...meet me on the barricades.

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Books by Charles Yale Harrison

Fiction

GENERALS DIE IN BED
A CHILD IS BORN
THERE ARE VICTORIES
MEET ME ON THE BARRICADES
THE BETRAYERS (*In preparation*)

Biography

CLARENCE DARROW

MEET ME ON THE BARRICADES

A Novel

By
CHARLES YALE HARRISON

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1938

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FOR
CHARLES ABRAMS

TO WHOM FRIENDSHIP
IS A LIVING ART

NOTE

"Meet Me on the Barricades" is a work of fiction and the characters in it are not intended to represent any actual person, living or dead. In a few chapters, however, certain well-known public persons appear as hallucinatory figures in the minds of two characters, but these must not be interpreted as realistic portrayals. This literary device, for which the author makes no boast of originality, in this case is simply a method of presenting social criticism within the framework of the novel. As such, it definitely comes within the realm of public interest. Any person who chooses to identify himself with any of the characters of this book, does so at his own peril.

C. Y. H.

Meet Me on the Barricades

I

For perhaps the tenth time Signor Turano, now gaunt and unhappy, tapped the music-stand, raised his arms with a commanding gesture, prepared to signal the beat. Things were going quite badly. For one reason or another the orchestra seemed unable to achieve precisely the shading of tone which the *maestro* so assiduously demanded.

The celebrated conductor glared at his men and damned them in mellifluous Neapolitan, a tongue admirably suited in affairs involving one's enemies. In liquid but subdued tones he called for the immediate visitation upon the orchestra of various malignant diseases, notably one said to have been originally contracted by members of the crew of the *Santa Maria* in the West Indies some four and a half centuries ago.

Somewhat relieved, he gave the signal and at his pantomimed behest the orchestra played once more. Under his eloquent hands the music grew in volume, billowed, while beneath the echoing majesty of the brasses the dark waters of Finland seethed and hissed.

Now this seething and hissing was achieved, to some degree, by means of the woodwinds: the clarinets, bassoons, English horns and oboes. And in the midst of the woodwind choir, impervious to Turano's tantrums, sat P. Herbert Simpson [P for Peter], oboist, a little, baldish, guileless man in his middle forties. His talent as a musician and his physical appearance, however, were singularly contrasting.

Simpson played easily, one might say absently, for he had long since acquired that co-ordination of hand, heart and ear which makes for the superbly talented performer. His embouchure, that is to say, the tension of his mouth, jaw and facial muscles, was perfect. His fingering was delicate and yet so sure that he was able to play more than competently while lost in

the deepest thought.

At the moment his pale blue eyes absently followed the score while his instrument emitted reedy, plaintive tones. To all appearances he was completely absorbed in his work, but as a matter of fact he was lost in a form of contemplation in which the realistic present played an exceedingly insignificant rôle. In short, P. Herbert Simpson was at it again. He was daydreaming!

Untrammelled, his fancy leaped, soared, weighted by no ballast of logic, chilled by no illusions of reality.

Fantasia! The renowned Philharmonic is in rehearsal. Maybe it is the Philadelphia Orchestra, or perhaps the Boston or Minneapolis. It is a matter of small importance. It might even be that Soviet importation, the Conductorless Orchestra. . . . But no, that would never do!

[*He negotiated a familiar difficult passage in the score without so much as being aware of it.*]

P. Herbert Simpson mounts the podium. The men of the orchestra, *his* men, look up eagerly, with admiration, respect. The respect of musicians in a symphony orchestra—what a triumph! The public, the patient, long-suffering public which is to be found in a serpentined queue before Carnegie Hall may be deluded by press-agentry as to the true character of a conductor, but not the men who work with him, who see him in his underwear, so to speak, not the men who so painstakingly contribute to his greatness. Toscanini, Koussevitzky, Stokowski, good men all, no doubt, each in his way. But then, why make odious comparisons?

Simpson raises his arms. The orchestra is poised for flight, alert. He gives the signal and at once a solitary horn announces the melancholy dominant theme of the first movement; then a sudden crescendo of violins, sharp and electric, followed by a fleeting solo oboe passage.

[*This places Simpson in somewhat of a dilemma because he is now on the stand and in the woodwind section at the same time. He manages, however.*]

Loud and clear the brasses relentlessly pursue the theme and soon amid spiralling vortices of sound, the movement comes to an end. A pause and then the second adagio movement, the theme of which is announced by the horns, repeated by the woodwinds and echoed by plucked strings. Now the music is precious, held to but a few instruments, now it is full and harmonious, now discordant and angry. . . . And so to the climax of the

symphony with its six suspended, crashing chords.

There is a thunderclap of applause.

Impossible! This is merely a rehearsal. [*He smiles.*] Yes, yes, of course he had forgotten. This is the actual performance.

He turns and faces the crowded hall, observes with secret joy that the ushers are marching down the aisles bearing expensive and complicated floral pieces. The auditorium is in an uproar. Luxurious women crowd about him, struggle with each other to reach him. Flashlight bulbs are set off. Cameras are levelled at him from every conceivable angle.

Simpson bows again and again. . . .

A vicious rap on the music-stand splintered Turano's baton, brought the orchestra to an agonizing halt and sent Simpson slithering into the bleak atmosphere of reality. Momentarily resentful of Turano's unwarranted intrusion into the privacy of his daydream he looked up with mild indignation and observed that the conductor was now in his most dangerous mood.

When Turano was violent in speech he was comparatively safe. It was only when he spoke in modulated, excessively polite tones that he was to be feared.

The conductor was now bathed in homicidal calm.

"Gentlemen [he pronounced it *gentle-a-men*], I want passion from you. Do you hear? Passion! What are you all—married men?"

The bachelors tittered. But unappeased by appreciation of his wit, he continued:

"You are not compelled to laugh, gentlemen. Flattery will get you nowhere."

He paused for a moment and wet his lips.

"Listen once more! The winds [he pronounced it *weends*] must be smooth like fast-moving water, like air in motion. But you [*withering scorn*], you play it like a German band."

And so in this vein for nearly five minutes.

Finally he paused and shrugged his shoulders helplessly. It was precisely on an occasion such as this that Turano had once smashed a costly violin over the head of a concert-master. Subsequently, a court had exonerated him

on the surprising ground that his incontrollable fury flowed from the identical afflatus which also bestowed upon the world the incomparable gifts of his great art.

Simpson, strangely enough, now listened to Turano's invective with growing sympathy. For did he not know the torments of creation? The mood engendered by his daydream was still upon him, the applause of his phantom audience still rang in his ears and his face was radiant with triumph. And only the triumphant may indulge in the luxury of tolerance.

In a haze of sympathy and generosity he suddenly, almost involuntarily, arose to address the conductor.

"*Maestro*——."

Turano stood speechless for a few seconds scarcely believing his eyes. Finally he bellowed:

"What do *you* want?"

The second personal pronoun dripped with contempt. But Simpson was now immune to insult; he transcended all human baseness.

"I know how it is, *maestro*. We've been here since two o'clock but we'll stay all night until we get it just the way you want it."

Turano's expression underwent a series of lightning changes: from stupefaction to amazement, astonishment, surprise and finally pleasure. In turn he was outraged, touched, overcome. At once contrition overwhelmed him, brought him almost to the verge of tears. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket, dabbed at his damp forehead, wiped his moist eyes.

"All right, boys!" he said. "Let's try it once more—for the last time. You are all fine musicians. And Seemson, you are a real artist—a wonderful oboist."

Once again he tapped the music-stand, once again the music swelled. The dark waters of Tuonela roared and the wind howled through the barren Finnish ravines. Once more the brasses carried the melody, high and lonely. . . .

Turano smiled; it was going superbly now. He looked in the direction of his oboist and nodded affably. But Simpson did not see; he was lost in another fantasy.

II

When the rehearsal came to a happy end with apologies and extravagant compliments from Turano, it was quite late. Simpson hurried from the hall, nodding casually to his colleagues.

After five years with the New York Symphony Orchestra, he still had little in common with the polyglot groupings which went to make up the ensemble. At rest periods or before performances they stood about in small national knots, the Contis with the Del Vecchios, the Ottos with the Sigmunds, the Saschas with the Mischas. Being the only Anglo-Saxon in the entire orchestra, Simpson soon developed a feeling of inferiority as though he were an unwanted alien.

Outside on Fifty-seventh Street the windows of fashionable shops were gayly lighted. Well-dressed men and women entered restaurants, horns tooted, voices laughed. The city uttered its night call. Tall buildings escalated toward the deep purple light over New York. Cafés, theatre lobbies, smiling faces seemed to beckon to Simpson, hinting at pleasures to come. But he paid no heed. Instead he hurried eastward toward Third Avenue. And under his arm he carried a leather case containing his oboe.

No lad since the beginning of time ever made firm resolve to be an oboist when he grew up. But when Herbert was a boy his father, whose life was a melancholy affair, said:

“Herbert, if I were you I’d learn to play the violin.”

“Why?” the lad asked.

“Because when you’re old and lonely you can play sad pieces in a minor key.”

Now, to a thoroughly normal boy this would have sounded remote and far-fetched. But Herbert was not a normal boy. Ever since early childhood he had suffered from a weak heart, the result of an almost fatal attack of inflammatory rheumatism. Sickly, pale, and yet eager, he spent his early days at a window watching other boys playing robustly. The desire to excel, which sometimes resides most powerfully in the hearts of handicapped youngsters, expressed itself in music. He applied himself assiduously to the violin and soon played with astonishing skill.

But music in itself was not enough and soon the boy had created for

himself a dream-world in which all things became possible and in which an ailing heart was no obstacle. Thus, merely by concentrating and staring off into space, he was able to escape the more painful and restraining aspects of everyday reality. In this dream-world he was successively a renowned baseball player who had once pitched a no-hit, no-run game; a world champion pugilist who was also a dilettante in the arts; and a conquering general who fought only in heroic wars of liberation. As time passed his daydreams began more and more to take on the solid aspect of reality while the daily world became a vague and unhappy place from which one escaped at every opportunity.

At high school Herbert played second violin in the school orchestra. One day at rehearsal his teacher, feeling that the ensemble lacked wind instruments, said:

"From now on, Simpson, I think it'd be a good idea if you played the oboe."

For a few days the boy hesitated. But when he had occasion to hear the instrument's sorrowful, plaintive tones, he was captivated.

Thus Simpson became an oboist. . . .

East along Fifty-ninth Street he walked, scarcely observing the precipitous social descent as evidenced in the shop windows: a diminuendo of displays ranging from costly evening gowns and expensive but dubious *objets d'art* to dismal secondhand bookstores where the result of years of creation may be had, neglected and flyblown, for fifteen cents. At Third Avenue he bought an evening newspaper, mounted the steps of the elevated station.

On the platform he waited, reading his paper. Across its pages marched the news of the day: a sensational murder, a sleazy political scandal, an interview with a child prodigy. These things Simpson read cursorily and passed on.

His essential interest, however, lay in the dispatches from abroad, for intellectually he was the victim of the foreign correspondents who see everything, understand precious little, and write about it with great talent. Their ability to reduce everything to the level of personality had become a mode of thought with him. He had even improved upon the method by introducing his own personality into nearly all the dispatches as he read. Thus, he became the perfect reader, to whom reading is impossible without personal identification.

When Simpson was twenty years old he had been a radical for a few brief but delightful months. It was during the summer of 1912. He had attended a mass meeting in support of the Lawrence textile strikers. Here he witnessed a hot contagious enthusiasm, a multitude welded together by common aspiration, a selflessness which hitherto had been unknown to him.

In the weeks which followed he was overwhelmed by the impact of new people, alien types, strange but exciting doctrines. He was subjected to an eloquence which left him exhausted but happy. Here were people who had harnessed their daydreams to a scientific social concept and who one day would alter the essential conditions under which mankind lived.

As a daydreamer he was compelled to admit his purely amateur standing; these people were professionals. But they were more than mere visionaries. They demanded not only emotional acceptance of their theories but action, self-sacrifice, discipline.

And this was beyond Simpson. He instinctively recoiled from the implications inherent in revolutionary socialism. The mere possibility of strikes, demonstrations and armed insurrection terrified him so that when the immediate situation which had drawn him into the movement had subsided, he retreated to his music again.

But after that he was never the same. He had seen a vision. And although fear of reality made actual participation impossible, revolution had become an integral and important part of his dream-world. In real life he could not bring himself to become so much as a distributor of leaflets, but in his daydreams he was a veritable firebrand.

He flipped the pages of his newspaper until he came to the news of the civil war in Spain. Under the dispirited, jaundiced lights of the elevated station he read:

"*Late today one of the suburbs of Barcelona lay in smouldering ruins following a fascist air-raid . . . the rhythm of this bombing contained a diabolical logic—first, hand grenades and heavy projectiles to stampede the population, then machine-gunning to drive them below, next heavy incendiary bombs to wreck houses and burn them over the victims.*"

At the pit of his stomach he experienced a cold, heavy sensation, a feeling compounded of impotent rage and resultant despair.

—Fascist bastards! Innocent men, women and children [*he thought*]. Nameless heaps, bundles of blood-soaked humanity. They sang in the sunshine of Spain, drank its great wines, clenched their fists in the salute of

solidarity. . . .

The cataclysmic roar of an approaching shell!

The gigantic horn motif of the last movement of the Schubert *C Major Symphony*!

A train pulled into the station.

Inside the car, Simpson struggled for a strap, settled himself to continue reading of the air-raid on Barcelona, of the heroism of the Catalonian clergymen who blessed and prayed for the kneeling crowds, socialists, anarchists and communists, in crumbling dugouts. The image of genuflecting anarchists and socialists filled him with a vague disquietude for a second—but for a second only. Rage, the most positive of all the emotions, now seized him.

Tremblingly he lowered the paper, stared at the advertisements but instead of the faces of pretty girls he saw the fascist horde, steel-helmeted, rigid, brutal, at whose head stood Hitler with painted cheeks, mascaraed eyes, leering in perverted lechery [he had read somewhere that the Austrian house-painter was homosexual], and Mussolini with a scabrous, decayed face [a gossiping columnist had written that the Italian renegade was in the last stages of syphilis.]

He turned away with contempt and in disgust, for in matters of sex Simpson was occasionally conformist and uniformly prophylactic. Thus, abetted by journalism and at the stroke of one transient thought, he had solved the most pressing problem of our time—fascism. His sense of moral superiority had provided the basis for an emotional catharsis; analytical thought was consequently unnecessary.

A headline proclaimed still another bombardment of Shanghai by the Japanese and the story underneath told of unburied bodies of coolies which lay rotting in the streets of the Chinese quarter of the city. The war in China, however, did not greatly move him, for while he could easily picture himself as a Spaniard or a German, he simply refused to imagine himself as a Chinese. Too much was involved in the process. Moreover, the names of Chinese cities were almost unpronounceable: Shihkiachwang, Kaocheng, Taiyuan. . . .

On an inside page of the newspaper he found another dispatch from Spain, read of the taking of a strategic hill on the Madrid sector by the Loyalist forces. He lowered the paper, exultant, elated. . . .

His imagination annihilated reality, telescoped time and space.

They lay in shallow shell-holes nervously watching their artillery tear the opposing positions to pieces, saw geysers of earth shooting up along the line of the Insurgent trenches.

Pedro H. Simpson, captain in the Loyalist forces, his face tanned, nervously fingers a thin, flexible mustache. He wears a red beret pulled smartly over his right eye, a snugly fitting khaki tunic, a highly polished Sam Browne belt, scintillating Salisbury boots. He stares intently at his synchronized wristwatch, then addresses his men, the remnants of the battle-torn 14th Machine-Gun Company, heroes of Toledo, Malaga and a score of lesser engagements. He speaks in perfect English which is touched with the faintest trace of an intriguing Spanish accent.

"Comrades, it is nearly zero hour. Two more minutes!"

His men nod, eagerly awaiting the signal to attack. One, however, a young student from the University at Salamanca, begins to whimper, breaks down, grovels in abject fear. Comrade Don Pedro places a fatherly arm about the lad's shoulders.

"Courage, little brother . . ."

(*The train lurched. No, he said to himself, 'little brother' is Russian and besides the two situations are entirely different. The sending of Russian divisions would mean the flare-up of a new world war. Besides they would have to come through the Mediterranean, run the gauntlet of the German and Italian fleets. Suicide! Geography! History! International Diplomacy! Peace is Indivisible! Defend Democracy!*)

"Courage, *compañero* [he thinks of the word in italics, the only way he has ever known it]; "by noon we shall have avenged the dastardly bombing of Madrid. And we shall celebrate with wine, song and lusty fascist wenches. For you must remember that while political intercourse with avowed fascists is a cardinal sin, sexual intercourse is more or less pardonable, particularly in time of war. Besides [*he winks*], rape will not be necessary, eh, my valiant men?"

A wisp of *La Paloma*, a few bars, floats through his brain.

Heartily, he brings his hand down on the youngster's back. At first the lad smiles feebly, then he laughs outright.

The preliminary barrage rises to new heights.

One minute before zero!

A *tutti* of guns of all calibres, an inspired performance in percussion. Abstracted, lost in wonder at the virtuosity of this artillery display, Captain Simpson listens.

"God, what a crescendo!" he exclaims, "louder than thunder, more original than Stravinsky!"

The air is filled with the piercing shrieks of the high-arching canopy of projectiles overhead.

Zero!

Enthralled by the grandeur of the artillery concert he fails to observe for a moment that his men have started to attack without him. Abashed, he hurries after them; nonchalantly, he takes his place at their head, leading the advance.

[*Countless scenes from war pictures flicker before his eyes.*]

The earth heaves, rocks, staggers; the terrain is torn, hacked, pulverized.

[*He walks through an inferno of Hollywood battle locations.*]

The machine-gun crew moves slowly across the field at a weighted pace, burdened by the gun and ammunition, sweating under the glittering, merciless Spanish sun.

[*The pages of a dozen war novels flutter in his mind. Putrescent, shapeless, the corpse of Kemmerich lies in the path of his advance. Broadbent reclines in a shell crater, looking away from his shattered leg where a pool of blood grows as though fed by some subterranean spring. At the bottom of that chalk pit a trench rat steps daintily onto Paolacci's chest, prepares to eat with relish the lieutenant's lower lip.*]

The curtain-fire lifts, Simpson and his men lunge forward with a final effort, automatics drawn. Happily, there is no opposition; the trench is unoccupied when they leap into it.

The enemy has fled!

Soon the gun is mounted; parado becomes parapet. To the rear the Insurgents are in full flight, discarding arms and equipment as they run. Simpson orders a burst of machine-gun fire. The gun sweeps an arc of the field. Fascists fall, rigid, as though they were life-sized wooden targets. Not a shot is wasted, not a man survives. Now to consolidate the position!

Spotless, leather still gleaming, Simpson superintends the operations. All is quiet now and the men sing as they labor.

He lights a cigarette and takes a neatly folded newspaper from his haversack. A newspaper from back home, God's own country, one of the peace-loving democratic countries. He turns the pages of the paper idly, homesick, savoring each story, even enjoying the advertisements.

The news items, however, are strangely reminiscent. They bear the same date-line as the day he stood up and told Turano to take it easy when that Sibelius symphony was all gummed up.

(*As in a dream he hears the grinding of brakes, experiences an odd sensation as though the trench were a vehicle in motion. He shrugs his shoulders, turns another page of the newspaper.*)

Ah, the page opposite the editorials; political wisdom, cartoons, literary gossip. Under the heading of "News about Books and Authors," he reads:

"*The editors of* The Nation *gave a party on Tuesday for Louis Fischer, their European correspondent, recently returned from Spain. The affair was held at the luxurious penthouse home of Maurice Wertheim where fine paintings by Picasso, Gauguin, Degas and other costly moderns adorn the walls. A smartly dressed, sophisticated crowd asked questions for nearly an hour about Mr. Fischer's experiences in Spain but were finally stopped so that everyone might eat, drink and dance. . . .*"

At that moment the counter-attack begins. The roar of shells, ear-splitting detonations. It is no longer daylight; all is dark and the night is lit up with red, green and blue distress signals. A shell lands in the next bay.

Another! This time almost directly on the parapet. An ugly, jagged fragment of metal strikes the student from Salamanca. He sinks slowly to the bottom of the trench. Piteously, he looks up to Simpson, who now kneels at his side.

"My captain, comrade, I am dying!"

—Premonition [*Simpson thinks*], soldiers sometimes sense the approach of death. Form of telepathy. Yes, but with whom? Maybe God. Superstition. Must be a scientific explanation, undiscovered as yet. Psychology. . . .

The lad grows incoherent, babbles; Simpson listens closely, catches a phrase:

"*Morituri te salutamus.*" Simpson bows his head reverently.

—Latin. I know what that means. Dying, we salute you.

The student goes limp, collapses. At that moment a wave of bitterness

overcomes him—the resentment of the hard-bitten fighting man for contemptible civilians and armchair revolutionists who make cause of his agony. He thinks:

—Penthouse apartments, expensive paintings, smart crowds eating, drinking and dancing while we—while we die here in bloody Spain!

A salvo of shells tears into the trench, shattering it. [*Blackout.*]

The train roared into the station at 133rd Street. White-faced, stunned, Simpson staggered out with the Westchester crowd, clutching his oboe case. In a daze he tramped the ugly wooden ramp to the Westchester Station, to all appearances a little tired suburbanite coming home after a day's mundane work. On the Mount Vernon train he found a comfortable seat, slumped wearily into it, a veteran returning from the wars.

III

Mrs. Mathilda Simpson was a large, placid woman who moved on the two-dimensional level of pragmatic reality and whose imagination operated almost exclusively within the narrow limits of her household and social duties.

The tenor of her existence would have been completely unruffled but for the psychological eccentricities of her husband. One never quite knew when Herbert was likely to give expression to views on philosophical anarchism, socialism in one country, permanent revolution, separate establishments for husbands and wives, or compulsory Wassermann tests for all. And in mixed company at that! This was particularly reprehensible in the circles in which the Simpsons moved where solidity was a virtue and imagination, unless commercially exploited, was somehow disturbing.

When he was silent, however, matters were still worse. For then he sat with a far-away expression on his face, nursing a smile.

The Simpsons were childless (a fact for which Mathilda nobly took all responsibility) and their evenings, when Herbert was not performing, were spent at cards, visiting, and other mild forms of suburban recreation. At the moment Mrs. Simpson was sitting in the dining-room of their Mount Vernon home bitterly reconciled to the fact that the dinner was almost dried to a crisp. Moreover, the Faulkners were coming over to play bridge at eight and it was nearly half-past seven now. Just as she was about to eat alone Simpson entered the hall, white and haggard.

As the charred chops were served Mathilda said:

"You'd better hurry, Herbert dear, we expect company in a little while. Bridge tonight."

The Insurgent artillery still thundered in Simpson's ears. Scenes of carnage and destruction lay before his eyes.

"The world's in flames and people play bridge," he said.

"What is it now?" Mrs. Simpson asked in alarm.

"Spain."

"Oh!" [*Relieved.*]

"Well, I'm *not* going to play bridge tonight."

Mrs. Simpson looked at her husband out of determined but understanding eyes and remarked that it was all right, she would get another hand. She hadn't counted on his playing anyway. Then:

"Very well, dear, but hurry; they'll be here at any moment."

The discussion was ended. And so it was always; the Simpsons never argued. Nevertheless a shrewd observer would have noticed that a matriarchal peace reigned over their relationship.

Shortly after they were married they had had one serious difference of opinion during which Herbert found himself face to face with a bland imperturbability of cosmic proportions. Although Herbert imagined that he dwelt in a matrimonial democracy, in reality he lived in a state perilously close to domestic totalitarianism. If there was no obvious repression it was only because there was no open rebellion.

Mathilda looked on as he ate, observed his tense nostrils, his pallor.

"You don't look well, Herbert." Then shrewdly: "You didn't get into another political argument today, did you?"

"No. I'm all right."

Herbert's political convictions, if such they may be called, were greatly confusing to Mathilda. Before they were married he had indulged in a formless sort of humanitarianism to which she had paid little attention, and which she had hoped would soon pass. It did. But not before it had been replaced by a newer and a more unorthodox credo.

Simpson now openly declared himself to be a philosophical anarchist. This didn't seem to make sense. Anarchists were bomb-throwers, people who believed in and practiced free love. More, they openly discussed the most intimate aspects of birth control. The very word brought to mind names like Emma Goldman, who always seemed to be in difficulties with the police, or Alexander Berkman, who had attempted to assassinate that steel man (what's his name?), and hirsute and irresponsible people generally.

And why a *philosophical* anarchist? Philosophy meant abstract and incomprehensible thought; *the intrinsic nature and essence of reality, subjective idealism leading to solipsism*—stuff like that which she had read somewhere in an idle moment, silly but harmless. Or when one thought of a philosopher it was some noble person (in marble) like Plato, Aristotle or those other *ancient* Greeks, not wild-eyed, contemporary foreigners on Fourteenth Street. He had put the word in, she felt, merely to confuse her.

Now Herbert was none of these things; he was neither philosophical in the sense of *subjective idealism leading to solipsism*, nor was he a bomb-thrower. As for free love . . .

In the fall of 1918, a year after the Russian Revolution, when all of America was intensely patriotic and overflowing with the vitriol of inspired human hatred, Herbert took it into his head to become a communist. As time passed he modified his stand somewhat and declared himself to be a democratic communist and went on to explain this apparent contradiction in terms:

"The sort of thing they have in Russia may sound brutal to us but it's all right for the Russians. They're an ignorant people; centuries of Czarism did it. Besides, there's a peculiar thing called the Russian soul. You read about it in Dostoyevsky. It's murderous and soft-hearted, heroic and cowardly, backward and revolutionary, all at the same time. Why, take a Russian *mouzhik*—that means farmer—he can talk philosophy by the hour and then go out and brain his wife with an ax. At the same time they have great music. Take Rimsky-Korsakov or Moussorgsky, for example. All this comes from the Russian soul. But in America things are different. When we have a revolution here it will have to take on a democratic form. In the United States communism will have to be a combination of the best of Russian and American systems. That's why I call myself a democratic communist."

All this sounded like moonshine to Mathilda. Nevertheless she was rather proud of Herbert for having mastered such reverberating, thundering phraseology. She said nothing and hoped for the best.

For more than a decade Simpson remained a faithful communist sympathizer—with minor reservations, of course, but a devout fellow-traveler nevertheless. He subscribed to radical magazines, contributed generously to defense funds and followed the zigzags of the international revolutionary movement with great intensity, if not clarity.

In 1928, when Stalin announced the imminent downfall of capitalism in his then celebrated but now forgotten Theory of the Third Period, Simpson waited with some impatience for the appearance of barricades in the sleepy, tree-lined streets of Mount Vernon. Once, after a heated political debate with Faulkner, he drew himself up to his full height and declared:

"Very well, then, nothing remains to be said. Meet me on the barricades!"

When Hitler came to power and when the Kremlin's international policies began to savor more and more of conservatism, Simpson's faith in

the Stalinist leadership began to wane. Then the leaders of the 1917 revolution fell before the G.P.U. firing squads. Stunned and bewildered he now found himself, for a time, without a political resting-place.

But Simpson was an incurable revolutionary sympathizer. His dream-world turned upon the axis of revolutionism. For what mental fiction can be more satisfying than one which holds forth the promise to destroy old concepts, to create new social forms and which is at once the life and the resurrection?

Once more Simpson changed his political line. Stalin, he said, was pursuing a counter-revolutionary course. At the same time, however, he still believed the Soviet Union to be a workers' state which was unfortunately saddled with a voracious, dictatorial bureaucracy. If only this bureaucracy could be induced to resign, or at least to mend its ways! Sadly, he came to the conclusion that bureaucracies never resign and so, one bright morning, he boldly announced that while he still considered himself a staunch defender of the Soviet Union and while he approved of many of the Stalinist principles and policies, from now on he was a *free lance* communist.

It was at this point that Mathilda gave up in despair. However, she consoled herself with the thought that some men were women-chasers, others drunkards and gamblers and that, after all, vicarious revolution, however absurd it seemed, could not quite come under the heading of vice. She cared for his health, managed his affairs, ministered to his simple wants, listened to his varying theories and thanked God it wasn't worse.

Each change in Herbert's political line, naturally enough, brought about a corresponding change in his reading habits. Before the war it was Kropotkin, Haywood and Bakunin; after the Russian Revolution it was Lenin and Trotsky (no one in those days had ever heard of Stalin) and so on. Incapable of sustained theoretical reading, he preferred books dealing with the more personal aspects of revolution: *My Flight from Siberia*, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, *Bill Haywood's Book*. The appearance of a radical novel was an event in his life.

All the pictures he had ever seen, all the books, stories and articles he had ever read, all the radio talks he had ever heard, formed a palimpsest of memory which lent substance and color to his daydreams. A word, a familiar sight, a bar of music, an odor, was enough to set him off.

They had been sitting in silence for some time, finally Mathilda said:

"You don't look well, Herbert, dear. Are you worried about something?"

“I read of another fascist air-raid today. Not a house left standing. Men, women and kids killed in the streets. . . .”

“But what can *we* do about it? I guess we ought to be glad we’re Americans.”

Mathilda’s apathy simply served to increase the intensity of his emotions.

“Well, if I were ten years younger, I’d volunteer for service with the Loyalists.”

“What a thing to say!”

Setting his cup down with determination:

“I certainly would.”

“I *like that*! You’d leave me to go away and get killed just because of a crazy political idea. You know perfectly well that you’ve changed your ideas before. How do you know you’re not going to change again? [*In anger.*] If you want to get rid of me, Herbert Simpson, there are simpler ways of doing it. [*With contempt.*] And how far do you think you would get with your weak heart? [*Gently, as she sees she has wounded him.*] Herbert, you are romantic!”

He said nothing in reply; there was nothing to be said.

The doorbell rang. The Faulkners and a friend had arrived. There were noisy, shrill greetings, small talk. The card table was taken out of the cupboard. Simpson felt out of place, excused himself, went upstairs to their bedroom to read.

He undressed, got into his pajamas and dressing-gown and settled down for an evening with an exceedingly modern novel. After reading for a few minutes he put the book down. He was in no mood for unusual syntax, it corresponded too closely with the unevenness of his intellectual existence.

Sounds of laughter came from the floor below. Faulkner’s booming, positive voice annoyed him particularly.

“Six hearts!” he heard him call out.

—The world going to hell and these fools playing cards! And Mathilda thinking I wanted to go to Spain for some personal reason. . . .

He closed his eyes, passed a tired hand over his lids and in that moment *he became aware that Natasha was in the room*.

IV

Natasha had come into his life in a strange manner.

It was after the performance of a tone-poem in which a solo by the first oboe figured prominently. There was prolonged applause and Turano had signalled Simpson to take a bow, a distinct honor.

After the concert a woman came backstage and asked for the soloist. She was tall, in her early thirties, decidedly Slavic in appearance. She swept forward to the flustered oboist and uttered a solitary word: “Splendid!” And before he could reply she had disappeared. A word, a smile, a significant glance—nothing more.

But the memory of the occasion remained vivid forever. From that moment on she lived in his daydreams with him. She became his loyal companion, his severest critic, his fellow revolutionist; yes, let us be blunt, his mistress. She understood him when all others failed. When Mathilda seemed particularly unsatisfying, this Slavic woman came to him in his dreams, dark, exotic, carrying the breath of danger and the odor of love. He called her Natasha.

And now she was in the room with him. He sensed her presence, heard the rustling of her gown, inhaled the heavy fragrance of her perfume. He kept his eyes closed. He saw her better that way: slender, her braided hair coiled, worn like a coronet.

“Natasha!”

“*Mon cher* Pyotr! It has been so long.” Like most well-bred Russians she spangled her conversation with French expressions.

“I’ve been so busy. We open our season next week. Rehearsals. . . .”

He felt her fingers on the nape of his neck, caressing him.

“You have forgotten?”

“No, no, darling, never!”

“There are things to be done,” she said, admonishing him. “The world is in flames and you still play your oboe. This is no time for art.”

“Even for great art?”

“What will happen to art if the fascist hangman comes into power? It will

be consigned to the bonfire. Artists will languish in prison, in concentration camps. And then what is all your art worth?"

"You are right, Natasha."

"This is the time for action!" [*Resolutely.*]

"Yes, I know."

"And—if there is time—for love." [*Pragmatically.*]

"You are right, Natasha."

He smiled, recalled their first long conversation. She had come to him in his sleep as Mathilda lay by his side, oblivious to his infidelity.

"Do not think," she had said, "that I demand middle-class fidelity from you. No! What is loyalty? Simply a property concept. You are a man, Pyotr, not a eunuch. Nature has endowed you with millions, yes, billions of spermatozoa which must find an avenue of release. You have hormones which drive you along the road to sexual adventure, to love. And if you resist you will become a frustrated neurotic. Read Freud, Jung, Adler. . . . Nature is explicit in this matter. To man she says: impregnate! And to woman she says: discriminate! You are an artist, a revolutionary; your task is to create beauty, and you also have a world to change. In this task you cannot be bound by the restraints of bourgeois morality. You must look upon sex as a thirsty man looks upon a drink of cool water, as something biologically necessary, refreshing; yes, beautiful but not immoral."

And now she came to sit on the arm of his chair, placed her arm about his shoulders.

"But I do not want my love for you," she said, "to make a spineless creature of you. You *must* go to Spain, Pyotr. Our comrades are there, dying in the International Brigades, on the Aragon front, in the streets of Barcelona. It is your duty."

"But Mathilda . . ."

"Cowards hide behind the skirts of women. Did Lenin plead that he had a wife? No! Krupskaya was his companion, his comrade. Together they fought through two revolutions, side by side."

"If I were ten years younger," he said weakly.

"But you are in the prime of life. Conrad didn't begin to write until he was forty-three. Forty is the dangerous age; make it dangerous for the fascists!"

“But I have responsibilities—the mortgage on this house—two years to go . . .”

“Fool! Do you think history waits for mortgages?”

“My heart . . .”

“Yes, some day you will die of it. All of us do eventually. Do you want to die in bed, in useless agony, without one moment of splendor?”

“But——.”

A shout of laughter came from the living-room below. He opened his eyes, blinked. Natasha was gone.

Rising from his chair, he walked to his table, filled his pipe (Mathilda forbade cigarettes), turned to his bookshelves and sought a book to supplement the mood engendered by Natasha’s brief visit. He thumbed through several volumes, mused, grimaced, puffed his pipe leisurely. Finally he decided upon the *History of the Russian Revolution* and returned to the soft ease of his chair. He skipped scores of pages at a time, paying scant attention to long passages of revolutionary polemics and historical analyses until, at length, he came to his favorite passage: a description of the early days of the February Revolution. He settled back comfortably to read and dream.

> *Petrograd, February 25, 1917. The general strike spreads. Street-cars are at a complete standstill. Shops are closed, boarded up. It is noon; the city is blanketed in snow which muffles the sound of marching feet as tens of thousands of people stream toward the Kazan Cathedral. Students parade through the streets singing, laughing, shouting slogans. The city is vibrant, expectant. These are the dying days of Czarism.*

Revolution, the midwife of history, is about to deliver a new society.

At the monument of Alexander III, orators address the crowds who stamp and thump themselves to keep warm. The speeches are impassioned, electric.

Suddenly out of one of the side streets the police make a sortie, opening fire on the people. Men and women flee, terrified.

All is confusion; but Tovarich Pyotr Simpson stands firm.

“Comrades,” he shouts above the din, “do not run!”

His voice is no longer thin and weak. A holy cause has given him strength; his voice is stentorian.

“Death to the Pharaohs!”

He draws his automatic from his holster and fires into the ranks of the oncoming police. They waver and in this moment the courage of the crowd stiffens. A soldier in the ranks of the demonstrants pulls the pin of a hand grenade, hurls it. It explodes with a deafening roar. The tide is turned; the police are routed.

A revolutionist of professorial appearance wearing *pince-nez* and small pointed beard congratulates Pyotr.

“You see, citizen,” he says, “the war has taught our people this new art. Violence may be an instrument in the cause of freedom as well as of oppression.”

Out of nowhere Natasha appears at his side. She wears a long cloak and a black toque, both of Persian lamb. She grasps his hand, pressing it warmly.

“Splendid!”

A word, a smile, a significant glance.

She takes his arm, guiding him through a maze of streets until they find themselves in a large open square. An army of silent, drab workers are face to face with Cossacks and infantry who are drawn up in battle array. With a flourish the soldiers fix bayonets; the horsemen nervously finger their steel-tipped whips. In a moment the white snow of St. Petersburg will be stained with the blood of Russian workers.

Pyotr instinctively reaches for his Colt. Natasha restrains him.

“Not now!” she whispers fiercely, “first we must try to win them over. Stay here!”

She leaves him, approaches the commanding officer of the Cossacks. The bearded Caucasian is ill at ease as Natasha speaks to him; soon they are debating, arguing, laughing. The crisis is over. The crowd is emboldened.

Behind him Simpson hears people talking, questioning each other.

“Who can she be?”

“You don’t mean to tell me [*incredulously*] that you don’t know?”

“She is the friend of Simpson, the American sympathizer.”

“No!”

“Yes!”

A cynic: “Did you say ‘friend’?”

A snicker, a whisper, then:

“Well, not really, if you must know; but after all this is revolution, citizen.”

A shout drowns out the dialogue. Women surge forward, approach the soldiers. They beg, smile, entreat, with the infantrymen.

“Come, comrades, put down your bayonets. Join us. We are all Russians. Liberty, equality, fraternity! No taxation without representation! Land, peace and bread! Don’t shoot!”

The troops are abashed; they shuffle uneasily, look away, blush as the women become more forward. Here and there a bayonet is lowered. Sheepishly at first and then with open enthusiasm the soldiers join the revolutionists. Cheers. The square reverberates as thousands of voices take up *The Internationale*.

Natasha is at Simpson’s side once more, so is the bearded, professorial comrade. They are swept into a fashionable street by the cheering, singing crowd.

“*Arise ye prisoners of starvation . . .*”

“A fine rallying anthem,” Simpson remarks, “but as music I must confess that it’s not very important.”

Bearded looks at him suspiciously:

“It’s not form, but content that matters, comrade. Ten years from now such a remark will be considered counter-revolutionary, mark my words.”

They enter a tea-room. Waiters in Russian blouses hurry about, filling orders, discussing revolutionary tactics, debating heatedly with the customers. The captain of the waiters mounts a chair and makes an announcement.

“Comrades, from now on we are no longer servants, we are no longer menials. We are workers and must be addressed as ‘comrade waiter.’ ”

“How about tips?” a voice, the voice of reaction, asks.

“Until the economy of the country is established on a complete and firm communist basis, the system of tipping will continue,” the captain replies.

Everyone cheers and applauds. Natasha, the little professor and Simpson

find a table, order tea and pastry. On a platform a balalaika orchestra plays sentimental gypsy airs. Natasha leans across the table and whispers:

"Tonight, Pyotr, you shall come to my apartment. We shall have a bottle of Tiflis wine, some Beluga caviar and you shall stay until morning. Yes?"

Simpson nods. *Pince-nez* beams upon them.

"Ah, you have my blessing, children. What can be more noble, more touching than the true love of comrades."

Natasha pours her tea into a saucer, crooks her little finger, daintily drinks as she listens, looks away, embarrassed, happy.

At a nearby table an officer obviously fresh from the front raises his glass and shouts:

"Long live the Revolution! Death to Czarism!"

"It was inevitable that it should die," bearded remarks. "Corruption, superstition, Asiatic barbarism, vice. Do you know the story of the Czarina Catherine?"

He lowers his voice as he proceeds with the anecdote:

"She was a nymphomaniac; there was no satisfying her. Finally, she was reduced to carrying on affairs with the private soldiers of her palace guard. And in the morning the exhausted private received a dazzling promotion. Not a few of our noble families received their crests in Catherine's boudoir.

"Be that as it may, one night the palace chimney-sweep, dirty and tired, got lost and found himself in her Majesty's bedroom. It was pitch black and he groped about for some time and finally crawled into a bed. A little while later he heard the queen's voice, sleepy and languid, ask:

" 'Who is it that is doing *that* to *us*?'

"Terrified, the ragamuffin desisted and stammered:

" 'The chimney-sweep, your Majesty.'

"He saw visions of the firing squad and at the very least expected a scream for help; instead he heard the imperial command:

" 'Continue, major-general!' "

Everyone laughed uproariously. Still smiling, the professor concluded:

"And the Romanoffs were not much better. Rasputin and that sort of thing. That's why the revolution was inevitable. . . ."

(*Bespectacled, bushy-haired, thick-lipped, Astronsky, the second cellist, appears behind Natasha's chair and points an accusing finger at Simpson. "Plagiarist!" he shouts. "I told you that story in the Russian Tea Room two weeks ago and now you palm it off as his. Scoundrel! Counter-revolutionist!" Simpson comes to his side, places a placating arm about his shoulders. "Literary device" he mutters apologetically, "comic relief to take the mind off the horrors of civil war. Outside in the streets of St. Petersburg men are dying for a new social order. Is this the time to think of the copyright laws?" Astronsky raises his fist in salute and fades out.*)

V

Mathilda's footsteps on the creaking stairs brought Simpson from St. Petersburg to Mount Vernon in what was once known as a trice. When she entered the room he put his book down and looked up enquiringly. Mathilda observed the pained look in her husband's eyes and at once knew that he had been daydreaming, that he resented her intrusion.

"I do wish Faulkner would learn to play bridge quietly," she said.

She turned the lights out and prepared to undress.

The Simpsons always undressed in the dark. Mathilda never discussed this matter with Herbert, but to a friend she once remarked that this procedure tended to make marriage last longer. Nevertheless they slept in one bed—such being the vagaries of orthodox morality. But on the whole their married life was a reasonably happy one and, because of Simpson's weak heart, gently modulated.

He got into bed with some reluctance and in the dark heard Mathilda undo snaps, unbuckle her corset (it sounded like armor as she threw it across the back of a chair), and massage her skin where it pinched tightest. He lay quietly on his back thinking of the February days of the Russian Revolution, of Natasha. [*God, did such women really exist?*]

Slowly, his thoughts turned to women in general and he racked his memory to conjure up a living face, an image having some basis in reality. Finally, because of the severe limitations of circumstance, he was compelled to fall back on his wife. After all, there she was!

But in the matter of marital favors Mathilda operated on a budgetary basis, strictly adhered to—and this was only Wednesday.

—Somebody ought to tell her about this hormone business.

Odors, the closeness of her body, memories, the urgencies of the flesh. He could withstand it no longer. He reached out in the dark, caressed her.

"Herbert, dear," she whispered, "remember your heart."

The Simpsons always whispered in their sleeping-chamber, even during the daytime. It was as though there was something faintly immoral about a bedroom.

"You must control yourself, darling. Now go to sleep!"

She patted him gently, consolingly, and rolled over.

Resentful, defeated, he lay long in the dark, staring at nothing, thinking, hoping, aching—and then sleep came.

Out of the reservoir of his memory, out of his subconsciousness, out of the deep well of forgotten experience and desire, vague shapes stirred, took form.

Sounds which at first were confusing and meaningless became clear, significant: the booming of a gun, the giant hum of an aeroplane, the slow lapping of river-water against stone walls, the hollow sound of his echoing footsteps.

He found himself in a strange city, flat, miasmic. It was night and he walked alone. Endless empty streets and avenues criss-crossed by innumerable canals and streams.

Venice? But there were no gondolas, only flat empty barges floating aimlessly in the canals.

He walked along the deserted streets in painful loneliness for a long time, then quite suddenly the city was flooded in brilliant sunlight. The streets were filled with people: officers, fashionably dressed women, students in uniform and laughing young girls.

Of course, this is St. Petersburg! There on an island in the Neva stand the forbidding walls of the fortress of Petropavlovsk, tomb of generations of revolutionists. To the left are the gayly colored buildings of the Admiralty and further on St. Isaac's church supported by columns of marble, lapis-lazuli, malachite. More than 150,000 workers died building the city; died for the greater glory of Czar Peter. . . .

And here at his side once more was Natasha, but a Natasha who seemed strangely altered. All her revolutionary vigor seemed gone, her very coloring seemed altered. She was now blonde, more elegant, disturbingly frivolous. She wore a wide-brimmed floppy hat of straw trimmed with lace, a long full dress, a black silk jacket and in her hand she carried a long-handled parasol. Her speech, too, had undergone a change; she spoke with a trace of Scandinavian accent and as they walked she talked incessantly.

"I have just left Prince Vassily, a delightful person but an impossible flirt. Oh, but quite impossible. We are invited to his home tomorrow night, first theatricals and later dancing. Do you hear, *mon cher* Pyotr? See, this is the Nevsky Prospekt! Is not St. Petersburg truly a splendid city? Half

European, half barbaric." She sighed. "That is the tragedy of Russia, beneath its dinner jacket there beats the heart of a Tartar. . . ."

As he walked at her side he became aware with pleasant surprise that he was dressed in a tight-fitting smart uniform of powder blue; on his shoulders there were gold epaulets and his breast was hung with orders and decorations.

A little man in a gaudy uniform approached them; he walked with mincing effeminate steps and addressed them in a high, piercing voice:

"*Charmé de vous voir*, Natashka."

He leered at her and shook an admonishing forefinger at Simpson.

"Prince Andrey was furious. We were all desolate, yes, heartbroken."

He tapped his heart lightly.

"It was splendid, simply superb. A *sauté* of woodcocks and the finest *Imperial Tokay* one ever tasted."

He licked his lips with a cracked, purple tongue and babbled on in his thin voice. Natasha whispered loudly into Simpson's ear:

"Don't be fooled by his uniform. He's nothing but a fraud. He read Tolstoi as a youth and now he goes about trying to live up to the worst aspects of the Russian aristocracy. We are not all like him, you know. He uses the most *recherchés* French expressions—vulgar display of erudition."

But the little man did not seem to hear and he continued talking rapidly.

"Come!" Natasha said sharply, and they walked away leaving the little fellow talking to himself, gesticulating to the thin air.

Now they were in the foyer of a fashionable restaurant which was filled with smartly uniformed officers and gay, chattering women.

Gossip:

"Ah, *mon cher* Boris Vladimirovitch, so you are now in the hussars."

"I tell you he's a veritable bear [*whispered*]; he looks upon the more vulgar aspects of love and the saying of his prayers as a nightly affair."

"See, there is the Princess Natasha with her American friend. A stunning couple, don't you think?"

A tall, bearded officer, a giant of a man, came forward, took Natasha's hand, bent low, kissed it.

“This is my good friend Colonel Pyotr Simpson of the American Embassy,” she said, introducing him. “Russian mother, American father.”

But the bearded soldier scowled at Simpson, fingered a silver dagger which hung from his belt, turned abruptly on his heel and walked away. Natasha said nothing, as though she had not seen.

At once everyone in the foyer underwent a complete sartorial transformation. Natasha now wore a long black velvet evening gown, cut daringly low, revealing more than enough of her breasts and all of her back. The bearded officer wore a colorful Russian blouse, his full trousers tucked into his shiny boots. Others masqueraded as gypsies, some as pirates, and some were covered with the skins of animals. The women for the most part wore diaphanous garments under which breasts, thighs and pubic hair were faintly visible.

Somewhere a hidden orchestra played fierce bacchanalian music; wild sensuous music, louder and faster, and underneath it an insistent, almost painful, pounding of the kettle-drums. The air was filled with a heavy odor compounded of perfume, wine, musk, and the reek of human bodies.

Inside the main room of the restaurant there were scenes of wild disorder. Drunken men reeled, lurched, danced grotesquely. Women clawed at their own garments, caressing their breasts, uttering wailing, indecent cries. Above the guttural shouts of the men and the cries of the women, the brass and tympani of the hidden orchestra thundered, inciting the bacchantes to still wilder excesses.

With a feeling of impending disaster Simpson became aware that Natasha was no longer at his side. At that moment he saw that he no longer wore his resplendent uniform but that he was clothed in ridiculous rags—wide, baggy trousers, patched at the knees; excessively large, broken shoes which turned up at the toes; a short tight-fitting jacket. He ran from group to group uttering Natasha’s name but everywhere they ceased from their revelling and laughed at him with insane, malevolent laughter.

At length he found her. She was reclining on a divan in the arms of the bearded officer. As he approached the couple he saw that Natasha’s eyes were half closed, that her lips were wet and red and that she lay contented under the shameless caresses of her companion. She opened her eyes and looked at him.

“Natasha!” He uttered her name reproachfully.

“Yes, Pyotr.”

Her voice was languid, happy. Her companion's hand, however, remained disturbingly out of sight.

"Tell him to stop while I talk to you," Simpson demanded.

"Why should I?"

His throat became dry, speech was difficult. Finally:

"We were comrades. The places we've been together; Spain; St. Petersburg in 1917. . . ."

She cut him short: "Don't be a fool; this is 1904. . . ."

"I mean," he stammered, "we promised each other loyalty, companionship."

"*You* talk of loyalty? Have you always been faithful to me?"

She was now wanton in her responses to the caresses of her newly found lover.

Pained, speaking in almost a whisper, he said:

"But you said that it was all right. You said that I have hormones which drive me to adventure and love."

She looked up to him, the pupils of her eyes half under her lids in ecstasy, and murmured:

"Yes, I know, Pyotr, my darling—but I, too, have hormones."

At this point the music reached a terrifying crescendo making speech impossible. Natasha's lover lifted her in his arms and carried her through the thronged room toward a wide winding staircase. Simpson ran after them calling her name.

"Natasha! Natasha!"

Someone seized him by the throat, strangling all breath from him. Men and women threw themselves upon him, kicked him, beat him, clawed at his throat.

In agony he struggled, screaming. . . .

He awoke fighting, drenched in perspiration, his heart thumping insanely. Mathilda was bending over him.

"Herbert, dear, wake up!"

He sat up, limp, unhappy.

“What is it, darling?” she asked with wifely solicitude.

“A nightmare, I suppose,” he answered weakly.

“You poor thing.”

Once again she patted him gently, consolingly. Then she rolled over and was soon asleep. Tense, distracted, Simpson lay staring unhappily into the dark; finally, he, too, fell asleep.

VI

—Two hours to go. Walk a bit, lunch, then rehearsal.

Musing, watch in hand, Simpson stood on Forty-second Street outside the Grand Central Station.

He had had a bad night, sleeping fitfully and the morning brought with it a feeling of vague disquietude. Restless, unhappy, he performed his matinal duties sluggishly. The color of the walls, a creaking board in the floor, the shriek of the hot water tap as he turned it on all conspired this morning to make his home seem intolerable. Mathilda's solicitude at breakfast and her too-eager smile irritated him; even the bright morning sunlight and the autumn-reddened maple tree outside the kitchen window gave him small pleasure. He made an excuse and left for the station three full hours before rehearsal time.

And now he stood aimlessly for a few moments wondering what to do. Undecidedly, he moved west, lost himself in the crowds, immersed in happy anonymity.

At Fifth Avenue he turned north, walking leisurely, observed the tall white buildings up ahead in the Fifties sharply outlined against the lemon and gold sunlight of high noon. Slender against the pastel sky, monuments to man's ingenuity and skill, symbols of a usurped power over the lives of those who had created them, they filled him with admiration, sent him on a long journey into the future.

—Some day all this will be owned in common. The revolution will wipe out slums and the insane pattern of this city and make it a paradise. . . .

In his mind Utopia loomed. He saw Norman Thomas' City Beautiful: a city of white marble, broad greensward, columned sports stadia, concert halls, in which a serene, emancipated people dwelt in reposeful freedom. A welfare worker's dream come true. All wore horn-rimmed glasses.

—Supermen. A healthy mind in a healthy body.

Strong, clean-limbed, the new race sprang to birth in his mind. Then it was night and the incredible fairy city towered into the soft black sky overhead. Thousands of men and women listened with rapt attention at open-air concerts. Children followed the scores of the symphonies with obvious ease.

Simpson smiled, thought:

—Musician's paradise; everyone able to follow the score of a Beethoven symphony. All professions and trades must think the same way. Martha Graham must see hordes of interpretative dancers expressing themselves all over Central Park. Overweight women in gauzy shifts gamboling on the green. Mathilda, for instance. . . .

He shuddered.

—Or social workers. First five-year plan after the revolution and everyone'll be a welfare client. Happy hunting ground for snoopers; looking into pots and refrigerators, peering out from under beds. . . . "Comrade, this is the third time this week! Conserve your energy for the workers' state."

—Or professors of mathematics wanting everyone to be an Einstein. A plus B equals C; 4.73 carried to the twelfth power. Nothing doing! That's going a bit too far. People won't stand for it. There'll have to be some sort of central control board to protect the nation from every fanatic that'll want to force his ideas on the rest of us. Vegetarians, nature-healers, sun worshippers, nudists. But we'll find a way. . . .

He stepped off the curb at Forty-fourth Street and in the same moment staggered back, terrified. A taxi had passed almost within an inch of his nose. Brakes shrieked, the car came to a standstill. A red-faced hackman put his head out of the window and with evident pleasure bawled:

"Whatsa matter, lug, are ya sorry yur in good health?"

Breathless but polite, Simpson replied in a weak voice:

"It was your fault. You didn't sound your horn."

"Wy don't ya wake up?" the driver yelled, enjoying this attack on a mere pedestrian. "Wy don't ya try sleepin' at night?"

Offended, Simpson made no reply. In a few moments the traffic signal changed and the hackman, driving off, called a parting insult.

A fellow pedestrian proffered sympathy. Simpson nodded, smiled and then continued his stroll, looking straight ahead in palpitating, simulated unconcern. And as he walked he pondered man's inhumanity to man and the ingratitude of the working-class.

—A lot of thanks you get for trying to think up a better world for the proletariat.

And then with magnanimity:

—Well, I suppose it isn't his fault, after all. Brought up in the slums, I suppose. Economics, that's what it is. Explains everything.

Catching himself:

—Wait a minute. Not everything . . . but nearly everything. Like what? Like why one brother prefers brunettes, and the other blondes. Or human cruelty. Or incest among the wealthy. Or . . . or . . . Now where was I before that idiot ran me down? Oh yes, these skyscrapers and what life would be like if . . . if men could live happily together.

He walked along slowly, meditating, dreaming the great American daydream of vague happiness, roseate idealism, inchoate utopianism.

Out of the revolutionary past of his people (men who bore the name of Simpson fought at Valley Forge and Saratoga), out of the violent history of his nation (a nation, too, has a memory and subconsciousness), arose this undefined mood of emancipation, this foggy yearning for the millennium, this desire to leap into the Utopian future. But the revolutionary past was confronted by the ruthless conservative present and in despair and confusion Simpson turned in upon himself to hope and dream, but not to think and act.

—But it's not going to be easy. [*A concession to realism.*] These boys aren't going to give up without a fight. No ruling class ever does. [*Historicity.*] The police, the army, the navy, all this power, these buildings. . . . [*A strategic weighing of forces.*] It might take a hundred years, maybe longer. . . .

He paused before Mr. Jensen's window, observed luxurious tableware, Swedish glass, English china.

—Forty-six dollars for a salad bowl! Outrageous! Still, if you have the money and can afford it I suppose it's worth it. Wood retains the faint odor of garlic. Mixing salad dressings. Quite an art. A touch of English mustard, a speck of curry, a whiff of mace, some white pepper, a few dashes of paprika, two-thirds olive oil, one-third vinegar. Some day all will practice the fine art of living. . . .

He heaved an idealistic sigh and in his mind there appeared a gallery of workers at table against a subdued background of stained glass. Steamfitters, boilermakers, ironworkers, they sat on a dais in dinner jackets, nodded to each other politely, spoke in hushed tones. One arose, held a wineglass aloft in a work-calloused hand, announced: "Gentlemen, comrades, this is unquestionably the finest *Château Yquem*, I've ever tasted. Nineteen twenty-nine, unless I am gravely mistaken."

He called himself to task, thinking:

—Nonsense! Why, that sort of thing is nothing but reaction standing on its head, wanting everyone to wear dinner jackets. A burlesque of the working class. Just the same it's strange how ideas keep popping into your head.

He corrected his image of an emancipated proletariat by recalling a shot in a newsreel showing a workers' sport parade in Moscow.

—That's better!

He sighed again, regretfully this time.

—I don't suppose I'll ever live to see it in America.

Looking up at Mr. Rockefeller's skyscrapers:

—All this power, wealth.

Then hopefully:

—I suppose an oboist walking on the Nevsky Prospekt in 1913 would never have dreamed that four years later Lenin and Trotsky would be in power. Trotsky. Those trials. . . .

All his thoughts, all his dreams dashed against the bleak stone wall of the Moscow trials, filled him with a vague dejection. For a while he walked along without conscious thought, depressed. Slowly, imperceptibly, thought returned; blurred images moved indistinctly before his eyes.

—Where was I? Yes, St. Petersburg before the war. The Nevsky Prospekt. . . .

His dream of the night before unrolled before his eyes: the Fortress of Peter and Paul, the malachite columns of St. Isaac's, Natasha speaking to him in a deep husky voice touched by a familiar and yet odd accent, the bacchanalia at the restaurant, her infidelity.

—Betrayed by a woman in a dream. The worst thing that can happen to a man. Can't go up to her and say, "Look here, I had a dream about you last night. This sort of thing simply can't go on, my dear." She looked so different, blonde instead of dark, elegant and sickly instead of fiery and revolutionary. Not at all like Natasha. Just the same, I know it was she because of the way I felt when that brute of a Russian officer . . .

All went dark in his mind and in the darkness a motion picture screen flickered, came to life: the railway station in St. Petersburg, Russian aristocratic men and women in heavy, expensive furs, the vicious whispering

at the opera, Vronsky, Anna Karenina.

The deep, emotional voice of a movie actress, magnified in volume by a score of sound tubes, thundered in his ears: “Vronsky, Vronsky. I love you.”

Tears compounded of Hollywood and Tolstoi oozed down the cheeks of a celebrated movie actress.

In the theatre of his mind the film snapped, the house lights went up as the truth suddenly broke upon him. His face lit up with revelation, joy.

—Of course! It wasn’t Natasha at all. It was that movie I had seen. I must have been feeling pretty low about Mathilda. Transference, that’s what they call it, substitution.

He heaved a sigh of relief.

—Why didn’t I think of it sooner?

He quickened his pace and marched along whistling lightly under his breath, a new, a redeemed man.

He now found himself at Fifty-seventh Street. He looked at his watch; it was too soon for lunch, besides he still wanted to walk. Crossing to the other side of the street he turned south. He was at one with the world. Head erect, chest out, he strode down the Avenue enjoying the warm sunlight, the chattering noontime crowds of clerks and stenographers. The images which filled his brain now were more lively, less foreboding than they had been all morning. And as he walked he hummed a rousing military march.

He is astride a white charger; he turns and looks behind him and sees marching ranks of steel-helmeted troops carrying rifles with fixed bayonets.

Heavy-booted, hob-nailed: the monotonous rhythmic beat of thousands of marching feet.

The martial music thunders, the street-drums rattle and the bass drums boom the beat. Women pelt his men with flowers; a sea of handkerchiefs wave from the sidewalks, from the office-windows.

Red bunting flutters from the buildings.

He turns in his saddle and with surprise sees the stars and stripes fluttering in the breeze. The crowds which line the sidewalk are solemnly saluting the flag.

He blinked and came to with a start:

—What am I thinking of? This is militarism, not revolution. My God, I was in the wrong daydream!

He smiled sheepishly and walked at a slower pace. More subdued, his thoughts took on a more analytical note.

—That's how they get the youngsters; brass bands, uniforms, cheering crowds, hysterical women. I guess it won't be long now. Munitions factories going day and night; prosperity, profits, blood. The battle of the century; fascism against democracy. Italy, Germany, Spain, China. Where'll it break out next? Now let [*stroking his chin reflectively*] me see. All right: Germany attacks Russia. . . . Not so fast. Where does she attack? Her border doesn't touch Russia's at any point. Mn-n-n. Well, she'll have to go through Czechoslovakia or Poland or one of the border countries. Naturally, France and England get sore. Ultimatums, notes, mobilization. Fine! Japan strikes from the east; through Manchukuo at Vladivostok and Siberia. This war in China might easily spread.

Self-satisfied, he smiled after the manner of a chess master who has succeeded in working out an intricate problem.

—I'm pretty good or else I wouldn't be thinking all this involved stuff. Ought to be in the diplomatic service. . . .

He came to a street intersection, waited for the traffic signal to change.

—Don't want to get run down again. . . . All right, Japan attacks in the East. Then what happens? Mussolini strikes in the Mediterranean; he might even get through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea. Odessa: wide, winding stone steps leading to the waterfront. Those Russian sailors seizing the *Potemkin*; that was a great movie, all because their rations were rotten. A bit of stinking meat and an empire goes to hell. They brought back the body of the leader of the mutiny and on his coffin they wrote: 'he asked for little.' But that's how it is, people die asking for little. But each little bit makes for progress, gradually moving forward. Wait! Now take it easy! What is progress? A progression toward what? Maybe it circles around, always coming back to the same point again. Bah! That's metaphysics. Give me the scientific approach any day. *Matter is vacuum in space.* Be realistic! *Facts are stubborn things.* Yes, but how can you tell which facts are true and which are false?

Impasse.

—Aw. . . .

The traffic light changed and cautiously he crossed the street looking left and right.

—All right, let's suppose Japan attacks Russia in Siberia. The world war is on. And what does America do in that case? After all, we're a democratic country. Can't allow the fascist swine to have their own sweet way with the world. They'd destroy free speech and things like that if you gave them half a chance. Besides, we can't have the Japs running the show in the Pacific. . . .

His thoughts sideslipped, veered off at a confusing tangent.

—But isn't that what Hearst says? The yellow peril, American interests in the Pacific. Wait a minute, wait a minute. . . . There must be an explanation somewhere.

A thousand editorials, magazine articles, feature stories stirred heavily in his memory. He was in a blind alley. An army of cunning publicists clamored for his meed of approval. In his mind there arose a tumult of conflict in which falsehood and truth each fought for ascendancy and which merely served to increase his bewilderment. The echo of hundreds of printing presses, radio broadcasts, street corner meetings, sounded in his ears:

A radio commentator: *The lucrative sale of German heavy machinery to Soviet Russia is providing Hitler with the much-needed sinews of war in his vast rearmament program which threatens to upset the European applecart.*

Stalin: *Socialism has been achieved irrevocably in the Soviet Union. We shall surpass the United States industrially during our next Five Year Plan.*

Trotsky: *If you remember that the task of socialism is to create a classless society based upon solidarity and the harmonious satisfaction of all needs, there is not yet, in this fundamental sense, a hint of socialism in the Soviet Union.*

Harold Denny, Moscow correspondent for "The New York Times": *I do not know intimately what the position of the communist party members is in Italy, Germany and other rabidly anti-communist countries. But it is difficult to believe they face any greater hazards elsewhere than they face here. For here they have been shooting them.*

Hitler: *We have always said that the creators of the Soviet revolution were a pack of criminals worthy only of the firing squad.*

"The Daily News": *Our part in the threatened war should be that of*

breathless spectators at a supreme tragedy—nothing more. The best way to safeguard our neutrality is to have a navy that can keep us out of war.

"The Nation": *Victory for the Spanish government would be the first fascist setback in Europe in years and it would check fascist arrogance and be the signal triumph for world peace.*

A Communist sympathizer [Simpson's dentist]: *It's a war to save democracy*.

"The New York American" (1917): *It's a war to save democracy*.

Professor Robert Ivan Charles Kilpatrick: *Now is it not quite obvious that neutrality would be of little avail in a world dominated by fascist doctrine?*

Simpson was caught in the coils of the hired publicists. Desperately, he waded through this gluey sea of propaganda, floundering from ideology to ideology.

If, for example, he had been a scientific Marxist it would have been possible for him to have arrived at a definite (biased, if you will) conclusion. If, on the other hand, he had been a principled reactionary it would have been possible for him to have reached a position diametrically opposite, also prejudiced, if you will. In either case it would have been a clearly defined point of view resting on obvious economic interest and hence on political reality.

But Simpson was neither a Marxist nor a reactionary. He was a visionary, a radical liberal whose political sympathies ranged from the right center to the extreme left. In short, he was an ideological Marco Polo. Then again, he was essentially a musician and the business of thinking logically in the realm of ideas was difficult and distasteful to him. This is true of most musicians as the published program notes of the great masters attest.

Now logical thought calls for the patterning of words in such a fashion that ideas emerge in form and in sequence. But this relationship between words and ideas is an abstract and arbitrary one, so that it is possible to arrive at a multitude of conclusions from any one set of premises, provided one is skillful enough at the game. One simply sets one's own definitions and the result varies according to the preconceptions of the thinker.

In music, on the other hand, it is different; the formal relationship of tones and tonal combinations are more or less fixed and readily discernible. The diminished seventh, for example, is a reality which may be verified by the sense of hearing, but the word 'humanity' is an abstraction of an abstraction which can only be verified by still another set of abstractions.

Moreover, out of the confusion of the society in which Simpson found himself, out of the pain and frustration of his personal life, his idealism was born. Such opinions as he had sprang not from closely reasoned ideas but from emotion: fear, hope, desire. He was motivated, not by ideas but by ideals, and being the creature of his hopes and fears the struggle became one between good and evil and not one where economic and historical forces relentlessly contended for power. As he walked, the problem was slowly resolved as the result of emotional instead of intellectual activity.

—Socialism in Russia, Soviet oil and heavy machinery to Italy and Germany, all that's not important. Suppose fascism wins in Spain. France goes next, maybe Czechoslovakia. The whole world will be fascist in ten years.

In his imagination he saw bonfires of books, saw artists and scientists driven from the land, old patriarchal Jews tortured at the stake, negroes lynched, the world reduced to agony and flames. Long lines of homeless refugees trudged slowly through the reaches of his saddened mind. And through this picture on hairy, monstrous horses rode the twin riders of the modern Apocalypse, Hitler and Mussolini.

He closed his eyes for a moment; it was too much.

—*Of course* we'll have to support a war against Germany, Italy and Japan. It would be a modern crusade, a holy war, that's what it'd be. We'll settle the business of reform and socialism after the war. I wouldn't mind enlisting in such a war. All of us brothers in a struggle for liberty and democracy. . . .

His pace quickened and once again the thundering tune of a Sousa march resounded in his ears.

—It's very crude, elemental music, but after all one must make sacrifices in wartime.

A last doubt assailed him, slowing him down, but only for a moment.

—But what about Hearst, the Standard Oil in the Orient, the ammunition makers and Wall Street? They want this war, too.

He grimaced sternly, shrugged his shoulders.

—We accept help wherever we can find it. We are not theorists but practical men.

Once again he is astride his white charger, riding lightly, gracefully, hand on his hip. Again he turns in his saddle and surveys the swinging files

of his men with grim, determined, social-patriotic satisfaction.

On the sidewalks frenzied crowds cheer incessantly as company after company marches past. A sixty-piece band blares an inspiring march. Street vendors sell flags, patriotic souvenirs, miniature steel helmets and toy gas-masks for the kiddies.

Women scream their greetings with a strange, mad delight. Flowers are tossed into the marching ranks. Well-groomed men at club windows fling packages of cigarettes for the fighting Yanks.

And to the rear there march the units of the People's Front; the Abraham Lincoln Regiment, the Warren Gamaliel Harding Flame-Thrower Company, the Sacco-Vanzetti Rifle Squad, the George Washington Section of the Intelligence Division, the Calvin Coolidge Rough Riders, the Eugene V. Debs Company of the Chemical Warfare Division, the Haymarket Martyrs Bombing Corps, and a contingent of picked members of the League for Peace and Democracy, formerly the American League Against War and Fascism.

Heavy, spiked boots trample flowers underfoot. . . .

No mercenary army this, no fascist horde, but farm boys from Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota; powerful proletarians from Cambridge, Princeton, New Haven and the College of the City of New York—all marching off to save the world for democracy and American supremacy in the Pacific. No man can say that this is an imperialistic army blindly fighting for markets or to safeguard Wall Street international loans.

—By God, no!

The street echoes with the heavy, rhythmic tread of thousands of hob-nailed boots. A forest of rifles whose bayonets glint in the sharp autumn sunlight.

And now the Avenue resounds to the pulsing measure of *The Internationale*. A roar of welcome and approval comes from the masses which line the sidewalks. Dainty handkerchiefs flutter; sleek men at the club windows shout thick, convivial words of encouragement. The air is filled with red, white and blue confetti.

Up ahead, Old Glory flies proudly, defiantly, in the October breeze. The color guard is composed of eager, uniformed members of the Young Communist League and at the very head of the parade march Earl Browder, Israel Amter, Robert Minor, Moissaye J. Olgin, leading members of the American Stalinist party—staunch Americans all!

Newsboys run along the line of march calling the imminent defeat of the fascist armies. . . .

Simpson walked along the Avenue at a brisk clip, smiling.

—So I wasn’t in the wrong daydream, after all. It all depends on how you look at it.

VII

Self-satisfied, he paused before the pampered, cool dignity of the Dunhill window and looked without bitterness or envy upon the lavish display of costly Havana cigars, very English briar pipes, jade ashtrays, princely tobacco mixtures and all the expensive paraphernalia of luxurious smoking. For at the moment he was no longer a nonconformist; no more was he at odds with the world, a subversive revolutionist. He felt tolerant, expansive, in harmony with his fellows. And why not? Were not all men, save a handful of degenerate fascists, lovers of peace and enemies of war, bigotry and intolerance?

—Under socialism I wonder who will smoke the rare cigars, eat pheasant and plovers' eggs, drink the choice wines? Imported cigars made from the most delicate leaves of the weed, grown in special soil, cured in the sun, made by hand in Havana. Or certain wines, only a few acres of vineyards, crushed by the bare feet of French peasants, a few thousand bottles a year. Only a limited amount available. May have to keep luxuries as a reward for work well done. But that's how competition starts; it'll breed envy, worker against worker. . . . However, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Perhaps nobody'll want to eat pheasant, drink rare wines, smoke Havana cigars under socialism; maybe every one'll be so busy they'll be satisfied with ham and eggs and a glass of nice fresh milk. Healthy, vitamins, good for the complexion. Big executives take crackers and milk for lunch, the simple life, success.

Regretfully, he turned from the Dunhill window and continued his walk. No longer an outcast, and now that he was momentarily identified with the more solid forces of society [if only for purposes of revolutionary strategy] he felt the need for association with those who personified leadership and success. At times such as this when his radicalism waned, his imagination waxed blatant, took on a bold quality which projected him into the highest circles of art, letters, politics and international affairs.

As he walked along the street in such a frame of mind he met imposing personages—statesmen, actors, novelists, journalists—and discussed matters of great moment with them. Sometimes he posed questions, occasionally he uttered a timely warning, at other times he joked and bantered.

These peripatetic celebrities, composed of snatches of stray information, wisecracks, slogans, paragraphs, walked at his side or floated in the air

before him. They appeared and disappeared upon the slightest provocation and once during a memorable walk he conversed with Hoover and Roosevelt, William Green and John L. Lewis, the Duke of Windsor and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, Hitler and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Stalin and Trotsky—all within the distance between Seventy-second Street and Times Square.

And in the streets on all sides of him walked thousands of other Simpsons, a lowly army of castle-builders, citizens of Cockaigne, conversing with the glamorous, the highly placed and the powerful in the hollow, echoing halls of their fancy.

Having arrived at a position which called for a more or less temporary alliance with the enemy of the revolution, he now sought to justify his position.

—I suppose the redder-than-the-rose revolutionists will call this class collaboration, but I mean to say, after all. . . .

He groped for explanations, analogies, parables.

—It's all a question of tempo. Suppose the liberals and radicals of America opposed a war in which we were allied with Russia, then what? The Soviet Union would be defeated and that would set the revolutionary movement back a hundred years. . . .

[Simpson always thought in round numbers.]

—But after all, what is revolution? Destruction, the conservatives say. What about it? You can't build without destroying. So it's all a matter of how fast you destroy. Some believe in destroying very slowly and we communists believe in stepping the pace up a bit. But not too fast, of course. Why, even the President. . . .

Pitched high, its affability emphasized by histrionic adroitness, the President's voice sounded in his ears.

"My friend [*the words seemed to boom out of a million loudspeakers*], my dear Simpson, how are you? You're perfectly right! Why, as I was saying to Eleanor this morning. . . ."

The smoothly enunciated words, the slurred Harvard 'r' coiled around him, caught him in a delightful, treacly mass.

Simpson squirmed with pleasure.

—It isn't every day that you walk down Fifth Avenue with the President

of the United States. If only Mathilda could see me now!

This touch of reality nearly extinguished the President.

—But she'd only say I was crazy. Maybe. . . .

By a superhuman effort of will and imagination he held his distinguished visitor at his side. He began to talk rapidly; the opportunity would soon pass.

"You mustn't think me presumptuous, Mr. President, but. . . ."

"Just call me Franklin, old boy."

His shadowy companion nearly disappeared into thin air.

—That's going a bit too far. He wouldn't say that the first time he met me.

"But I must say, sir, that you missed the chance of a lifetime in '33 when you had the banks on their knees. You should have nationalized them. Nationalization of credit is not a very revolutionary measure, even if Marx did call for it in the *Communist Manifesto*."

"But I'm not a communist," the President said.

"Yes, I know, preservation of the best aspects of capitalism and all that sort of thing. But after all I voted for you. . . ."

"Thanks a lot," said the President with gratitude.

"And thousands of other communist sympathizers as well."

"Quite true. [*Turning to a secretary who suddenly appears, notebook in hand, at the President's right.*] Remind me to acknowledge with thanks Mr. Browder's services in the last campaign."

"Landon had to be defeated at all costs," Simpson went on.

"You're telling *me*?"

"Of course, I sometimes have my misgivings about the sincerity of the new communist policy." Simpson interrupted himself, tripping over his rapid speech. "The new communist line; you know, war is indivisible [*flustered*] I mean peace is indivisible, a happy prosperous America. . . ."

"And a merry Christmas to you, Simpson," the President said cheerily.

—A redder-than-the-rose wisecrack, Simpson thought, as the President began to fade and look like an under-exposed photographic print. If I think of any more stuff like that, I'm not going to pay any attention to it.

“During your first term in office, Mr. President, I often said to Mathilda that I’d like to be alone with you on a fishing trip. We’d do some real solid reading, really worthwhile books.”

“Name them!” the President commanded.

Simpson racked his brain for a list of Marxist classics and called them off as they came to mind: *The Communist Manifesto*, *Capital*, *The State and Revolution*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. . . .

“I’ve read ’em all,” the President interrupted, “have you?”

“No,” Simpson confessed shamefacedly, “but I’ve always meant to. I’ve been so busy; rehearsals and one thing and another.”

“Then how do you expect to understand the class nature of the state unless you read Marx and Lenin,” the President said severely.

“But that isn’t really what I wanted to talk to you about. [*Now that he had trapped himself.*] There are a few suggestions. . . .”

“Fire away. Join my kitchen cabinet for a minute or so. For example?”

“Well, for example, minimum wages, minimum hours, free vacations, the thirty-hour week; compulsory castration for congenital criminals, provided, of course, that it isn’t used for political purposes; free lunches for indigent school children; free housing for the unemployed. . . .”

“Free love?” the President queried.

Simpson paused, stroked his chin reflectively:

“Mn-n-n, no, I hardly think the electorate would stand for it—in the rural sections, I mean.”

“What else?”

“Free birth control information for those who really require it. . . .”

“And who doesn’t?” the President asked, arching an eyebrow and looking about him cautiously.

“One more thing,” Simpson went on, speaking so rapidly that his words seemed to come in a steady stream, “I mean about the arts why shouldn’t we create a federal commission of fine arts government support for literature music sculpture poetry the drama architecture all that is noble and beautiful and which will endure when this civilization has long since crumbled into dust after all the government subsidizes banks railroads shipping aviation why not the good the true and the beautiful although I suppose if such a

commission fell into the hands of professional politicians it might be a means of subsidizing mediocrity just the same all those millions of dollars would be well spent if we produced one Shakespeare or Bach. . . .”

“A splendid suggestion,” the President said with marked enthusiasm. “I’ll take it up with Mr. Farley who understands these matters.”

“But wasn’t he a member or something of the New York State Boxing Commission?” Simpson asked fearfully. “A boxing commissioner in the arts?”

“Of course, the manly *art* of self-defense, you know.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” Simpson went on with a sinking heart. Then, hopefully: “But if you do form such a commission and you need someone to be in charge of symphonic concerts I mean to say I’ll be very happy to take charge for a very reasonable honorarium.”

“Good heavens, Simpson,” the President exclaimed, “don’t tell me that you, too, are a job-seeker!”

“Not at all, Mr. President, I meant a small fee just to cover expenses.”

“Take it up with your local congressman, Simpson,” the President said with some tartness.

And with that the nation’s Chief Executive walked away, disappearing into the columned entrance to a bank.

—A Rockefeller-controlled bank, I’ll bet. They say he’s sore only at the Morgan banks. The struggle between various factions of the ruling class: an inner contradiction of capitalism. I wouldn’t be surprised if he never read a line of Marx.

Groggy, Simpson shook his head vigorously as though to clear his brain, and at that moment became aware of two girls who appeared to be laughing at him as they passed.

—Must have been talking to myself out loud. . . . Silly business, everybody wanting to talk to the President. Fan mail by the sack, millions of letters. Most popular man in the country. Now, wait a minute! Is he? How about movie stars?

Groomed, scented, extravagantly tailored, a galaxy of male Hollywood stars, screen lovers with deep languorous eyes and passion-dilated nostrils, trooped before his eyes.

—Personally I don’t care for that sort of thing. It’s all right for working

girls and drudging housewives. Romance in the dark, and holding hands at the same time with an underpaid little clerk. Go home afterwards and lie in the dark staring at images of Robert Taylor, Clark Gable and people like that. I wonder if that's why women close their eyes when they're kissed. See better that way. Still, I suppose it serves a useful social purpose; compensates for the dreariness of married life. Live all day with the ball and chain and spend an occasional glamorous hour with a screen lover.

Suave, slow-moving, graceful, Hollywood's current idol fell in alongside Simpson as he strolled down the Avenue. The actor wore heavy sunglasses.

"I'm incognito," he said, pointing to his glasses. "I'd be mobbed by autograph hunters without them."

"Yes, of course. This business of having women running after you must be awfully tiresome," Simpson said with simulated sympathy.

"Tiresome!" the star exclaimed, "why, man, it's positively revolting. Don't smile! Wherever I go I am besieged by hundreds of women. Think of it!"

"I *am* thinking of it," Simpson said.

"I suffer from only one type of nightmare," the actor said passing a white, enervated hand across his damp forehead. "I'm alone on Fifth Avenue or Broadway and I'm being pursued by millions of goggle-eyed girls and women. They chase me down the street, into my hotel, down the corridors, into my room. Then I wake up in a cold sweat."

"Every vocation has its occupational disease. Still, it pays, I suppose."

"Yes, but what is money without peace?"

"I could make a pun now if I wanted to."

"This is no laughing matter, Simpson. How would *you* like to be pursued by shrieking, hysterical females? Pawed by them, womanhandled by them?"

"It must be terrible," Simpson said but without conviction.

The actor removed his sunglasses for a moment, pointed them at Simpson to emphasize a point: "At first, all the attention and adulation gratified my ego but after a while it became a positive curse."

Suddenly recognizing him, a crowd of shouting, elbowing women surrounded the actor; called his name, begged for autographs, caressed him, pulled frantically at his clothes, dishevelled him. In a few moments his suavity and well-groomed appearance were utterly destroyed. Simpson

wormed his way out of the crowd, started to hurry away.

"Simpson! Simpson!" the star shouted, "save me! Don't leave me alone!"

—The price of fame. But after all there are compensations; a home in Beverly Hills, a fantastic salary. You can't be one of the most popular men in the country without paying for it.

As Simpson walked along, the actor's appeals for help became weaker and weaker until they ceased altogether. He smiled.

—Now how did I come to think of him? Let me see! The war danger, democracy versus fascism, America comes in on the side of Russia against Japan, the people's front, we have to support the government. Oh, yes, the President, the most popular man in the country and I say no, how about movie stars? Funny where a thought can lead you. But sometimes I think this people's front business is going just a bit too far. Room for everybody in it! Heywood Broun, Father Divine, Roosevelt, General Smedley Butler, Norman Thomas, John L. Lewis and orthodox rabbis. But not . . . the followers of Trotsky. . . .

Once again his thoughts battered themselves against the paradox of the Moscow trials.

—Those days back in 1917. It was as though a new world were being born. Freedom became something more than a word with which politicians played. Now wait a minute, don't become sentimental. This is a hard-boiled world and these are different days. . . . It's true just the same. Lenin-Trotsky —as though it were a hyphenated name. The insurrection in Petrograd, the building of the Red Army, the victories against the White Guards. . . . And now?

Images evoked by newspaper reports stirred in his mind: Kamenev, companion of Lenin, stands in the prisoners' box facing the military collegium of the Soviet Supreme Court. His manner retains a trace of its old scholarliness, vestiges of dignity still cling to him, but his voice is without inflection and his eyes hold a strange light. "I am a traitor to my country," he says dully. "I am without honor or principle. . . . I have fallen into the pit of contemptible and loathsome treachery." There is no passion in his voice as he utters these incongruous lines, no shame, no emotion. "All that we wanted was power, nothing else. Death is too good for me." A prison courtyard of a G.P.U. prison, Zinoviev, chairman of the Third International, gray and shaggy, is dragged forth by a guard. The muzzle of a revolver is placed against the nape of his neck. A shot. Dark red blood colors the stone flagging of the yard.

Hastily, with happy relief, Simpson returned to Fifth Avenue, to its bright sunlight, its laughing colorful crowds.

—What was it Lenin said to his colleagues about that sort of thing?

He racked his brain, trying to recall a sentence in a book.

—Oh, yes. *Let there be no blood spilled among you.* Why did he say that if he didn't anticipate murder among the leaders? Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and the others. . . . Is it possible that Lenin's companions, nearly all of them, could have sold out to Hitler and the Japanese War Office?

Unhappy, dispirited, he continued his walk, all visions of a united front shattered by the thought of the exile in Mexico.

—And just when unity is needed most: executions, charges, recrimination. But if these things are true then who can be certain of anything? But still, the reporters who were at the trials said it was fair. Denny, Duranty. . . .

A wave of the wand of his imagination brought Walter Duranty and the Soviet Ambassador to his side. He sighed with relief.

"You've arrived in the nick of time, Mr. Duranty. I was just thinking of Trotsky and the Moscow trials."

"Simpson, I want you to meet his Excellency, the Soviet Ambassador."

"How do you do, your Excellency?"

"Ahm dunt spikink warry good Angleesh, Meester Seemson."

—Don't be silly, all these ambassadors are cultured people, speak dozens of languages.

"Charmed, I'm sure," said the Ambassador in correct English.

—More like it, Simpson thought.

"I'd like to ask a few questions on the Moscow trials, if you don't mind, your Excellency."

"Go right ahead, Mr. Simpson, it is only for that reason that I am in America. You've read my statements to the press?"

"Yes, but I'm not quite clear . . ."

"It's not a simple matter," Duranty interposed.

"How do you explain . . . ?"

“It’s this way,” Duranty interrupted, “back in ancient Greece, I think it was during the Peloponnesian War . . .”

“I was asking about Trotsky and the Soviet Union, Mr. Duranty.”

“Yes, yes, I understand. I was coming to that. Well, during this war Alcibiades was the most prominent political-military figure in Athens. He was brilliant and ambitious, but his policies brought Athens to the verge of ruin, and he was exiled. He fled to Sparta, the victorious enemy of Athens, where he never ceased to plot against his country with the help of its most hated rival. Do you see what I mean?”

Simpson looked a little bewildered.

“It’s a historical analogy,” Duranty explained. “Trotsky is Alcibiades, Athens is the Soviet Union, Sparta is Germany. Now does that explain how it was possible for Trotsky to betray his country?”

“It explains Alcibiades but it doesn’t explain Trotsky,” Simpson said with considerable unhappiness. “Don’t misunderstand me, Mr. Duranty, I’ve been a friend of the Soviet Union ever since 1917 . . .”

“Then your course is clear,” the Ambassador said, breaking in. “All friends of the Soviet Union believe in the absolute fairness of the Moscow trials. Only fascists and agents of Hitler can possibly think that they were a frame-up.”

“But I mean, how about the Trotsky defense committee? How about Professor John Dewey, Dos Passos, and people like that? I always thought they were good radicals and anti-fascists.”

“Not at all!” the Ambassador exclaimed sharply. “Haven’t you read what Stalin said the other day? They are the tools of warmongers, fascists, White Guards. . . .”

Simpson smiled with some embarrassment. “Isn’t that putting it on a bit too thick?”

“Ah,” the Ambassador said smilingly, “you artists are so naïve. My dear comrade, I will make a deal with you.”

“What is it?”

“You continue playing the oboe and Stalin and I will handle revolutionary politics. Each man to his own specialty.”

“But there are so many people like myself who are confused, Mr. Ambassador. How is it possible for old veteran revolutionists like Kamenev

and the others, I mean . . .”

“The production of pig iron in the Soviet Union increased 12.7% last year,” the Ambassador replied.

“What I don’t understand,” Simpson said, “is why they should have plotted to destroy the government they helped create.”

“Parachute jumping is part of the training of every Soviet boy and girl.”

“I can understand that they might be in political opposition to Stalin, but . . .”

“Pregnant mothers in the Soviet Union receive two months’ vacation with pay. . .”

“But how would 3,500 train wrecks help them to power?”

“You doubt the honesty of the genial Stalin, leader of the world proletariat?”

“No, no, no,” Simpson said. “I impute no unworthy motives. Workers’ fatherland and all that sort of thing, please don’t misunderstand me. I am a sympathizer in good standing. But why were they shot so soon after the trials? Why not wait? Quality of mercy and so on.”

“The shootings were carried out with neatness and dispatch as an expression of the government’s will to protect the liberties of the people and to foster their creative spirit,” the Ambassador said, quoting himself.

“But so many people were frightened by the shootings. Liberals, lovers of American democracy. . . .”

“You have no democracy in America,” the Ambassador said. “There are property qualifications for voting in many states. None exist in the Soviet Union. In Russia there is no disfranchisment of the Negro and there are equal rights for women, all of which makes the great Stalinist constitution the most democratic in the world.”

A burst of machine-gun fire echoing in Simpson’s brain lent force to the Ambassador’s remarks.

VIII

"Hello, Simpson!"

A real voice, not a phantom voice ringing in the labyrinth of his imagination, but one having the living qualities of timbre and resonance, destroyed Simpson's daydream and scattered the images of Duranty and Troyanovsky to the winds which blow among the skyscrapers. He blinked, grimaced [these exits from his dream-world were painful affairs] and became aware of a striking, amused Spanish face.

"Hello, Ascaso!" Simpson said with obvious pleasure.

"You look as though you are carrying all the sorrows of the world on your poor shoulders."

The Spaniard's voice was deep but soft, touched by a Hispanic lisp and his manner was flavored by the spice of gentle mockery.

Ascaso was a man in his early fifties, of medium height but wiry. Despite his matter-of-fact tweeds he looked as if he had stepped from a group in an El Greco painting leaving behind his companions, the elongated prelates and intellectuals of sixteenth century Toledo. Distinguished in appearance, possessed of a quiet dignity, he might have been mistaken for a diplomatist or a scholar of great means. Actually he was a member of the violin section of Turano's orchestra.

"Have you had lunch yet?" Ascaso asked, looking at his watch. "We have more than an hour before rehearsal and I'm famished. Will you join me?"

Simpson accepted the invitation and together they walked west along Forty-second Street; Simpson carrying his oboe, Ascaso, his violin.

"Things look pretty bad in Europe," Simpson said as they walked, "fascism and that sort of thing."

Ascaso smiled a slow, painful smile.

"Yes, that which we have feared has come to pass. How do the English say it? The long threatening . . ."

"And one feels so helpless," Simpson said helplessly.

"That's the mood today: helplessness and betrayal." Ascaso spoke

without passion in the manner of one who has long reconciled himself to a disagreeable fact.

Simpson turned his head sharply, looked at his companion with an alarmed, questioning glance.

"It seems to me that for the first time people are getting together and fighting for democracy and against fascism. Why, look at the Loyalists in Spain! Radicals of all countries fighting in the International Brigades . . ." He interrupted himself and concluded: "But you know more about what is going on in Spain than I do." He smiled anxiously.

Under the promiscuous ugliness of the Sixth Avenue elevated structure they turned south.

"You remember the Italian restaurant we used to go to when we played at the Metropolitan?" Ascaso asked. Simpson nodded. "We are going there. Do you mind?" Simpson did not mind.

A little west of Sixth Avenue on Fortieth Street they passed through a dingy doorway, mounted a flight of clean, bare steps, entered a dining-room. The walls of the room were hung with autographed pictures of operatic and musical stars; Enrico Caruso in chaps and a ten-gallon hat, an overweight Neapolitan cowboy in *The Girl of the Golden West*, looked out of a heavy frame upon the lesser lights which surrounded him. The proprietor, fat and amiable, greeted Simpson and Ascaso with marked enthusiasm. His manner conveyed the idea that he had lived only for this moment.

"Ah, *maestri*, how are you? It is a long time since you have been here."

The restaurateur invariably addressed all musicians who visited his establishment as '*maestro*.' The lowest rank which musicians held in his eyes was that of genius; from that point they ascended. This custom was at once an expression of his high regard for music and an evidence of his awareness of the innate vanity of artists, however humble. Moreover, it contributed in no small degree to his financial success. He bowed his guests to a table, summoned a waiter and discreetly withdrew.

Simpson and Ascaso pondered the menu for a minute or two; the violinist with the utmost gravity as though the list were a document of profound importance, and the oboist with a certain indifference as befitted a man who was concerned with weightier matters. With a decided gesture Ascaso removed his rimless glasses and announced his choice: sweetbreads cooked in white wine and made pungent with the herbs of northern Italy. Simpson called for spaghetti with a mushroom sauce.

“No use coming to an Italian restaurant without ordering the national dish,” he explained.

Ascaso was a gourmet but a tolerant one. He nodded with understanding. “Naturally,” he said. Then after a moment’s hesitation: “A salad of greens, romaine lettuce and some chicory, perhaps?”

Simpson nodded, thought:

—A touch of English mustard, a speck of curry, a whiff of mace. Some day all will practice the fine art of living . . .

Aloud:

“I mix quite a salad dressing myself. [*Laughing*] I put everything in but the kitchen sink, my wife says.”

“For myself, I prefer it to be simple. Olive oil and a little vinegar.” Ascaso paused for a moment; pursed his lips in thought. “Do you think,” he finally asked, “that we should take a small bottle of *Orvieto*? It’s not the best wine in the world,” he said with pardonable chauvinism, “but it goes rather well with Italian cooking. Besides, there will be little work done at rehearsal this afternoon; a few last instructions, and then perhaps quite a bit of drinking. Isn’t that usually the program just before we open the season?”

Simpson agreed and Ascaso ordered. The violinist took a case from his breast pocket, offered a cigarette to his companion, inhaled deeply and exhaled with slow reluctance.

“What were we talking about?” he asked at length. “Oh, yes, fascism and Spain. And I said that helplessness and betrayal was the mood of today.” He puffed deeply on his cigarette. “That makes me sound like a cynic, which I am not.” He paused and sat in silence for a few moments. Then: “You see, I come of a rather good family in Barcelona. My father wanted me to study for the law and later use his influence to get me a government post. But as a young man I was a revolutionist and, to make matters worse, a musician to boot. Ever since I was eighteen I have been in and out of the revolutionary movement. Today I am, unfortunately, nothing but a pained spectator. However, I took part in the Barcelona uprising in 1917 and spent a year in jail for my pains. So you see, I have some right to be critical now that everything seems to be in a state of collapse. . . .”

“Collapse? What do you mean?”

Ascaso ignored the question and continued:

“Perhaps you’ll call me a tired radical. It’s an easy charge to make. But

I'm not, I assure you." He smiled as a thought occurred to him. "Sometimes I wonder why some tired radical hasn't written the reasons for his fatigue. And they are many: the bickering, the disruption, the splits, the personal opportunism and the betrayal which go on in the revolutionary movement."

"I've never been active in the movement but I've followed it ever since 1912," Simpson said. "But don't you think that all that's changed in the last few years? Ever since the business in Germany, Hitler's coming to power, I mean. Today there's a real united front in Spain and . . ."

"Popular front," Ascaso remarked, correcting him. "You know the difference, of course?"

"Why, to tell you the truth . . . [*embarrassed*] I'm not quite sure."

"As I understand it," Ascaso said, "a united front unites revolutionary parties only, while a popular front admits all parties as long as they are opposed to fascism."

"Well, that's all right, isn't it?"

"No."

"Why?"

Ascaso's reply was thwarted by the appearance of the waiter who set food and wine before them. Deferentially, Ascaso poured the *Orvieto*; first a few drops into his own glass, then filled both.

"I really shouldn't," Simpson said as he took the stemmed glass between his fingers.

Ascaso looked up enquiringly, politely.

"My heart . . ." Simpson explained.

The Spaniard's face quickly bespoke sympathy.

"That's too bad. But a little wine is good for the heart. A gentle stimulant." He held his glass aloft. "A toast!"

"To whom?" Simpson asked, raising his glass also.

"A toast in which all humanity will silently join us."

"Yes?"

"It has a heroic ring in Spanish but I give it to you in English. . . . Death to all tyrants!"

They drank and then sat in silence for a few moments.

Tense with excitement, Simpson ate mechanically, barely chewing his food. A riot of murderous imagery flashed before his eyes. In Berlin the car of *Der Fuehrer* moves slowly through the streets between banks of cheering humanity. A youth throws himself before the car, a living bomb, and blows himself and the dictator to atoms. In Rome a young man leaps upon the running board of Mussolini's car and fires a revolver at the breast of the scowling fascist. Assassinations of a similar character occur in Belgrade, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest and Tokyo. . . .

He sighed with relief and began to eat at a slower, less feverish tempo, thinking:

—Individual terrorism may be un-Marxian but it's a damned satisfying thing to think about sometimes.

Looking up from his food, he asked:

"Are you an anarchist?"

"I am beyond labels," Ascaso replied. "I have reached the point where I am interested only in programs."

"I thought you might be an anarchist, because you are opposed to the People's Front in Spain."

"But large numbers of anarchists do support the government. And that is one aspect of the tragedy of Spain."

"Tragedy?"

"Yes, my dear friend, tragedy. Because the government is no longer revolutionary; no, it's not even as liberal as the Roosevelt administration here in America. The civil war has become a war between two factions of Spanish capitalism."

"But radicals all over the world support it as a war in defense of democracy. Why, even the liberals . . ."

Ascaso laughed.

"Why are you laughing?"

"But isn't a liberal one who is always urging others to die for democracy?"

Simpson smiled but without joy.

—That woman writer, what's her name? A rose is a rose is a rose. Yes, Gertrude Stein. She said to Hemingway: remarks are not literature.

“A very amusing remark,” Simpson said aloud, “but is it really true? Is it really sound politics? After all, isn’t the struggle for democracy today a revolutionary one? I mean if you can defeat fascism, wouldn’t that ultimately lead to something worthwhile?”

Ascaso shook his head. An expression of unutterable weariness passed over his face. He started to speak, then quickly controlled himself and sat for a few moments in silence.

A mild feeling of conquest welled in Simpson’s breast:

—I’ve got him there. There’s no other way out. Democracy or fascism. It’s clear as daylight. Unless of course . . .

Ascaso put down his knife and fork, took a sip of wine and reached into his breast pocket.

“I have here,” he said, “a letter from an old comrade who is now active in the revolutionary movement in Barcelona. You may listen to his words with respect if for no other reason than that he spent nearly half of his life in the prisons of Alfonso and Primo de Rivera for his radical activity. Of course, this willingness to suffer for an ideal does not necessarily make him correct. Reactionaries, Jesuits and fascists are also ready to die for their ideals. All of which proves nothing except that men of all parties are capable of great sacrifices. Heroism is a non-partisan attribute.”

He whipped the pages of the letter open with an impatient gesture, adjusted his glasses, frowned with nearsightedness and started to read aloud:

“*The war here in which so many of our comrades have died . . .*”

He paused, looked up and smiled apologetically.

“You’ll pardon me if I pause from time to time. I’m translating as I go along. The correct word was not ‘died’ but ‘fallen.’ You see, I’m trying to give you the full flavor of what he writes.”

He passed his eyes along a few lines of closely written script, mumbling to himself in Spanish and then read aloud in English:

“*The war here in which so many of our comrades have fallen, when stripped of any ideas of social change or of revolutionary grandeur, is only a vulgar war for national independence. Of course, we must continue to fight in order to avoid the complete extermination which the reactionaries of the world have prepared for us. Yes, my dear Ascaso, we Spanish revolutionaries are caught in the trap of anti-fascism. To refuse to fight means the victory of fascism. . . .*”

"That's exactly what I said," Simpson interrupted. "It's a matter of fighting a rearguard action. God knows we'd all like to see a real revolutionary situation, but in the meantime Franco has to be defeated. That's what I meant."

"Please allow me to go on," Ascaso said with faint reproof. He continued.

"*. . . and to crush fascism means that we must strengthen the government which has abandoned completely all pretense of being revolutionary. We have no illusions on the score that the Republican government will annihilate us after the war should we dare to press for a genuine revolutionary program.*"

Ascaso paused for a few moments, poured himself some wine, took a sip of it to moisten his mouth and scanned the succeeding paragraphs in silence. Simpson said nothing. He merely continued to eat slowly, looking up now and then to observe the Spaniard's face which remained unimpassioned as he read.

"*For us*" he continued, "*it remains a terrible question of life and death, nothing more. But it is necessary to tell the world that the war is no longer a struggle which proclaims a new social order and a new humanity. . . .*"

A shaft of cold light entered the warm recesses of Simpson's heart. He listened with a feeling of growing anguish. Unmindful of his companion's pain, Ascaso continued:

"*The communists have seized control of nearly all the important posts and committees in the rear, but the communists of today are no longer revolutionists but staunch defenders of property, law and order. It is true that Moscow has been supplying us with planes and tanks but the price she demands in addition to cash before delivery is this: that we must say nothing or do nothing which will alarm England and France, who tremble at the thought of a genuinely socialized Spain. This is the bitter price we are compelled to pay.*"

Simpson coiled soggy spaghetti around his fork. Listlessly, he carried it to his mouth:

—It can't be true. It mustn't be true. Good God. . . .

He swallowed a mouthful of food with difficulty as Ascaso went on:

"*It is impossible to arrive at any other conclusion but that we are pawns in a game which is being played by the imperialisms of both France and*

England. History will soon make this apparent even to the liberals. What a tragedy for our beautiful country. . . ."

Simpson stopped eating altogether and gave himself up to the meaning contained in the precise words which fell from Ascaso's lips.

—It has the ring of revolutionary thought . . . and yet . . . and yet.

He closed his eyes for a moment and saw cascades of colored distress signals leap from the entrenched lowlands of his fancy. Artillery thundered in his ears and through the prism of his gathering despair, feebly sustained by an ebbing faith, he saw the green face of the dying student from Salamanca, an image born of an image, his forehead gaping where it had been torn by a jagged fragment of shell.

Ascaso continued reading with maddening insistence.

"*Anarchists, syndicalists and all those who oppose the instructions from Moscow are in grave physical danger. Comrades who persist in revolutionary activity are called agents of Franco. Some have been found dead behind the lines, blindfolded and shot by the firing squads of the government in whose armies we are fighting. Andres Nin, general secretary of the Party of Marxist Unity, was killed, as you may have read in America, by Stalinists who took him from a Republican prison in Madrid. Camillo Berneri, the brilliant author and scholar who was commissioner of a workers' column on the Huesca front, was kidnapped from his home in Barcelona last May and murdered by the Stalinists. I can mention others who met a similar fate: your namesake Domingo Ascaso, Barbieri and others, hundreds of them. Do you remember young Robles who was in prison with us in Barcelona? He is dead, executed by men who yesterday called themselves revolutionists. I cannot bring myself to say that everything is lost, but I must tell you that the future is dark and filled with despair.*"

Ascaso folded the letter and put it back into his pocket.

"That is what I meant when I said that the mood of today is helplessness and betrayal," he said with bitter calm. "How can it be otherwise? But you must forgive me. I see I have caused you pain and, what is much worse, I have spoiled a splendid luncheon. It is too bad." He shrugged his shoulders.

Bewildered, Simpson sat in silence, fingering the stem of his wineglass. Images evoked by the words of the revolutionist in Barcelona stood before his eyes. Words and phrases, like dismembered bodies, whirled in his mind.

—No longer proclaims a new humanity. Life and death, a terrible question. A smartly dressed crowd. Robles. *Morituri te salutamus.* Mr.

Fischer's experiences in Spain. He is dead, executed by men. Latin, I know. So that everyone might eat, drink and dance. Berneri, brilliant author, kidnapped, murdered. Penthouse paintings by Picasso, Gauguin and Degas. Nin, general secretary, Marxist Unity, killed. Russian tanks and England trembles. [*Before his eyes Mathilda appeared, plump, self-satisfied, tormented by no doubt.*] "Why, Herbert, you know perfectly well that you've changed your ideas before. How do you know you're not going to change them again?" [*Exulting, she smiled, vanished.*] We have no illusions. The Republican government will annihilate us. Behind the lines. Dead. Blindfolded. Filled with despair. And dark. [*The shrewd, smiling face of Lenin, but with the texture and ashen coloring of the final mask of death, seemed to look up from the tablecloth*:] "Facts are stubborn things, comrade Simpson. The letter was a fine piece of rhetoric. But how about the facts?"

But before Simpson could formulate a question, Ascaso had intuitively anticipated and stated it.

"Of course," the Spaniard said, "you want proof. You want names and dates."

"It isn't that I'm a party communist," Simpson replied in confusion. "I merely wanted . . ."

His lips were dry and he wet them with the tip of his tongue.

"There's a little wine left," Ascaso remarked.

He filled both glasses, draining the bottle.

"You're upset. That's quite natural, but, after all, there's nothing you can do. Yes, I know, the feeling is bad. That's why the world has always hated betrayers, even when they were on the other side of the barricades. The British, I am certain, must have looked with profound contempt upon Benedict Arnold, just as tomorrow revolutionists and conservatives alike will look with contempt upon those in Russia who have brought about the death of their colleagues of 1917. [*Pause.*] Be that as it may, let us drink!"

"Of course," Simpson said, "I've suspected for some time that they've turned their backs on the revolution, but I thought it was a temporary tactic. But the sort of thing your friend in Barcelona writes about is—is just a little too much. It's unbelievable."

"When Danton, betrayed by his fellow revolutionists in Paris, stood on the guillotine he, too, must have felt that it was unbelievable. But the murder of the Jacobins is a historic fact and all reasonable men look upon their betrayal with contempt. Russia is doing the same job in Spain and by very

much the same methods. However, my friend, let us drink."

Impulsively, almost defiantly, Simpson raised his glass. His temples throbbed and his face was slightly flushed with wine.

—Dead behind the lines. Comrades. Blindfolded. Filled with despair and dark. Heroes and nameless.

"Yes, let's drink!" [*Almost shrilly, with an unusual excitement.*]

"To whom?"

"To those . . ."

He paused, re-phrasing the toast in his mind, then:

"To those who aren't afraid to die in despair and darkness!"

"A toast for heroes," Ascaso said quietly, in admiration.

They drank.

"I mean to say," [*explaining unnecessarily*] "the real hero is one who can die without even the—the . . ." He fumbled, stammered, paused.

"Do you mean without even the prospect of immediate victory?" Ascaso suggested.

For a moment Simpson did not reply; he sat in silence, the most subtle aspect of conversation.

—To die in useless agony without one moment of splendor.

Then aloud.

"Yes, and not in the light of glory either, that's what I meant."

They fell into another vacuum of silence. Finally Ascaso spoke.

"But you wanted proof, didn't you?"

Once again he reached into his breast pocket and this time drew forth a small bundle of newspaper clippings.

"Some of these are from Spanish revolutionary newspapers printed for English-speaking sympathizers, others are from liberal magazines."

He pulled off the first clipping and, reading hastily, summarized it:

"This is a reprint from an editorial which appeared in the *C.N.T.*, published by one of the largest labor organizations in Spain." He read: " '*To date we haven't noticed the Madrid press paying any attention to the*

accusations we have made against the murders of revolutionary workers, committed nearly always by people who have communist party membership books.' That was published on May 26th of this year. No answer in the communist press; no answer save vilification, character assassination and the charge that all who oppose them politically are the agents of Franco."

He passed the clipping to Simpson.

"Or this one——"

He glanced down the printed column seeking a telling paragraph.

"Yes . . . this is from an editorial which appeared in the official organ of the Barcelona Workers' National Confederation on April 25th. Listen to this: '*The Cheka in Murcia uses the same methods against us as was used by the capitalists under Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. Our press is suspended or censored; our best members are persecuted, jailed, even murdered. . . .*' "

Ascaso interrupted himself to explain:

"You see, the Russians are exporting to Spain not only bread, sausages, herring, planes and tanks, but also their political purges and bloody factional tableaux in which the minority always ends before Stalin's firing squad. . . ."

Stunned, as though by a blow, Simpson listened to his companion as one listens to a pronouncement of doom. Ascaso lighted a cigarette, inhaled with desperation as if seeking to deaden a gnawing pain, and, glancing at another clipping, continued:

"Or take this one, for example, which appeared in *Cartagena Nueva*, in one of its issues suppressed by the police. [*He paused for a few moments as he read.*] It deals with the case of José Serrano, member of a syndicalist union at Murcia, who was arrested on March 12. The communist police officials tried to get him to implicate his trade union leaders in a fascist plot. While he was being questioned at headquarters he heard agonized screams from adjoining rooms. I will read you the statement in his own words:

" '*They took me and put me in an official car, from which they transferred me to a private car and took me to a cemetery. Here they stood me against a wall. I denied everything since I knew nothing. They were trying to make me accuse the leaders of the Murcia C.N.T. of being fascists. This I resisted. Then they put me face to the wall. I could hear them cocking their guns. Torrecillas, head of the local Cheka, said to me: 'You have five minutes left to live, you can still save yourself if you talk.' I answered nothing. I was insane from the torture. Torrecillas began to count. Suddenly I heard 'Fire!' and a volley at my back. Terrified, I felt myself all over. Then*

they put me on my knees in front of the car with the lights lit and questioned me again. I was still silent. They began to fire again. I saw the bullets striking the ground near me. The next day I was taken to the house of a police detective named Fernandez Ruiz. There they tortured me again. Once they twisted my arms until they made my bones crack. I signed a paper which they showed me. I do not know what it said. I suspect that it must be some senseless declaration. I swear that if I have accused anyone, he whom I have accused is innocent. I signed the paper as I might have signed my own death warrant.' "

Ascaso paused. He took the little pile of clippings and handed them all to Simpson. "There are others and nearly all sing the same tune. Take them!"

Simpson sighed but said nothing.

"Yes," Ascaso said, "the death of a dream is a terrible thing. I know precisely how you feel." He looked at his watch and exclaimed: "Good heavens, it's past two! We're late for rehearsal."

He arose, called for the waiter. Outside they hailed a taxi and rode in silence toward Carnegie Hall.

IX

Contrary to all expectations, the rehearsal continued until late in the afternoon. In that tensely suppressed mood which is finely suited to prolonged creative effort, Turano carried his orchestra through more than four hours of productive labor. The men quickly sensed the conductor's state of mind and intuitively responded to it. Tones, shadings, effects were achieved by a significant word here and there, by an expressive gesture of the hands now and then.

It was past six when Turano put his baton aside with an air of self-satisfaction and announced that the entire orchestra was to be his guest for cocktails and dinner at a nearby hotel.

Half an hour later Turano and his men stood crowded about an improvised bar in a spacious dining-room at the Barbizon-Plaza. The long afternoon of work had deadened the shock of Ascaso's conversation for Simpson, and he now stood alone drinking a scotch and soda.

The talk on all sides was light and gay but Simpson's thoughts wandered from Madrid to Moscow, from Geneva to Vladivostok, colored by the overtones of Ascaso's conversation. He was oppressed by the premonition of impending disaster, a mood which characterizes the political thought processes of the radical liberal faced with unpleasant reality.

He finished his drink and ordered another. A warm, optimistic glow now suffused him and before dinner was announced he had taken three whiskeys. At dinner he took two glasses of burgundy with his roast and a thimbleful of cognac after his coffee. At ten o'clock, when the dinner ended, he was pleasantly tight.

Outside on West Fifty-eighth Street, Simpson stood in mild indecision as the musicians called goodnight to one another. The evening was cool, overhead the stars shone in clarity and candor, and a stiff breeze fanned his forehead now inflamed by alcohol.

—Too early to go home. Besides, Mathilda'll bawl hell out of me if she sees I've been drinking.

Looking up in simple wonder at the splendor of the constellations:

—On a night like this I'd like to . . .

A voice, deep but soft, called his name in greeting for the second time

that day. He turned. It was Ascaso and a companion. The Spaniard performed the amenities: Roy Darrell, novelist and newspaperman, shook hands with P. Herbert Simpson, daydreamer and oboist. Ascaso uttered a warning:

"Don't talk politics with him, Simpson, he's a hopeless cynic."

Simpson smiled amiably, suggesting polite disbelief.

"I'm over forty," Darrell said, "an age when cynicism is pardonable. In a youth, however, it's as unsightly as premature baldness. But then, I'm no longer a youth."

"We were going for a drink," Ascaso said to Simpson. "Darrell knows of a very special place on Third Avenue. . . ."

"Where there are no phony intellectuals," Darrell cut in, "just honest folk who work with their hands—truckdrivers, mechanics and people like that, and who like to take a glass of beer when the day is done."

"Sounds good to me," Simpson said, unsteadily lurching a backward step. "I like the proletariat."

"But don't let them hear you call them the proletariat," the newspaperman remarked, "they might misunderstand you. They labor under the illusion that they're freeborn American citizens, poor wretches. Condemned to a life of corned beef and cabbage, beer and kelly pool when they might be enjoying the benefits of totalitarianism in Rome, Berlin or Moscow." He shook his head in feigned sorrow.

"He used to be a radical in his youth," Ascaso said. "Saw the founding of the Soviets in Petrograd together with Lincoln Steffens in 1917. Today he's the perfect example of the tired radical."

"Yes, and God-damned sick and tired." [*Turning to Simpson.*] "But wait until you see the paintings on the walls of this joint. Steatopygous females in the nude disporting themselves in salmon-colored woodland glades while . . ."

"Stea-what?" Simpson asked, interrupting.

"Steatopygous," Darrell said, slowly repeating the word, syllable by syllable. "It means having a remarkable accretion of fat on the buttocks, as in the case of certain Eastern European women, shall we say? Big-behinded, in short. But you'll see them for yourself. *Allons!*"

X

SCENE: Two hours later. The rear of GALLAGHER'S *Bar and Grill on Third Avenue somewhere in the Fifties. Crude, half-pornographic murals decorate the walls in which are seen* DARRELL'S *buttocked beauties coyly displaying their hefty charms for the delectation of the customers. The odor of stale beer pervades the place. The room is dimly lighted. Men and women are seen sitting at wooden tables drinking, talking. Some are quite drunk. In the center of the room sit* SIMPSON, ASCASO *and* DARRELL. *They talk. From the loudspeaker of a radio comes the voice of a crooner bemoaning unsuccessful love.*

THE CROONER

This year's new romance
Doesn't seem to have a chance. . . .

ASCASO

Still sober, looking up at the radio, taking a sip of his sherry

Listen! His heart is breaking. Pessimism in all things, including popular music.

DARRELL

Slouched in his chair, bleared, his face red with much drinking

Go ahead, tell me it's Tinpan Alley's awareness of the great revolutionary betrayal. Would you pardon me, my learned friend of great integrity, if I were to say nuts?

ASCASO

Not at all. Go right ahead.

DARRELL

Nuts!

He swallows his rye at one gulp, shudders

God! Even alcohol is no longer a pleasure.

Places his hand over a tortured diaphragm

Heartburn.

At a nearby table a drunk lurches to his feet, approaches ASCASO, *sways, clutches the edge of the table*

THE DRUNK

Yer damn right. Wot this country needs is a dictator. T'hell wit' politics, sez I. Where does politics get yuh anyhow?

Belligerently

Bunch o' graftin' crooks! Am I right?

He staggers away toward the gents' room

'Scuse me, got an appointment wit' Dr. Wharton.

He laughs obscenely and disappears behind the closed door

DARRELL

The voice of the people. The bloody proletariat which will deliver us from all evil. Dear God! He's a comrade of yours, Simpson.

SIMPSON

Glibly

Lumpenproletariat, backward element, product of capitalist society. We've got to educate 'em, make 'em class-conscious.

DARRELL

Wearily, without looking up

You all talk alike. A set answer for everything. You read a few radical books and you know it all.

In SIMPSON'S *mind, which is now touched by alcohol, insane, hallucinatory figures come to life. Out of nowhere a circus barker appears. He wears a loud checked suit, a red necktie, a brown derby and a paste diamond stickpin which reflects a white*

blinding light. He waves a small flexible malacca stick towards SIMPSON *who stands in mortar-board and gown to his right*

THE BARKER

The one and only Professor Simpson, the seventh son of a seventh son. He sees all! He knows all! He looks into the past and foretells the future. Step up, ladies and gentlemen! Ask him anything!

A multitude of men, women and children, a small-town circus crowd eating popcorn and peanuts, flock around him. The odor of menagerie dung fills SIMPSON'S *nostrils. The populace fires questions at him*

A STENOGRAPHER

I've been keeping company with a young man now for nearly five years. He doesn't earn enough for us both to live on. We love each other dearly but we can't afford to marry. What shall we do?

SIMPSON

Prim, the editor of a column of advice to the lovelorn; he taps the side of his nose profoundly

Wait until he gets a raise.

THE CROWD

Marvellous! Wonderful! A miracle has come to pass.

SIMPSON

Simpering, modestly

Not at all. It's all very simple. Years of practice and self-denial.

A BOY

Snubnosed, freckled

What's good for warts?

SIMPSON

In ragged, Tom Sawyer trousers, fishing-pole over his shoulders, buck-toothed

Snip it off with the hair of a horse's tail. Or if this fails, pee on it before going to bed.

A SHIPPING CLERK

Pimply, hair plastered down.

What's best for putting lead in the pencil? Oysters, sherry and egg, or Spanish fly?

SIMPSON

In the manner of a popular lecturer on sex

A well-formed young lady, scantily attired, ready, willing and able.

Laughter

A VOICE

Tell us something new.

SIMPSON

Severely

This is no laughing matter. Facts of life. Hormones.

A VOICE

Whore who?

SIMPSON

In cutaway and striped trousers, carrying a heavy volume entitled, "The Phallacy of Marriage"

Hormones, I said. A substance formed in one organ of the body and carried to another organ on which it has a stimulating effect. Sex, for example. A natural function but under capitalism it has become a commodity like steel, bread and munitions. Middle-class concepts of marriage, fidelity; all rotten. We have billions, yes, trillions of spermatozoa which clamor for release. God, or rather nature, has given us hormones which impel us along the path of sexual adventure, to love.

Mathilda appears in the woodland scene in one of the murals on the wall. She is dressed in a long nightgown. Her face is greasy

with cold cream, her hair done up in metal curlers

MATHILDA

All talk and no action.

With contempt

Lying there panting and white at night, all played out. Oh, the agony I have suffered. I, too, have hormones, Mr. Know-It-All-Simpson.

She vanishes past the near meadows, over the still stream, up the hillside, into the dark depths of the ochre forest of the mural. Nightingales trill. A green baby-spot moon sheds a bilious light over all. MR. GALLAGHER'S *hefty maidens cavort*

SIMPSON

Bitterly, a disillusioned man

Beauty, moonlight, love. What is it all? A snare and a delusion. Science explains everything. Dialectical materialism, for example, ninety percent infallible . . . or thereabouts.

DARRELL

Yes, that's the trouble with most radicals. Cocksure about everything, know it all.

SIMPSON

Diffidently

Sorry if I seemed to have given the impression . . . Know it all?

He smiles with self-deprecation, sips his whiskey and soda

Well, hardly. . . .

DARRELL

Pay no attention to me. Everything said in the spirit of clean, wholesome venom.

ASCASO

Cynicism, despair, the end results of betrayal. We sit here drinking and feebly talk while our betters are dying in Spain.

SIMPSON *recalls* FAULKNER'S *shout of laughter as he sat in his bedroom thinking of the air-raid on Barcelona and wishing he was ten years younger. His inflamed imagination now re-creates the scene. Reality weaves unevenly through the maze of his hallucination. He is in his dressing-gown and slippers and he tiptoes cautiously to the balustrade overlooking his living-room and eavesdrops as* MATHILDA *and the* FAULKNERS *talk*

FAULKNER

Booming, hearty, red-faced

Six hearts. I'm a callithumpian! Think more of my stomach than I do of Jesus Christ. To hell with humanity! Down with idealism. Where does all that stuff get you? Nowhere!

MRS. FAULKNER

A simpering blonde of forty, beef to the heels

I pass. Of course, Herbert's a darling, Mathilda, but how in the world did you ever come to marry him?

MATHILDA

Recalling the mad, tempestuous days of their whirlwind courtship

He said that one day he'd be a famous conductor and that nothing would be too good for me. Showed me a list of sponsors of the Philharmonic Orchestra and promised that we'd hobnob with the élite. I was a foolish, gullible girl without practical experience. I've been defrauded, hoodwinked, cheated. Instead of the four hundred he gives me free-lance communism; instead of the Rockefellers and the Guggenheims, I get Marx and Trotsky.

She weeps bitterly

MRS. FAULKNER

You poor thing! Married to an oboe player!

FAULKNER

I'll bet he doesn't know his brass from an oboe in the ground.

He yells with delight at his own joke

P. Herbert Simpson, saviour of humanity! Can you imagine that? Give me Harding, Coolidge or Hoover any day!

MATHILDA

Leaning across the bridge table, in a stage whisper

You'll never guess what he said when he came home tonight.

MRS. FAULKNER

Eagerly

What? What?

MATHILDA

Almost hysterical with laughter

He said: "The world's in flame and people play bridge!"

FAULKNER

Limp with laughter

No!

MATHILDA

Weakly, holding her side, tears streaming down her face

Yes, and he said that if he were ten years younger, he'd volunteer for service with the Loyalists in Spain!

FAULKNER

Howling with delight

Funniest thing I ever heard. I'd give the price of a two-pound juicy T-bone steak to see him in uniform. Can you see that lily-livered, panting, chicken-breasted runt during an attack?

MATHILDA

And that isn't all . . .

MRS. FAULKNER

Expiring

Please stop, Mathilda, I can't take any more. Don't make me laugh, I've got a split lip.

FAULKNER

Gasping

Christ, I've nearly burst my operation; it cost me four hundred dollars cash. Money talks but Simpson never listens.

NATASHA

Callipygian, in a swinging black shirt, stepping out of one of the murals

Philistines! Pay no attention to them, Pyotr. Your comrades are dying at Madrid, in the streets of Barcelona. You are an artist and a revolutionist. Let us both go to Spain. Do you want to die without one moment of splendor? The real hero is one who can die without even the—the . . . . Do you remember?

SIMPSON

In ridiculous rags, baggy trousers, patched at the knees, large broken shoes, a tight-fitting short jacket, Charlie Chaplin mustache, derby hat. He recoils

You!

NATASHA

Sinuously, moving closer

Yes, comrade darling, it is I.

SIMPSON

A broken man, misunderstood by his wife, betrayed by his mistress, he faces his declining years in bitterness and reproach

Did you imagine that I would ever forget the humiliation I suffered at your hands?

NATASHA

Astounded

Humiliation?

SIMPSON

Sternly, by God

Don't pull the innocent act on me, my dear woman. You know perfectly well what I'm saying.

NATASHA

Cut to the quick

Pyotr!

SIMPSON

A man outraged by woman's duplicity, hoping against hope, but at the same time not daring to show his true, his real, his manly emotions. He takes her roughly by the hand

Come, I'll show you!

A backward leap in time-space. Once again, as in days of yore, they are in gay, laughing, chattering St. Petersburg. Everywhere there are officers and their beautiful ladies who speak in italicized French. They are in that fateful restaurant where he first became aware that Natasha, too, had hormones. The odor of costly perfumes (comparatively inexpensive, my dear, when one considers that a ruble is only fifty cents) and musk fill the air. Bacchanalian music. In the center of the room there is a statue of a prancing, exposed stallion and astride the beast sits the bearded Russian officer, naked. Men and women dance before the beast, uttering indecent, wailing cries. The kettle-drums thunder

NATASHA

Horrified

How shameful! How wanton!

SIMPSON

Confronting her with the scene of her perfidy

Do you remember this?

NATASHA

Relieved

Oh that! It was all a dream. Symbolism. Read the works of the Viennese psychoanalysts. Wish-fulfilment. Neuroses. Fixation. The scientific approach.

SIMPSON

Bah! What is psychoanalysis? An idle pastime for wealthy neurotic women!

NATASHA

Explaining all

But, darling, don't you see? Why, it's as clear as day. The pounding of the drums was the thumping of your own poor heart. Silly billy!

SIMPSON

Adamant

I don't believe it!

NATASHA

Besides, it was all Mathilda's fault.

SIMPSON

In a display of suburban dignity, a taxpayer in the City of Mount Vernon

Please omit all references to my wife. Holy matrimony legally entered into on February 16, 1912, in the County, City and State of New York, in the presence of the City Clerk.

CITY CLERK

Affably

May God bless yuh. Two dollars, please.

SIMPSON

Cracking wise as MATHILDA *smiles trustingly at him*

Cheap at half the price.

NATASHA

Heatedly

She denied you woman's most tender gift to man. Your conjugal rights.

CONJUGAL RIGHTS

In long black gowns, carrying impressive legal volumes

Denial of us in no wise gives the plaintiff the right to indulge in subconscious vicarious but none the less pleasurable adultery. Case dismissed!

NATASHA

Do you see? The subconscious brooks no denial. You found a way out. The dream was the result. Moreover, I was not the woman. It was that cinema actress!

SIMPSON

Emerging from a trance, passing his hand weakly over his damp forehead

Where am I?

In a daze, he blinks

Yes, yes, it all comes back to me now. It was a movie I had seen.

He smiles feebly

Vicarious romance, a necessary form of diversion in an exploited industrial society; serves a useful social purpose, compensates for the dreariness of bourgeois married life. Live all day with the ball and chain and spend an exciting hour with your favorite actress.

On the mural facing him, SIMPSON'S *ball and chain, in a gauzy shift and still in curling-irons, dances esthetically with* GALLAGHER'S *beefy dryads. He shudders. In the distance bearded centaurs prance and paw the trembling earth*

Pull yourself together! Facts are stubborn things. Example, please!

Sternly

Answer quickly! No dawdling!

Brightly

4.73 carried to the twelfth power.

Disappointed

It would take reams of paper to work it out. Besides, it proves nothing.

Concentrating

Of course, the movie; Anna Karenina, Tolstoi. All happy families are happy in the same way, but each unhappy family is unhappy in a separate way.

Profoundly stroking his nose in contemplation

Mn-n-n, maybe yes and maybe no. I'll have to think about it.

Ecstatically, his hands clasped

Oh, I adore the simplicity of the Russian soul!

He shows a red membership card to the Soviet Ambassador, proving that he is a member in good standing of the Friends of the Soviet Union

I love its instinctive artistry, its sense of beauty, its wistfulness, its gentleness. . . .

An orchestra plays wild, Brahmsian music. Tambourines. In gypsy costume, wearing a red silk blouse which billows as he dances, STALIN, *impassive, freckled, mustached, spins into* SIMPSON'S *field of vision. He stops suddenly, breathless*

STALIN

Whew!

In happy abandon he whirls gayly across the room, pauses for a moment before an immobile dryad and chucks her under the chin

Come, let us all be joyous! Socialism has been irrevocably achieved in the Soviet Union.

A dispirited, forlorn troop of ragged political prisoners passes before SIMPSON'S *eyes.*

The happy Soviet land!

In the minds of DARRELL *and* SIMPSON, *who have been drinking whiskey all night, fantasy and reality now interweave more homogeneously than ever. Snatches of conversation, a thought, a name, materialize and take on visible form.* ASCASO *continues to sip his sherry*

DARRELL

Tens of thousands of them: writers, scholars, scientists, revolutionists, liberals, trudging the old road to Siberia. All the old façade of Czarism is being restored by these ruthless heralds of a new day which will never dawn. The oriental cruelty of Ivan the Terrible flaunting the red flag.

It is night in an apartment in the Kremlin. At a table are seated DZHERZINSKY, *the head of the Secret Police, gaunt, somber, silent*; KAMENEV, *urbane, scholarly, pleasant*; STALIN, *relaxed and talkative for the moment. In the center of the table there is a large bottle of Tiflis wine. The commissars drink*

KAMENEV

Turning to STALIN

And what supreme delight does life hold for you. Your greatest pleasure, for example?

STALIN

Drinking sparingly, as though he feared it

The finest thing in life . . .

He muses for a moment

is to choose your victim, to prepare your blow against him with the greatest care, to avenge yourself mercilessly . . .

He smiles

and then to go to bed.

DZHERZINSKY *and* KAMENEV *exchange significant glances. The scene fades from* SIMPSON'S *mind as* DARRELL *continues speaking*

DARRELL

Did you know that?

ASCASO

No. But I'm not in the least surprised. The anecdote is in character.

STALIN

Returning once again, still in gypsy costume, still joyous

More than one political party is not required in the Soviet Union because we alone express the highest aspirations of the Soviet people.

Efficiently

Why duplicate effort?

Snarling

To the mad dogs who challenge our power we offer the highest measure of social protection, death by shooting.

ASCASO

The highest measure. A Stalinist genteelism. Why are these blunt realists so afraid of the blunt phrase?

DARRELL

With mock wistfulness

I wonder if the recipient of the second highest measure is disappointed, like a student who flunks his exams.

STALIN

Shaking his fist at SIMPSON

You sit here and listen to this cynical counter-revolutionary chatter?

Sneering

A fine friend of the Soviet Union you are!

SIMPSON

Terrified, his teeth chattering

I am here merely in the interests of science and learning. Both sides of the question. Impartiality, the hallmark of the radical liberal. My presence does not signify approval, of course.

He produces a red membership book, proudly

Dues paid up until January first.

STALIN

In disgust

Rotten liberalism!

From afar the sound of machine-gun fire is heard. He cocks an attentive ear, listening

Ah, music! The overture to the most democratic constitution in the world.

DARRELL

Yes, and today all Russia is on its knees before the genial Stalin.

ASCASO

Where one rules, the many are certain to be found on their knees. It’s a law of life.

DARRELL

Making a wry face

Disgusting flattery. Byzantine panegyrics. You have no idea to what lengths they go.

ASCASO

Knowing the servility of petty office-holders, I can well imagine.

DARRELL

For example, the highest mountain in the Pamir chain is, appropriately enough, called Mount Stalin.

ASCASO

Shrugging his shoulders

Naturally. What else did you expect?

DARRELL

Pausing to time his remark

However, the second highest is called Mount Lenin. But that isn't all. There are eight cities named after the modest genius: Stalingrad, Stalinogorsk, Stalino, Stalin-Aoul, Stalinir, Stalinbad, Stalinsk and Stalinissi.

Grimacing, in the throes of an acute attack of heartburn

Poor Lenin must be turning in his grave; he hated that sort of thing. I remember way back in 1920 when I was covering Moscow . . .

He pauses, goes off at a tangent

Duranty was sending his stuff from Riga in those days.

He laughs mirthlessly

God, how he hated the Bolsheviks. . . .

DURANTY 1920

A Union Jack in his lapel

The Bolshevik system is a compound of force, terror and espionage, utterly ruthless in conception and execution. The communists hold Russia in a bloody grip.

DURANTY 1937

In a resplendent uniform, still writing as he pleases

The Soviet Union is an edifice which Marx conceived, Lenin brought to life and which the genius of Stalin developed.

DARRELL

Add similes: as consistent as a newspaperman.

ASCASO

He came to the faith only when the founders of the party were either dead, in prison, or in exile. Yes, he's been consistent. He hated revolutionists then,

he hates them now.

DARRELL

Laughing

The genius of Stalin! The silent, modest man of steel . . .

ASCASO

Before whom most of the radical intellectuals of America bow in low obeisance.

DARRELL

A remarkable picture: their faces turned reverently toward the Kremlin with their rear ends exposed to their countrymen. What a temptation!

ASCASO

In mock horror

What!

DARRELL

I mean to kick.

He lights a cigarette

But then, there is a type of intellectual who must always be on his knees before some great, silent man. Take the case of Avdeyenko . . .

SIMPSON

Sitting up, shaking himself

Who?

DARRELL

Avdeyenko, one of Stalin's novelists. In 1935 at. . . .

The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International at Moscow. The hall is filled to capacity with delegates from all the civilized countries of the world. The international revolutionary general staff is here assembled. The novelist AVDEYENKO *mounts the platform*

AVDEYENKO

No beating around the bush for him

Centuries shall elapse and the communist generations of the future will deem us the happiest mortals who have inhabited this planet through the ages, because it is we who have seen Stalin, the leader-genius, Stalin, the sage, the smiling, the kindly, the supremely simple. . . .

ASCASO

It's unbelievable!

DARRELL

Wait! The cream of the jest is yet to come.

AVDEYENKO

His face bathed in ecstasy

When I met Stalin, even at a distance, I throbbed with his forcefulness, his magnetism and his greatness. I wanted to sing, to shriek, to howl with happiness and exaltation.

Tempestuous applause

SIMPSON

To DARRELL

You can't fool me. You're making this up.

DARRELL

There are things which are beyond even *my* powers of invention. This is one. Besides, I have you at a disadvantage. I read Russian. The speech was faithfully reported in the Moscow newspapers the following day.

AVDEYENKO

Holding up his hand, calling for the frenzied applause to cease

Our love, our devotion, our strength, our hearts, our heroism, our life—all these are thine, great Stalin. When my beloved will bear me a child, the first word I shall teach him will be—STALIN!

Blackout

SIMPSON

It sounds un-Marxian to me. What I mean to say is, what about scientific socialism?

DARRELL

This is no time for riddles, comrade.

ASCASO

Smiling

Imagine Dreiser, for example, getting up before an American audience and saying that he wanted to sing, shriek and howl with happiness and exaltation at the mere sight of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

DARRELL

I should think he'd be taken to the psychiatric ward of Bellevue for observation.

ASCASO

But then Roosevelt is not Stalin.

DARRELL

For which I offer up grateful prayer.

Silence for a moment, then:

Perhaps the explanation of Avdeyenko's ecstasy can be found in the psychology of homosexuality. What do you think?

ASCASO

The truth, I think, is far simpler. In the Soviet Union the state is the sole publisher and Stalin, for all practical purposes, is the State. Hence Mr. Avdeyenko's enthusiasm. He was not singing his panegyrics to the beloved leader; it was simply a hymn of praise to the source of his bread and butter.

DARRELL

Comprehensible.

ASCASO

But not praiseworthy.

DARRELL

After a few moments of silence

Say! I'm threatened with sobriety. Waiter!

The waiter, tough, bulky, amiable, but not above the use of a Mickey Finn when necessary, responds. He takes their orders in taciturn silence and returns with rye, scotch and sherry. At this moment the drunk lurches from the doorway leading to the toilet. He approaches the trio, greets them as old, long lost friends

THE DRUNK

Sheepishly

The doc wuz busy, kept me waitin'!

He guffaws, then becomes deadly earnest

I see you gents is still busy savin' the world.

With drunken profundity

Can't be done, see!

ASCASO *and* SIMPSON *ignore him in embarrassed silence; only* DARRELL *replies:*

DARRELL

Listlessly

Why not?

THE DRUNK

Editorially

Human nature, tha's why!

He winks significantly, nods emphatically and shoves off towards his own table at which are seated two blowsy females who greet him querulously

DARRELL

What was I saying?

ASCASO

Looking at his watch

The flattery of Stalin in Russia.

DARRELL

Draining his glass

Yes, of course. The same sort of thing is true of American Stalinists. Every Avdeyenko has his American counterpart. For example take . . .

He mentions names

SIMPSON

Sitting up, taking notice

That was a damned fine book.

DARRELL

What was a damned fine book?

SIMPSON

I mean all that stuff about the East Side. Colorful. Everybody thinks that Jews are all millionaires. It goes to show that there are poor Jews, too.

DARRELL

An astounding observation for a Marxist novelist to make.

SIMPSON

Philosophical old Jews, and all that sort of thing.

DARRELL

Sneering

Ghetto tripe. A proletarian Cook's tour for gaping *goyim*.

A proletarian East Side novelist shuffles into view

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

In ghetto gaberdine; a Yeshiva student, persecuted, unhappy; in a

whining voice

Woe is us! The suffering we have known!

He rocks backward and forward, intones a passage of the Talmud in a singsong voice

DARRELL

I am unimpressed. The best you can achieve with that sort of thing is sympathy. No good.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

In ill-fitting clothes, derby hat pulled low over his ears; he carries a sewing machine slung over his crooked back

We were the victims of American capitalism. Pimps, fifty-cent whores. . . .

He rubs his hands together gleefully, whispering

When I was a boy I remember peeking through a keyhole and—and—and—. Gangsters, perverts, bums menacing our young lives.

Striking a pose

And there but for the grace of God and the communist party go I.

DARRELL

Pursing his lips, critically

Propaganda, and poor propaganda at that. Try again.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

In a smart, newly purchased tweed suit

We were caught in the trap of poverty. The agony of it! Three hundred and nine pages of it! We lived in degradation and filth.

In simple wonder, like a child

Did God make bedbugs?

GOD

Interrupted, as he marks a sparrow's fall

What was that?

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

To God

Did you or did you not make bedbugs? And no theological hairsplitting, please.

GOD

Petulantly

Why am I continuously being asked these silly questions? Blake asked me the same question about tigers. Yes, I made tigers, bedbugs and East Side novelists. I also made sunsets, flowers, the Fallopian tubes, love, children, Niagara Falls, Bach, Kennebec salmon, rainbows, the Grand Canyon, Shakespeare, and filet mignon. . . .

Wearily

Oh, I've made any number of beautiful things, but nobody these days ever seems to mention them.

Sternly

Now please go about your business and let me do my sparrow-marking in peace.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

To DARRELL, *contemptuously*

Futilitarian!

DARRELL

Hack!

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Cynic! Joycean!

Changing his tone; querulously, ungrammatically

Did Lenin or Marx really need to write like James Joyce or wait until a new

kind of prose was invented before stating their message?

As DARRELL *starts to reply, cutting him short*

No answer required, please. The question is purely rhetorical. To ask is to answer.

DARRELL

Idiot!

Gagging with exasperation, then with a marked effort at self-control

Lenin and Marx were political economists, not novelists, not literary stylists. What they had to say, they said as simply as their complex material would permit. Rule number one for factual writing.

He hiccoughs

For example . . .

He pauses in confusion, scratches his head

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

With evident pleasure at DARRELL'S *discomfiture*

Go on! Go on!

Mimicking him

For example, for example . . . You don't know. You've never read Marx.

DARRELL

Brightening as he recalls

Yes, now I have it. The annual rate of surplus-value, or the comparison between the surplus-value produced during one year and the variable capital advanced (as distinguished from the variable capital turned over during one year) is therefore not merely a subjective matter, but the actual movement of capital causes this juxtaposition.

He pauses, breathless, mopping his brow

Correct me if I'm in error. I quote from memory, of course. The point is that the complexities of the soul are as involved as the intricacies of political

science, a fact recognized by Marx himself.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Bah! An obvious Joycean device. Vulgar display of erudition.

DARRELL

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EAST SIDE NOVELIST

In the sensible, saccharine tones of a popular lecturer on literature

I think a new content often demands a new form, but when the new form gets so far ahead of all of us that we can't understand its content, it is time to write letters to the press.

DARRELL

Dear editor, I am a taxpayer and a pater-familias . . .

Millions of readers dispatch letters to the editors of local newspapers asking the meaning of the phrase "agenbite of inwit." A literary storm sweeps the country. JOYCE, E. E. CUMMINGS, GERTRUDE STEIN *and* EZRA POUND *receive attractive offers, precise amounts unspecified, to lecture before American audiences. A hundred people are injured outside Madison Square Garden in a vain attempt to gain admission to hear a debate between* JOYCE *and the literary editor of "The Daily Worker" on "Is Stream of Consciousness Superior to the Simple Declarative Sentence as a Revolutionary Literary Device?" Riots break out in a score of American cities. Bloodshed*

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Still lecturing

If the truth were told, I have gotten to the point where I believe that communist art now needs a Tolstoi more than it does a James Joyce.

JOYCE

Earnest, intent, he peers half-blindly at a manuscript

Bronze from anear, by gold from afar, heard steel from anear, hoofs ring from afar, and heard steelhoofs ringhoof ringsteel.

Looking up to E. S. N. *shamefaced*

No good, eh?

Apologetically

Excuse it, please.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

With a gesture of impatience

How can drivel like that help the building of socialism in the Soviet Union or the people's front in America? All reasonable critics will agree. . . .

Music is heard. A fortissimo chord for trumpets and trombones, to which the horns reply pianissimo, then an involved, figured passage for the solo violin. Austere, granite-hewn, bald, JAN SIBELIUS *appears*

SIBELIUS

Critics? Have you ever seen a statue erected to a critic?

An orchestral tutti. He exits

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Bourgeois decadence. What is *Ulysses*? The filth of Dublin! Smut! Depravity!

Whispering eagerly

Especially in the scene, I mean where he, she, together, in the brothel scene, you know, where. . . .

DARRELL

Coldly

Control yourself, comrade.

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Recovered

Apart from being a pornographic picture of an Irish slum, what is it?

DARRELL

A monumental work of art. A portrait in acid of the lower middle class. A contribution of major importance beyond the comprehension of . . .

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Portrait?

His eyes fixed and vacant, rapidly repeating a string of words

A vicious attack on middle-class people contradictions of capitalism which forces them into the struggle against war and fascism yes and twentieth century communism is americanism or words to that effect all of which will help build the people's front under the guidance of our beloved leader Earl Browder.

He springs to attention, salutes

Yes.

DARRELL

The middle class, tied to capitalism by the umbilical cord of economic interest. Why don't you Marxists ever read Marx? In a choice between communism and fascism they always prefer the latter. Look at Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland. . . .

EAST SIDE NOVELIST

Confidentially, whispering

Yes, yes, I know. It's a tactic. Win over large sections of the middle class in support of the Kremlin policy.

Chuckling

It's as easy as falling off a log.

He falls off a log

After all, what does the middle class know about politics? Lead 'em by the nose. Scare the Jews with Hitler, the Negroes with Mussolini in Ethiopia and the Californians and the American Legion with the Japs. We're building an all-inclusive people's front. We accept anybody as long as they are prepared

to speak out boldly against man-eating sharks. Popular issue, eh what? Why, as Earl Browder says . . .

BROWDER

In a natty people's front suit, trim mustache, stiff linen handkerchief in his breast pocket; he wears a broad golden wedding ring on his third finger as a symbol of his belief in marriage, democracy and simplified spelling

I am prepared to make a tactical statement to the press. I will also answer questions according to the new political line which has just arrived by parcel post from the Kremlin.

He *coughs*

Since 1935 I have been a loyal American citizen and the sight of Old Glory makes my people's front heart beat faster.

Reporters crowd around him

FIRST REPORTER

Do you still believe in the class struggle and the policy which calls for the revolutionary seizure of power?

BROWDER

Making the sign of the cross

God forbid! The Communist Party repudiates now, as in the past, all theories or proposals looking toward a forcible imposition of socialism or any utopia upon the majority of the people.

SECOND REPORTER

Is the Communist Party loyal to the flag of the United States?

BROWDER *kneels reverently and kisses the flag. A vigilante committee of American Legionnaires applauds*

BROWDER

See! Actions speak louder than words. *We* are the real Americans, defenders of the faith and soldiers in the army of democracy.

A phantom army of World War dead, mutilated and reeking of

putrescence, marches silently past. No one pays heed

THE DEAD

Speaking in forlorn, ghostly voices

We died for democracy, for the House of Morgan. We died that free speech and Kuhn, Loeb and Company might live.

SECOND REPORTER

Do you believe in teaching the youth of America to oppose enlistment in the National Guard?

BROWDER

In lace cap and crinoline dress; he bears a faint resemblance to BARBARA FRIETCHIE. *Outraged*

Why, of all things! I've never said anything of the sort.

He breaks down and weeps

HEYWOOD BROUN

In an ill-fitting war correspondent's uniform. Under his arm he carries two books, early Brouns, written during the World War. They are entitled: "The A.E.F., or With General Pershing and the American Forces" and "Our Army at the Front." He points to BROWDER

Who touches a hair of yon gray head, dies like a dog, march on, he said.

In the manner of a Fourth of July orator

Fellow countrymen, it may well be that somebody will throw an egg if I undertake to speak briefly in favor of patriotism.

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

Scrofulous and crotchety, he hurls a rotten egg. It breaks exuding a foul odor which no one seems to detect.

Sir, I tell you that patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels.

HEYWOOD BROUN

As a medical board rejects him as unfit for active service overseas

I hate to be the first one to suggest that we all stand up and sing *The Star Spangled Banner* and yet I say that in the moral issue between American democracy and foreign fascism, I'm for America and our President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

A blare of military music. Headlines. Newsreels. Loudspeakers carry the war message into ten million homes from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The lads in khaki begin to march. In a score of training camps recruits are taught the fine art of wielding the bayonet. Lunge! In! Out! Let 'im have it in the throat! Kick 'im in the nuts! If his entrails stick to the bayonet when you withdraw, kick 'em off with your boot! Casualty lists appear in the newspapers. The Department of Justice imposes a strict censorship on the press. Chorus girls in panties appear on the steps of the Sub-Treasury Building in Wall Street and call on all patriotic citizens (male) to subscribe to the Victory Loan. Anti-war meetings are broken up. Aliens are deported. Civil liberties are trampled upon by the authorities. Neighbors are urged to spy on each other. A revolutionary speaker is dragged from a soapbox and beaten to death by an angry, patriotic mob. BROUN *continues to speak, but no longer briefly, in favor of patriotism and against foreign fascism. Under the cloak of war patriotism, domestic fascism is introduced. American orchestras refuse to play Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and Brahms. Sauerkraut is re-baptized 'liberty cabbage,' and frankfurters are henceforth known, as the result of a presidential decree, as 'democracy sausages.' A million American boys are torn to shreds by high explosive shells; their lungs are rotted by poisonous gases. The streets of America are once more filled with armless and legless cripples begging for alms. America's late allies once more repudiate their war debts. The country experiences another cataclysmic economic crisis. The suicide rate mounts. Numerous literary and journalistic supporters of the war return to their peacetime pacifism. Another Unknown Soldier is interred at Arlington*

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Reeking of disinfectant; he sings in a thin, wheezing, gassed voice

Oh, the journalists have a bloody good time, Fifty miles behind the lines. Hinky dinky, parlay voo.

Everyone ignores him. Meekly, he climbs back into his silver casket whereupon a delegation of politicians, pacifists and bankers, all in top hats, place wreaths upon his tomb. They pose for the newspaper photographers, wearing appropriate expressions of patriotic sorrow. A tree near the sepulchre drips blood

FIRST REPORTER

To BROWDER

Then you renounce the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat?

BROWDER

Disguised as PAUL REVERE *in breeches and cocked hat, standing beside a spavined palfrey*

What a question! Dictatorship of the proletariat?

He grimaces as though he had just swallowed a dose of distasteful medicine

All that was a misunderstanding, a farcical misunderstanding. We of the Communist Party are completely in the camp of progress and democracy. We love America.

A disheveled figure on the outskirts of the crowd elbows his way forward. There is a striking resemblance between the plebeian stranger and the smooth, well-groomed communist leader. The reporters recognize the newcomer as EARL BROWDER, *vintage 1932, but they say nothing*

BROWDER 1932

Roughly

What was that?

BROWDER 1937

Startled, as he sees his former self. Aside, in a hoarse whisper

Pretend you don’t know me. Scram!

BROWDER 1932

In righteous proletarian indignation

I'll do nothing of the sort. Progress and democracy. I like that! You know as well as I do that all forms of government, whether democratic or otherwise, are merely forms of the dictatorship of the capitalist class.

BROWDER 1937

In coonskin hat, fringed leather pants; a Stalinist DAN'L BOONE. *He ignores him*

We believe in American democracy, in the spirit of the frontier, the covered wagon, Buffalo Bill, Steve Brody, Casey Jones and other heroic figures in our nation's copybook past. We appeal to all lovers of popular American history, to all liberals, radicals, socialists, progressive capitalists, stock brokers—and workers—to join the people's front against war and fascism.

Overhead, a dazzling display of red, white and blue pyrotechnics. A group of progressive capitalists make generous cash contributions to the people's front campaign fund. Loudly, they protest that they are actuated by nothing but altruism and a hatred of war and reaction. Among the donors are the following members of America's Sixty Families: JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER JR. (*the Ludlow Massacre*), ABBY MILTON, C. V. WHITNEY, HARRY F. GUGGENHEIM (*the Anaconda Copper Strike*), JAMES H. R. CROMWELL, *husband of* DORIS DUKE, *and several others. The board of governors of the New York Stock Exchange pass a resolution declaring May 1st a national holiday*

BROWDER 1932

Outraged

A people's front with socialists, let alone bankers! Heresy! Social-fascism! Have you forgotten so soon?

He quotes from a small pamphlet

Fascism comes to maturity with the direct help of the socialist parties, who are those elements within the working class we describe as fascists because of the historic rôle they play.

BROWDER 1937

In top hat, cutaway coat, lavender striped trousers; a respectable supporter of democracy. He turns to a policeman

Officer, this man is an impostor!

BROWDER 1932

In a proletarian leather jacket, unkempt, in work shoes

Earl, don't you remember me?

Pathetically

I am you!

BROWDER 1937

Horrified

Never saw you in my life before.

Aside

For the love of Stalin, go away!

BROWDER 1932

Adamant

Stalin or no Stalin, I shall not go away. Why are the socialists and liberals betrayers? Very well, I'll tell you.

Quoting once more

They disarm the workers by the theory of the lesser evil; they tell the workers they will be unable to seize and hold power; they throw the illusions of democracy around the rising forces of fascism; they break up the international solidarity of the workers. And all this they carry out under the mask of Marxism. If you deny this today, Earl, you, too, are a social-fascist.

BROWDER 1937

Turning to the reporters

Gentlemen, I beg you not to believe a word this disreputable hoodlum says. Why, look at the way he's dressed! Does he look like a respectable communist? Very likely he's a counter-revolutionist. We are a reputable

organization today. Why, we even have a branch on Park Avenue, in Hollywood and in the editorial offices of *The New Republic*. Look us up in Dun & Bradstreet. This man's absurd statements are part of a plot to embarrass the people's front. He's very likely a Trotskyist agent of Hitler, Franco, the Japanese Emperor, Mussolini, Professor John Dewey, William Green, Hearst, Landon, Sinclair Lewis, Henry Ford, J. P. Morgan and many others whose names I could mention but time is pressing. He's a disrupter, an incompetent, overpaid agent sent here to wreck our carefully laid plans for unity.

He unrolls an elaborate blueprint

BROWDER 1932

Incoherent with anger

Renegade! I'm nothing of the sort. Why, we wrote all this in our five-cent masterpiece entitled "The Meaning of Social-fascism, Its Historical and Theoretical Background" and published by the Workers Library Publishers in 1932.

He is overcome and weeps

To think that all this could have happened in five short years!

BROWDER 1937

In a whisper to his alter ego

For the love of God, let bygones be bygones. The new line, the dialectical approach to politics, we must win the middle classes at all costs.

He winks knowingly

Pardonable duplicity. Are you out of your mind?

BROWDER 1932

No. I must expose you. It is my revolutionary duty. You are a mealy-mouthed reformist, a betrayer and I can prove it out of your own mouth.

Shouting

Renegade! Betrayer! Social-fascist!

BROWDER 1937

Dignified, in a huff, producing his business card to the policeman

This is an outrage! This man is masquerading as a decent, law-abiding citizen of some prominence, none other than myself. I am a resident of the city of Yonkers. Moreover, I am a taxpayer . . .

POLICEMAN

Yawning

Then go and pay some taxes.

As a parting shot, walking away, swinging his nightstick

Since when do radicals call on the cops to settle their arguments?

Outraged; in a thick Irish brogue

Shure an' yuh ought t' be ashamed uv yourself availin' yourself uv th' bourgeois police power t' adjudicate differences uv revolutionary theory.

DARRELL

To himself

Highly improbable. Farce comedy. Reality standing on its head. Amusing, nevertheless. It's simply a case of allowing one's wishes to sire one's thoughts. Continue, Darrell, continue!

He laughs aloud

BROWDER 1937

To the reporters, pointing to the retreating cop

An economic royalist, no doubt.

FIRST REPORTER

You were speaking of the Communist Party as a stabilizing force of American democracy. Can you give us an example of your party's activity along these lines?

BROWDER 1937

Pompously

Certainly. Take the question of relief for the unemployed. It was the fight

organized and led by the Communist Party on behalf of the unemployed which finally brought from a reluctant Congress those measures of relief and work which saved America from catastrophe.

SECOND REPORTER

Catastrophe?

BROWDER 1932

Almost frothing at the mouth

Catastrophe! For whom?

BROWDER 1937

Calmly, as befits a defender of democracy

For the nation as a whole. Twentieth century communism is Americanism! We believe in unity with anyone as long as peace and democracy is upheld. We are Americans in the truest sense of the word.

He takes a small silk American flag from his right hip-pocket and waves it with enthusiasm

I love the Constitution and I thrill at the sight of the Rocky Mountains and the muddy Mississippi River.

LENIN *turns lightly in his grave*

BROWDER 1932

In a purple rage, clutching at his throat

Good heavens, man, what are you saying? I deny every word of your statement.

Reading, choking

The development of Roosevelt's program is a striking illustration of the fact that there is no Chinese wall between democracy and fascism. Roosevelt operates with all the arts of "democratic" rule, with an emphasized liberal and social-demagogic cover, quite in contrast with Hoover who was outspokenly reactionary. Yet behind this smoke screen, Roosevelt is carrying out more thoroughly, more brutally than Hoover, the capitalist attack against living standards of the masses and the sharpest national chauvinism in

foreign relations.

BROWDER 1937

Alarmed

Stop him, somebody! I thought that pamphlet was out of print, forgotten.

BROWDER 1932

Speaking rapidly, realizing that he will soon be cut off

It is clear fascism already finds much of its work done in America and more of it is being done by Roosevelt. . . .

BROWDER 1937

Under his breath

My God!

Aloud

Circumstances alter cases. Things are different today.

BROWDER 1932

Yes, of course they are: WPA layoffs, larger military and naval appropriations, greater profits for those who have and increased costs of living for those who have not.

Quoting from his pamphlet

British-American relations are clashing in every field. Japanese-American relations are growing sharper. An inevitable part of the New Deal is therefore the tremendous building of new battleships, cruisers, new poison gases, explosives, new tanks and other machinery of destruction for the army. Industrial recovery is thus to be hastened by working the war industries overtime.

BROWDER 1937

Ranting; losing all control over himself

I denounce this man as an agent of Hitler. He is a leading officer in Franco's Fifth Column.

BROWDER 1932

Liar! Betrayer! Party hack!

BROWDER 1937

Stool-pigeon!

BROWDER 1932

Pigeon stools!

In a violent rage BROWDER 1937 *falls upon his past, beats him, knocks him down, kicks him into a bloody pulp, snatches the pamphlet from his limp hands and tears it into a hundred pieces*

BROWDER

Nonchalantly, wiping blood from his hands

So perish the enemies of the people.

He lights a cigarette, turns to the newspapermen

This is no time for theory. Actions speak louder than words.

Pointing to the corpse

Having disposed of the convicted scum of the communist revolutionary movement—the Kamenev-Zinoviev-Plekhanov-Betrand Russell-Hearst-Liberty League-Kautsky-Norman Thomas-Benedict Arnold-Hitler gang, I will now issue an official appeal for an all-inclusive American people's front.

He sends telegrams of invitation, collect, to many organizations including the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks; Independent Order of B'rith Sholem; Freemasons of the U.S.A.; Knights of Columbus; Ancient Order of Hibernians in America; Simplified Spelling Board; National Association of Briefless Lawyers; Y.M.C.A.; Magicians' Society of America; Friends of the Soviet Union; League Against Reaction; American Association Against Man-Eating Sharks; Society of Mayflower Descendants; Philatelic Society; Daughters of the American Revolution (left wing); United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa; Union of American Hebrew Congregations; Amalgamated and Federated International Union of Moels and Midwives, local 839; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; Eugene V. Debs Post of the

American Legion; Pickets' Industrial Union; Federation of Architects, Engineers and Chemists; the Cloakmakers' Union; the Furriers' Union; and the Industrial Union of Unpublished Novelists and Unemployed Sociologists. A battalion of Western Union messenger boys stagger out carrying the messages. The people's front is declared an overwhelming success. Discredited labor leaders, unhappy, vacillating liberals, ten-cent politicians of the major parties clamber aboard the band-wagon. Cheers

FIRST REPORTER

And what, may I ask, is your position on the question of war?

BROWDER

We are for peace.

FIRST REPORTER

But in the event of war?

BROWDER

In the uniform of a recruiting sergeant

We shall fight in the armies of all countries which are democratic and which find themselves at war with any of the fascist powers.

LENIN

stirs uneasily in his grave.

SECOND REPORTER

Slyly

And what about the Leninist theory to the effect that all governments are the executive committees of the ruling class and that under no circumstances are revolutionists to fight in capitalistic wars?

BROWDER

Blandly

Things are different now. England, France and the United States are now peace-loving countries. Besides . . .

The Lenin mausoleum facing the Red Square in Moscow. Within, a Red Guard, erect and motionless, stands on duty before the casket which contains the embalmed remains of the genius of the October Revolution. At once the sound of splintering glass is heard. Terrified, the guard turns and beholds the figure of Lenin rising from his resting place. The odor of stale phenol and formaldehyde fills the room. A startled officer appears for a moment, disappears and rushes to a telephone in the next room to telephone the Kremlin. The Red Guard backs away from the advancing form of Lenin

LENIN

Angrily

This is more than I can stand. Do you hear? Enough is enough.

RED GUARD

Falling to his knees and making the sign of the cross, stammering

Little father!

LENIN

Shouting

Idiot! Don’t call me little father! Are you a communist?

RED GUARD

Still on his knees

Yes, comrade.

LENIN

In disgust

Then what are you doing on your knees? Get up! What do you think I am? A saint?

RED GUARD

Rising to his feet

You may think that you’re not, but nevertheless a woman came here two

years ago and prayed before your casket. She begged to be delivered of her sterility. Last year she returned with twins.

LENIN

Snorting

Bah! Supernaturalism.

Abstracted for a moment

Have you ever read any of my works?

RED GUARD

No, comrade. We are too busy building socialism to be bothered much with theoretical questions. Why do you ask?

LENIN

Well, in one of my books I once wrote that after the death of revolutionists, attempts are made to turn them into harmless icons, to canonize them. Do you know why?

RED GUARD

No, comrade.

LENIN

Well, then, I shall tell you. The purpose is to surround their names with a halo for the consolation of the oppressed for whom the revolutionist fought when he was alive. But at the same time every effort is made to vulgarize his revolutionary ideas, to emasculate them, to render them safe and harmless. They mummified me and in my death made me the head of a revolutionary ecclesiastical hierarchy.

RED GUARD

Aside

It sounds counter-revolutionary.

LENIN

For thirteen years I have lain here, helpless, while opportunists and epigones have distorted the essence of my life work. They have murdered

nearly all of my comrades who labored with me to create the first workers' fatherland. And those who have been spared so far will be killed tomorrow, next year. And now they are preparing to lead millions into the next world war. And as in the last war the excuse will be democracy.

RED GUARD

Looking around cautiously, whispering

You mustn't say things like that in the Soviet Union today, even if you are Lenin.

LENIN

In despair

I've had enough! I'm leaving!

He starts for the entrance of the mausoleum

RED GUARD

Alarmed

Where are you going?

LENIN

I don't know. Turkey, France, Norway, Mexico—anywhere!

He exits and runs noiselessly across the deserted spaces of Red Square. The guard follows, raising an alarm. At this moment STALIN *and a group of military aides arrive. Commotion*

STALIN

To the Red Guard, calmly pointing at the fleeing figure.

Shoot him!

RED GUARD

Hesitatingly

B-b-but . . .

STALIN

I command you to shoot him! Fire!

The Red Guard raises his rifle to his shoulder, takes aim and fires. The fleeing figure of LENIN *is halted in its flight; it drops to the ground, lifeless. Turning to one of his aides*

Issue a statement to the world press saying that we discovered documents proving that he was negotiating with the Fascist powers for the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. You can also say that he confessed and committed suicide in order to escape public disgrace.

AN AIDE

I mean to say, comrade . . . But who will believe it?

STALIN

Smiling

Who will believe it? Why, the intellectuals, you idiot. They believe everything.

* * * * *

It is now nearly two in the morning. The effects of the evening's drinking have begun to wear off. Elation, born of alcohol, has given way to depressing sobriety. Fantasy, shackled by fatigue and weighted by reality, is now supplanted by a mood akin to despair. MR. GALLAGHER'S *establishment is now nearly emptied of customers; only the drunk and his two sleazy companions at the nearby table remain. An under-sized, tired newsboy approaches* DARRELL'S *table. The lad utters no word. He stands mute and displays the front page of the morning's newspaper which proclaims a fascist military victory in Spain, the shoot-of anarchists and marxists by the Loyalist secret police in Barcelona, and the bombing of a hapless Chinese city by a Japanese air fleet.* DARRELL *buys a paper and puts it aside, unopened. The three men sit in silence for some time*

ASCASO

Looking at his watch again

It's ten minutes to two!

Getting to his feet

Yes, it’s time we shoved off. *Allons!*

He summons the waiter, settles the bill and the three men exit.

XI

Loath to separate, they stood on the sidewalk outside the bar under the red glare of a neon sign, and uttered the seemingly significant but delightful inanities of boon companionship. They dawdled, deliberately delayed the final moment of parting. Overhead, an elevated train avalanched past, blurring the accents of their speech.

Darrell, still a trifle unsteady, his forehead still damp, drank deeply of the night air, told another anecdote. Ascaso, calm and collected, continued to enjoy the mild effects of his sherry (for not once during the evening had his thoughts been hallucinatory). He now stood waiting for the question which he knew was in process of formulation in Simpson's mind.

Slowly, they started to walk in the direction of the nearest elevated station. For some time they continued in silence, then Ascaso spoke:

"Yes, the revolutionary theorists tell us that each social system carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. Marx supplied us with the revolutionary dialectical formula. Nothing is permanent, everything is in a state of flux, in perpetual conflict, and out of this conflict, out of these contradictions, new social forms are constantly emerging . . ."

Darrell laughed bitterly:

"At last the dialectical method is completely substantiated. We have witnessed the ultimate contradiction. The revolutionists have killed the revolution."

Ascaso observed with sympathy that the oboist winced at Darrell's irony. Simpson, however, said nothing but walked along in silence, immersed in thought.

—Then what? All the protests, demonstrations, revolutions—have they all been in vain? What is one to do?

Feeling rather than thinking:

—Is there nothing left for me but to live out my life tooting an oboe, or for the world to go from generation to generation under the eternal burden of oppression and injustice?

He paused to wonder at the intensity of his emotions.

—I suppose men think like this when they're carried beyond themselves,

when they're swept beyond the range of narrow, personal desire.

Something stirred within him; the legerdemain of memory reduced a decade to a moment.

—Vanzetti, the poor fish-peddler. God, that was ten years ago! What was it he said? *I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. Never in our full life could we hope to do such work for tolerance, for joostice, for man's onderstanding, as now we do by accident*. An unknown radical immigrant, barely able to speak English, but when he had to cry out against infamy, strong beautiful words came readily to his lips and to his pen. And facing a felon's death in a Massachusetts electric chair he said . . . Let me see. Oh, yes. *That last moment belongs to us—that agony is our triumph!*

His mind leaped across the chasm of a decade and returned to the present.

—Betrayal. They spoke of it all night long. But what assurance have we that today's savior will not be the renegade of tomorrow?

A burst of laughter by Darrell cut across his thoughts for a moment. Then:

—To laugh is not enough and to sneer in bitterness and cynicism out of great knowledge is still less.

Blind alley.

—Then what?

He returned to listen to the conversation of his companions. Ascaso was speaking.

"You're wrong, Darrell, nothing can kill the revolution. It continues in the face of ignorance and apathy and despite betrayal. Pessimism, the philosophy of disappointed optimists, will get us nowhere."

"An optimist, on the other hand, is one who continues to believe in the probable occurrence of the improbable," Darrell said, "and that is the height of stupidity, if you will pardon my bluntness."

"But I'm neither," Ascaso replied. "I prefer to think of myself as a realist who faces the facts whether they appear to be hopeful or discouraging. I grant you that things look dismal today. Fascism moves from victory to victory and the so-called revolutionary parties gravitate more and more to the right as though attracted by some irresistible force."

“So what?” Darrell asked.

“So under a smoke screen of revolutionary phrases the world is being led into a new world war.”

“Precisely,” Darrell said. “While throughout the world liberals and radicals call upon England, France and America to save the world from fascism.” He laughed. “Think of it! England, the bomber of Hindu villages and the organizer of the Black and Tan terror in Ireland, virtuously condemns Mussolini for bombing Ethiopian mud huts. France, who demanded that the German towns in the Rhineland after the war provide white prostitutes for her black Senegalese troops, is outraged today at Hitler’s questionable international morality. As for America’s record in the Philippines and in Central America, the less said the better. . . .”

“But that’s my point of view,” Ascaso interposed.

“With this difference: you think that some remote revolutionary force will save the world from its current bestialities, while I think that mankind is doomed to wallow in its own blood forever.”

“Well, I’m compelled to differ with you. There are times when history seems to burn with energy, when thought is brave and one feels that mankind stands on the verge of a glorious adventure. . . .”

Ascaso’s voice took on a heroic ring as he continued. It seemed as if he were not rebuking a lone cynic for his despair, but rather as though he stood inspired before a multitude dark with confusion and hopeless with despair.

“. . . but there are other times when all mankind seems to be paralyzed by its dismal prospects. All ingenious and daring thought is stifled or looked upon with contempt. People pray only for today’s security which turns out to be a mere bellyful of beans. Even revolutionists pride themselves on being practical men, by which they mean that they have come to think like shopkeepers. The world seems to be caught in the throes of a perpetual crisis. New radical parties are hatched which in turn will spawn new betrayers, a fresh crop of Samuel Gomperses, Ramsay MacDonalds, Woodrow Wilsons, Mussolinis and Stalins. But the very forces which create the crisis also breed a new generation of revolutionists. Markets crash, unemployment increases, wars break out. The working-class, which ultimately must pay for the errors of its masters, is driven to desperation and takes to the road of revolutionary struggle. And at such times, as in the past, it inevitably finds its leaders in the trade unions, in the factories, in the universities. It’s happened in the past and it’ll happen again.”

Ascaso paused and then laughed self-consciously.

“These explanations,” he said, “always seem to develop into orations.” Turning to Darrell: “I know they sound a little pretentious. I’m sorry.”

“No, as a matter of fact,” Darrell said, “I think it was a good speech. But I’m tired of radical speeches no matter how good they are, because they all lean rather heavily on blind faith and I’m beyond that sort of thing.” He spoke without inflection, bored. “Besides, I’ve heard it all so often before.”

Ascaso shrugged his shoulders and turned to Simpson.

“There’s no magic formula by which fascism can be defeated.” Then, to Darrell: “But at the same time my confidence is not based on blind faith. [*To Simpson again.*] Think of this! In 1916, when all the world was at war, one would have been called insane had he predicted that a new social order would soon emerge from the bloody battlefields of Europe. Still, only one year later Russian Czarism collapsed and the Soviets, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, were established. It will happen again, but this time the revolution will do a more thorough job. To believe otherwise is to believe that the barbarism of fascism will remain with us forever, and that is unthinkable.” He paused and then added simply: “I’ve nothing more to say.”

“I hope you’re right,” the newspaperman said, “but the odds are all against you—against us all.”

Ascaso merely smiled but said nothing.

“Anyhow,” Darrell said wearily, “it’s nearly three in the morning and I’m exhausted. Let’s call it a night.”

Simpson and Ascaso agreed. All three shook hands and as Simpson turned to climb the stairs leading to the elevated station he felt that he, too, would like to say something sharply appropriate. For a moment he thought that he would say what he said to Faulkner the night they had the heated argument about revolution, barricades and things like that, but on second thought it seemed silly. Instead he merely wished his companions a cordial goodnight and went his unassuming way.

XII

Nightride, long and uneventful, from New York to Mount Vernon: the empty local train to 133d Street, the deserted, barnlike waiting room of the Boston, Westchester Station. . . .

It had turned chilly and Simpson now walked the long platform waiting for the 3:39 to pull in. He paced back and forth recalling the events of the day: his walk up Fifth Avenue, the luncheon with Ascaso, the afternoon of rehearsal, the dinner at the Barbizon-Plaza, the long night of drinking.

—What a day!

Thinking, he paced; pacing, he thought:

—But surely there is something besides biting humor at the expense of a long-suffering mankind, something else besides long, involved historical speeches. Intellectuals, that's what they are, and while mankind bleeds from a thousand wounds, they go on talking, debating, being oh so devilishly clever. . . .

He paused in admiration of his thoughts and continued, pacing, thinking.

—It's a game to them. Chess, for example, with millions of lives as pawns and pieces. Slogan against slogan: collective security, peace is indivisible, democracy against fascism. Or, on the other hand: neutrality, war is inevitable, socialism against capitalism. Deals, maneuvers, and propaganda. Then the move is made with living bodies. . . .

Recalling a dispatch from the Far East in the morning's paper:

—Nearly a quarter of a million Chinese died in the fighting around Shanghai. Bodies rotting in the streets, unburied. Somebody made a slight tactical error. Wrong analysis, wrong policy, wrong slogan, wrong move. So a dead coolie lies unburied in Bubbling Well Road, dead between the shafts of his rickshaw. Died in harness, good man. Didn't even have time to take up a rifle in defense of his democratic right to act as a human draught animal. Or Japanese peasants taken from their farms. More slogans: the need for natural resources, inevitable expansion. . . . A Japanese kid with a piece of shrapnel in his guts, grinning in death.

—No magic formula, Ascaso said. Then God help us all!

Now more than ever his thoughts ran to confusion and despair followed

hard on its heels.

—The future of the world, he said, was in the hands of the working-class. But where are the working-classes of Germany, Italy, Japan and the other fascist countries? Maybe Darrell was right, after all. He's seen this sort of thing before, saw it with his very eyes in Petrograd, saw the founding of the Soviets. God, is it possible that it can go on forever? The blood and sweat of revolutions, the seizure of power and then the same stinking mess all over again. White mice scurrying on a revolving wire screen, never getting anywhere. Think of it! In Spain yesterday and today, in China or France tomorrow, men dying in darkness before firing squads made up of their comrades, but those who do the shooting not knowing it and hating them as enemies and pulling their triggers with righteous fervor. . . . God! But it can't go on forever, because . . .

The 3:39 backed into the station and a few tired passengers climbed aboard. Simpson settled into a seat, took a magazine which Ascaso had given him and read for nearly five minutes, then he dozed off. By instinct he awoke just before the train stopped at the East Third Street Station in Mount Vernon.

Outside it was quite cold now. He turned up the collar of his coat and walked towards his home, all color drained from his face, his nostrils pinched, his eyes drawn.

—I shouldn't have done this, drinking, staying up late.

He stiffened, shivered.

—No wonder I feel so lousy.

When he arrived at his home, Mathilda was fast asleep. He undressed quietly without waking her and cautiously crept into bed. He stretched out luxuriously on his back to his full length and enjoyed its warmth and comfort. In a few minutes he was fast asleep. For more than two hours he slept soundly and then, just before dawn, he fell into a troubled dream.

In the beginning there was a strange feeling of apprehension. All seemed without form and an impenetrable darkness lay upon everything. Void was the word and the mood was fear.

Soon, however, he became aware of physical sensation. He knew that he was lying on his back, that he ached all over, that he was deathly cold and that he was wet to the skin. And at once he realized that he was no longer in his warm, comfortable bed in Mount Vernon, but that he was lying in the

damp by the side of a concrete road in Spain.

It was all clear now—the weeks of fighting, the forced marches by night, hunger, cold, lice, and unutterable fatigue. Surely *this* was no dream and yet this sort of thing had happened before and with such vividness that reality and dream seemed indistinguishable.

He opened his eyes fearfully. Yes, it was true. Here to his right was the concrete road, and here at his side lay his mud-caked rifle and equipment. In the distance to the north he saw the flickering gun-flashes of an artillery bombardment. . . .

Stiffly, he raised himself on his elbows and looked around in the dark. On all sides he saw the indistinct outlines of prostrate, sleeping men. A whistle sounded and the sleeping troops stumbled heavily to their feet and fell into line. A command, and they marched, Simpson among them.

The road was choked with tractors, heavy artillery, lorries, cavalry and infantrymen. What havoc the enemy could wreak if he but knew!

Suddenly, the darkness was stabbed by bursts of red flame. Shrapnel! Hissing, wailing, snarling, the shells came, one after another. There was confusion everywhere. The hoarse shouting of commands, the grinding of brakes, the screams of wounded men. The scene was lighted by the blinding flash of each detonation. In this fantastic, uneven light, terrifying pictures revealed themselves: a pair of rearing artillery horses pawing the air, their eyes distended like those of helpless, frightened children, flakes of white foam dripping from their mouths; a wounded man clutching the ankles of a comrade, pleading not to be deserted.

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the bombardment subsided. Lines re-formed and the march toward the front continued. . . .

For some time the soldiers trudged along in silence, then they began to speak quietly among themselves. It was dark and the faces of those who spoke could not be seen. Only voices:

“Did you know that they’ve killed Berneri?”

“Yes, the bastards!”

“They found him with his clothes torn from his body, shot and stabbed.”

“I heard him lecture at the University of Camerino in Italy just before the fascists came into power. He was as gentle as a woman. . . .”

“For the love of God, comrade, please don’t talk of women. We have

wives, girls, back home . . . And it's been so long since . . ."

"Then I heard that the squadristi beat him up and Mussolini threw him into jail. He comes to Spain and nearly burns himself out for the revolution and then the Stalinists bump him off. . . ."

"Shut up, comrade, shut up!"

"They twisted his arms out of their sockets."

"Yes, comrades, we're in a pretty mess. Franco up ahead and a gang of betrayers in our rear. We're caught in the trap of anti-fascism, that's what we are."

"Do you remember young Robles? They say he was executed behind the lines. . . ."

"Yes, and by men who yesterday called themselves revolutionists. . . ."

[*In his sleep Simpson stirred, smiled to himself and sighed with a sense of great relief.—Of course, it's a dream! Ascaso said that to me at lunch today. The letter from Barcelona. I shall wake from this one as I have from all others. . . .*]

But though he had smiled a second before, he now awoke, startled, his heart thumping, only to find himself once more lying, stiff and cold, at the side of the concrete road.

He got to his feet with some difficulty and, groping in the dark, tripped over something which half yielded when he trod on it. The road was now filled with retreating troops, heavy guns, tanks and an endless stream of silent refugees. He fell in at the side of a soldier.

"What's happened?" he asked.

The soldier looked at Simpson with frank contempt. "Are you another one of those foreign politicals who always arrive on the scene when all the fighting's over?" He spat in disgust and turned his head away.

"No, I've been here for months, in the thick of it. Lost my unit on the way up."

The Spaniard's manner changed at once. "That's different, comrade. The front up ahead has collapsed. The fascists are right behind us. There'll be bloody hell to pay in the morning when their planes spot us. You'd better turn back, my friend."

Simpson stood for some time watching the disorganized retreat, then he turned and ran wildly toward the front guided only by the portentous mutter

of the artillery. As he ran he tried desperately to think of some miraculous thing, a slogan or a heroic gesture perhaps, which would turn this retreating mass into a fighting, victorious army. But he could think of nothing.

The road was now impassable and he took to the fields. Soon found himself floundering in a heavy quagmire, felt himself slowly sinking into it. Terrified, he shouted for help. Then an unseen hand fell on his shoulders and he was pulled roughly out of danger. He scrambled to his feet and turned to face his rescuer and found himself surrounded by a party of soldiers wearing Franco's shoulder insignia. They said nothing and started to march him across the fields, shoving him along as they went.

"Who are you?" he asked his captors. [*He knew!*] "Where are you taking me?" But they said nothing.

At length they came to an iron gateway leading to a cemetery before which stood a group of silent, manacled prisoners. He was thrust among them.

"What outfit are you with?" one of the prisoners asked Simpson.

"The Second International Brigade," he answered.

"And you?" his questioner asked another prisoner.

"The Durrutti Column."

"Why, you're nothing but a mob of uncontrollables, members of Franco's Fifth Army, you sons of bitches."

"You're an idiot," the syndicalist replied quietly. "Who stopped Franco at Madrid? We did, you God-damned fool, we, the Durrutti Column. We and the Asturian miners who went into battle with dynamite strapped to their backs. Living bombs. Saved Madrid so that you swine could shoot revolutionists behind the lines. Dead in the dark."

The Stalinist laughed grotesquely and raised his arm slowly, pointing to his adversary.

"Dead in the dark," he shouted. "Now what in hell does that mean? The man's out of his mind. Dead in the dark." He doubled over, holding his sides, laughing hysterically.

[*In his sleep Simpson moaned, turned uneasily from side to side as though in pain.*]

The syndicalist paid no heed to the laughter of his fellow-prisoner.

"But who handed over Toledo, Malaga and Santander to Franco?" he

asked. “That’s what I’d like to know.”

The Stalinist straightened up and spat a jet of liquid through bared, malformed, decayed teeth.

“You lousy disrupter!”

He lunged at the syndicalist, but his companions caught him by the arms and shoulders, restraining him. The Insurgent guards stood by, laughing, making no move.

“Aw, for the love of Christ, shut up!” one of the prisoners said. “Keep your mouth shut and keep your hands to yourself! Do you hear? A fine one you are to talk of disruption.”

The arrival of a fascist officer interrupted the conversation.

“Line up!” he commanded.

The men fell into line. The order to march. They moved off, still shackled, following their armed guards. Finally the prisoners arrived at the cemetery wall. An automobile with its headlights full on illuminated the scene, blinded them as they faced a low-slung machine-gun. Simpson watched the gunner take a belt of ammunition from a nearby case.

—And now I’m among those who aren’t afraid to die in despair and not in the light of glory.

He watched the machine-gunner thread the belt through the breech, heard the click of the bolt as it was shoved into position. He watched the operation with unemotional detachment, unafraid.

—But that’s because you know you’ll soon wake up and find yourself warm and snug at Mathilda’s side. A fine hero you are! Safe at home in a dream.

He laughed in his sleep. But at that moment the lights of the car facing them were suddenly switched off.

—In darkness . . .

He heard the fascist officer give the command, but it was not chivalrous or dramatic.

“Let the sons of bitches have it!”

The gun roared, sweeping a slowly traversed arc, drowning out all cries, obliterating all polemics, forging a final indestructible bond of unity.

But Simpson smiled.

—There you are! [*Triumphantly.*] If this were real I wouldn't have heard the report of the gun. You're dead before you can hear it. Physics . . .

But strangely enough, he found himself on the ground unable to move. He lay for some time and vaguely heard the officer give a final order. Then he became aware of a stabbing pain in his chest which grew in intensity until it felt as though his breastbone were being crushed against his spine by a steel vise. Slowly the pain spread to his left side, travelled along his arm, down toward his groin. An unbearable, murderous pain. Drenched in perspiration, struggling for breath, he shouted for help with all his ebbing strength, but no sound came. Then all consciousness left him and his head sagged to his damp, crumpled pillow. Herbert Simpson was dead.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected or standardised.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *Meet Me on the Barricades* by Charles Yale Harrison]