

PHILIP GIBBS

The Interpreter

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BOOKS BY
PHILIP GIBBS

The Interpreter

America Speaks

The Long Alert • The Amazing Summer

Sons of the Others • Broken Pledges • This Nettle, Danger

Across the Frontiers • Great Argument

Ordeal in England • Cities of Refuge

England Speaks • Blood Relations

European Journey • The Cross of Peace

The Anxious Days • The Golden Years

The Winding Lane • The Wings of Adventure

AND OTHER NOVELS

The Hidden City • Darkened Rooms

The Age of Reason • The Day After To-Morrow

Out of the Ruins • Young Anarchy

Unchanging Quest • The Reckless Lady

Ten Years After • Heirs Apparent

The Middle of the Road

Little Novels of Nowadays

The Spirit of Revolt

The Street of Adventure

Wounded Souls • People of Destiny

The Soul of the War

The Battle of the Somme

The Struggle in Flanders

The Way to Victory

2 VOLUMES

More That Must Be Told

Now It Can Be Told

PHILIP GIBBS

The Interpreter

A NOVEL

A great interpreter of life ought
not himself to need interpretation
EMERSON

Toronto

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1943

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THE INTERPRETER

1

THERE was a pretty picture of life and some pleasing sounds in the Surrey village of Spurfold on a July day in the year 1941. The date is worth mentioning because pretty pictures of life were in sharp contrast to the headlines of the morning papers just delivered round the village by a boy on a bicycle, unperturbed by the daily tale of death and human agony in his bundle of newsprint.

That morning German armies were smashing their way nearer to Moscow. The stench of dead bodies—until three weeks before the living youth of Germany and Russia—wafted over the ruins to Smolensk, but did not reach as far as Surrey, which was still fragrant with flowers. Fifty more Frenchmen who had been seized as hostages had been executed for the murder of a German officer by unknown men. Famine and pestilence raged in Poland, where thousands of civilian prisoners were dying behind the barbed wire of concentration camps. The R.A.F. had bombed Hamburg again. . . .

In the village of Spurfold the morning sun was streaming through the leaded windows of an old cottage with tall chimneys, making a diamond-shaped pattern of light on the opposite wall. On the breakfast table, which had just been laid by a stout woman who moved heavily about the room, was a bowl of roses not yet fully blown, and exquisite in form and colour. It was a low-ceilinged room with a black beam across it, and a fireplace of red brick and blackened hearthstones, where centuries ago the rustics here had warmed their bones and baked their bread by wood fires. The room was daintily furnished with signs of the modern spirit, showing that no rustics lived here now. On one of the walls, for instance, was a portrait, very modern in style and technique, of a young woman with merry eyes which laughed out of the canvas. On the polished boards there was a Persian rug, too precious for the muddy feet of rustic folk. Through the leaded windowpanes was a view of a small garden where hollyhocks were growing taller than the King of Prussia's grenadiers, and where there was a scent of sweet William and lavender.

So much for the pretty picture of life in time of war. Pleasing sounds came from a bedroom upstairs. A small child was cooing and crowing at the advent of a new day in life, and a young mother was doing some backchat while she finished her morning toilet in an old-fashioned wash-basin. All these sounds could be heard very clearly in the breakfast room below, which had now been entered by a tall, thin, youngish man in a blue dressing gown, who stood reading the headlines of the morning paper with a look of intense concentration and anxious gravity. Only once did he seem to hear the noises going on upstairs, and for a moment a smile touched his lips. It was when his sister Judy abused her infant son in a high, laughing voice.

“You little bag of mischief! I’ll be after you. Trying to climb out of your cot, are you? No, my lad! No attempts at suicide allowed in this cottage.”

The child seemed to think this remark highly amusing. It gave out a prolonged note of crowing ecstasy.

“My goodness, what a noise!” cried the mother. “People will think it’s an air-raid siren.”

She went on talking nonsense to a small lump of humanity born in a world war which had no mercy on women and children.

“Judy is happy with her baby,” said the man in the blue dressing gown.

He made this remark to an elderly woman with white hair, who came into the room and kissed him.

“That poppet is a great joy to her,” she answered. “It makes up for the loss of Robin—though I found her crying last night because those Germans don’t let him write as often as he wants. I wish Anne had left you a child, John, my poor dear!”

“For God’s sake, Mother!” said the man in the blue dressing gown. A look of anguish came into his eyes. He turned away and strode to the window and stared through its diamond-shaped panes seeing nothing, though the morning sun was shining on the low-lying hills with the massed foliage, and on the spire of a little old church, and the tiled roofs of cottages and barns in the village below.

“I’m sorry, John,” said the white-haired lady. “But I don’t think you ought to shrink from talking about Anne now and then. It might help you a little. You know she is still with you, my dear. She has only gone into another room. She is very close to us, and would like us to talk about her.”

“No,” said the man; “I can’t bear it, Mother—please.”

The man in the blue dressing gown was John Barton, the American correspondent, well known to millions of us now because of his broadcast talks during three years of war, to say nothing of his newspaper articles. He turned back from the window and sat down heavily at the breakfast table. Presently he opened some letters which had been put by the side of his plate. One of them seemed to hold his interest. He read it twice, and then pushed it away with a harsh, dry laugh.

“Any news?” asked his mother, who had been reading some of her own letters.

“Nothing good,” he answered.

Then he greeted his sister Judy, who came down with her small son, born two months after Dunkirk, and too late to be seen by his father, now a prisoner of war.

“Morning, Judy. No need to ask after the health of the infant Hercules.”

“Oh, he’s fine,” said Judy. “I hope he didn’t wake you up at dawn?”

She looked searchingly at the letters on the table. There were none by her own plate, and she gave a deep audible sigh. “Nothing from Robin.”

“Well, he’s safe,” said her mother cheerfully. “That’s the great thing. And on the whole he’s well treated, he says.”

“I hope it’s true,” said Judy grimly.

“Have a look at that,” said John, flicking over the letter which he had read twice.

Before looking at it, Judy dumped her small boy into his high chair within reach of a silver spoon which he banged on the table with great satisfaction to himself.

"Something important?" she asked.

"It wouldn't help to win the war," said John, with dark irony. But the letter seemed to excite his sister.

"Why, John, it's a splendid offer! And isn't it a great honour? I mean the great man in Washington doesn't write letters like that every day. '*The best interpreter of England to the United States.*' That's a nice description of you, John. And because it's true it doesn't make it less handsome."

"Well, I'm not going," answered her brother. "Nothing will induce me to leave England now. Besides, I loathe lecturing; and anyhow, I'm up to my neck in work for the B.B.C."

Judy rescued her son from instant death—he had nearly swallowed the spoon—and then she looked at her brother with steady eyes.

"John, you ought to go. You can't turn it down."

"Oh yes, I can," he said, with a laugh.

"It comes at the right time," said Judy. "You want a change—you want to get outside of yourself. And, John, think of it, you might bring the United States into the war. You might help to save England and liberty everywhere."

John Barton laughed at his sister's excitement. For a moment he forgot his private grief.

"No chance of that," he answered. "Our great democracy, the champion of liberty and noble sentiment, has decided to stand on the side lines and watch this struggle from afar. Bundles for Britain, but no expeditionary force. Munitions of war, but no fighting for their little lads. Those damned isolationists are in the ascendant."

"You might convert them," said Judy. "You might sweep the country and bring them in. Don't turn it down, John. Anne would have wanted you to go."

At the name of Anne, his wife, John Barton's face paled. A look of pain came into his eyes again.

"I'll think it over," he said gruffly.

"What are you two talking about?" asked Mrs. Barton, looking up from a chatty letter which had come with the American postmark and the censorship label.

Judy answered her question.

"The great man wants John to go out as the best interpreter of England to the United States. He wants John to lecture all over the country to counteract the isolationists and that horrible windbag, Val D. Turner."

"Why, that sounds fine," said Mrs. Barton. "It's a great honour for you, John. And it's just the thing for you now. It will help you to forget."

John Barton looked sombrely at his mother.

"I don't want to forget," he said, in a harsh voice.

He left the breakfast table abruptly and walked into the garden.

“Poor dear John!” said Mrs. Barton. “His wound won’t heal.”

2

THE wound had been deep, cutting him to the soul, and for a time destroying the very foundations of his life upon which his faith and courage—he had had courage—were built.

As an American journalist in London, doing a nightly broadcast as well to the United States, John Barton had had but little time for the enjoyment of married life with a girl he had once called ironically “the flower of English beauty.” That was before his inferiority complex had been cut out, and when he was still hostile to the English accent and the English manner, in which he had suspected arrogance and condescension. Anne had been a little arrogant and very elusive, giving no easy wooing to an American reporter who had fallen in love with her after their first challenge and counterchallenge on board ship crossing the Atlantic. He had been a persistent lover, though once he had nearly lost her—in Germany, among the Nazis. He had quarrelled with her, and she had laughed at him. She had been as cold as ice sometimes, and the fire of his love had not melted her. She had been Lady Anne Ede. He had been audacious—a cub reporter, or at least a special correspondent with his rough edges hardly worn off after a year in Europe—in marrying a girl who belonged to the English aristocracy, poverty-stricken but still proud, though they made no fuss about it. It was only he, really, who became a bit fussed—absurdly embarrassed—because his wife, according to English custom, was Lady Anne Barton instead of Mrs. John Barton, as he would have preferred her to be. She had jeered at him for that. She had turned the tables on him, calling him an “American snob,” because he worried about a title which the English didn’t bother about unduly.

“All you Americans are snobs,” she told him once; “though you pose as being strictly democratic. Anybody with a title—what does it matter?—gets you all excited, John.”

“It’s the romance of it,” he assured her. “We’re all incurably romantic, and the old titles in Europe belong to our fairy tale of life.”

“Oh, you can’t get away with that!” she answered with a challenging laugh. “No, John, your inferiority complex is a national malady.”

She had slapped his hand when, after their marriage, he had called her chaffingly “Lady Anne,” or “Lady Anne of the Moated Grange,” and, at times, “La Belle Dame sans Merci.”

After his marriage—he had been amazed to find himself married to her one night in Washington where she had been living with her brother David of the British Embassy. She had nearly died of the heat in the furnace of a Washington summer. Perhaps, as he dared to tell her, half jeeringly, that had weakened her resistance to him. The war was threatening in Europe—the war which he had foreseen as an American correspondent

in Berlin and other capitals where she had been a lady passing by. War was declared, and the English people whom he had learned to like stared up at the sky and asked: “When are they coming?” or “Will they come tonight?” Anne had refused to stay in Washington, though he had pleaded with her.

She had refused to stay, living in luxury, putting on “silly frocks,” while London might be bombed and all her friends might lie dead in the ruins. So she said. She wanted to be in England, sharing the peril of her own people. She had even questioned his courage. “Do you want to stay here in safety?” He had felt hurt at that. She had often hurt him.

They had married in a hurry. Only her brother David and a girl named Diana Faversham had been present. Their honeymoon was aboard ship driving across the great gray sea to a world at war. A strange honeymoon for a young married couple! At Journey’s End they would be in the war zone with its furnace fires, its unimaginable horrors. Now and again he faked it for Anne’s sake, and even for his own. He had no proof that he was anything of a hero. He was doubtful of his own courage, never having stood the test.

They had talked under the stars gravely and without any lightness of newly married love.

“I wonder what God thinks of it all?” Anne had asked him once. He remembered that afterwards, as he remembered all her words, and the touch of her hand, and many little things of delight and wonderment on that voyage from a world at peace to a world at war. He remembered his own answer, not meant to be flippant.

“I guess it makes Him vexed.”

He still suffered from an inferiority complex regarding Anne, even when she was his wife. She was so fine and delicate, and he so rough and clumsy, he thought. He was worshipful of her mind and body. He was absorbed by this exquisite thing which had come to him. He felt unworthy of her tenderness, her caresses—she was not so cold as ice—her high standard of style, as he called it. It was more than style. It was tradition—the tradition of a code which demanded courage, and good manners, and fastidious taste. “Isn’t that bad form, John?” she asked him when he had been a little careless, or a little clumsy. Bad form was a departure from the code which belonged to her family and her blood. He studied her watchfully in those early married days. He thanked God he could make her laugh a good deal, even though the shadow of the war was dark upon their minds. He was thankful that her code of good form did not make his kisses loathsome to her, or hold her back from the little tender things of love. He worshipped her. Sometimes he quarrelled with her, and then he hated himself. It was because he loved her so much. It made him angry when she took great risks, because he was afraid of what might happen to her.

3

THEY had gone to St. Leonard's Terrace, Chelsea, where Judy and her husband Robin—that humorist—were living with John's mother: crowded quarters at first, though presently Robin went away to France as a staff officer, leaving his heart behind, and hating this new war.

As an American correspondent in England, John did not have much home life. His paper was insatiable for news and descriptive articles about English life in wartime, until they began to think it was a phoney war because there was no fighting in Flanders. Meanwhile Anne was equally irregular in her home-coming. In the evenings she attended first-aid classes and instruction on poison gas. In the daytime she served on a committee for evacuating mothers and children. It was annoying to John, when he came home at odd hours, sometimes very late, to find that Anne was out.

"I thought we were married?" he said to her more than once. "I never see you. When I'm in, you're out. There's no sense in it."

"There's a war on, John," she answered carelessly. "Perhaps you haven't noticed it?"

She looked very tired sometimes—utterly fagged out—but she ignored his pleadings with her to give up some of her work.

"Other women are not taking the war so seriously," he argued.

It was a bad argument with Anne.

"That's why I'm working," she said. "If we don't take it more seriously, we shall lose it. It's a case of amateurs versus professionals. We have an army of Boy Scouts against the most terrific force in Europe. I know those Germans, I've seen them on the march."

"But, Anne," argued John, for purely selfish reasons, the selfishness of love, "I don't see why you can't cut out all that first-aid stuff. What are you going to do with it? Aren't there any nurses? Hasn't the Government organized all that? And, in any case, where are the casualties?"

"John," said Anne, "you know perfectly well the smash will come one day. I've heard you say so when you are urging us to live in the country. When it comes the army nurses will be overwhelmed. They will want thousands of women to look after the civilian wounded."

Even then a chill of fear had passed down John's spine as he had a vision of Anne—so fine and delicate—standing under aerial bombardment, rescuing children out of the ruins, helping wounded women, careless of her own risk.

Yes. He knew the smash would come one day. When it came, after the fall of France—that incredible tragedy—and after the daylight Battle of Britain, Anne behaved as he had foreseen.

They had had a kind of quarrel about it one night: not really a quarrel, but a passionate discussion in which he pleaded emotionally for Anne's consideration of her own safety, for the sake of his future happiness, and for any love which she might have for him.

He had come home from doing a broadcast at the B.B.C. It was on the day when part of that building had been hit by the previous night's bombing. He had spoken to America over the microphone describing last night's raid, and the courage of the ordinary London folk in that grim ordeal. He had seen that. He had spent the night going from one shelter to another, coming up into moonlit streets below a scarlet and throbbing sky. He had been frightened now and then, not only because of his own peril—he had heard the whine of shell splinters close to his head, and the crashing of heavy bombs not far away—but also because of the frightful scene of London under this attack from the air. The streets in which he walked were solitary. He seemed to be the only man alive above ground. They were gleaming under the moon, as though paved with silver. The London roofs were shining also, like quicksilver. But the sky above them was as red as blood; throbbing, boiling blood, because of the many fires started.

"This is like hell!" he said aloud. "It *is* hell. I am alone in this hell of war!"

Then he had thought of Anne, for the thousandth time that evening. . . . She was out in this somewhere. She had gone off with a mobile canteen to the East End where the fires would be hottest, and where there would be the most casualties among civilians.

"Jesus Christ!" he had cried aloud; not with irreverence, but with a kind of prayer from his soul.

Anne might be killed that night. His beautiful wife. His adorable Anne.

"Curse Hitler!" he had said aloud, as he stared up at the scarlet sky again. "Curse all these devils who make war against women and children!"

He was in a kind of rage, and a kind of terror, because Anne was out in all this somewhere.

And yet, so odd is life, he had laughed that night. Down in the shelters, the London cockneys, especially the old men and women, had made him laugh. Their spirit was undaunted, though when they emerged at dawn many of their slum houses might be just heaps of brick and rubble. Some of them down in the Piccadilly tube had started dancing the Lambeth Walk, and he had done a turn with them, laughing also, though in his mind there was that cold fear for Anne. In his broadcast message to the United States he had described all this, and had stressed the humour in the shelters rather than the horror of the streets. But he had left out Anne, who was in the centre of his thoughts.

She had come home at dawn an hour after his own home-coming, an hour of dreadful apprehension. Because of nerves and fears his greeting had been querulous.

"Good God, darling, what have you been doing in this hellish city?"

“Doing my bit,” she answered, with a tired laugh. “It wasn’t a picnic. They’ve made an awful mess in Limehouse. Lots of people killed. I helped to drag some women and children out of the ruins. It was pretty ghastly.”

John looked at his wife sombrely, and almost angrily. She was very pale, with white lips. Her blue uniform was covered with dust, and there was a rent in her skirt, badly torn by a twisted iron in the ruins of Limehouse. There was a smudge of soot on her face.

“I don’t like you doing this work,” he said. “It fills me with terror. Supposing you get killed?”

Anne looked at him with a tired smile.

“Lots of people are being killed,” she answered. “We’re all taking the same risks. That’s our privilege. We’re all in this fight for England—even the women and children. That’s fair. I don’t see why the boys should do all the dying. Make me a cup of tea, John, and tell me what you’ve been doing. After that, I’ll have a bath, gravely needed.”

He made her some tea with a kind of sulkiness, which was due to blue funk rather than ill-temper. His nerves were rattled. He was conscious of that when suddenly he put his arms round her and gave a sob.

“Anne,” he cried, “my beautiful wife, don’t be so brave! I don’t want you to die for England. I want you to live for me.”

She rubbed her smutty cheek against his, and laughed again.

“What an egoist you are, my John. And how very illogical you are. Haven’t you been out all night, cheek by jowl with death, all for the sake of an American newspaper and a B.B.C. broadcast? How do you think I shall feel if you get killed?”

“I’m a man,” he answered. “I’m not beautiful. Beauty must be saved in this hideous world.”

Anne was amused by the absurdity of those words.

“Beauty doesn’t matter a damn,” she told him; “though I’m glad you think I’m beautiful.”

She spoke gravely for a moment after taking his hand and putting it to her lips.

“John, my dearest dear, we have to face this thing. We can’t dodge it. It may be death for one of us, or both of us. We must all be fatalists. If our name is written, it is written—that’s how most people are taking it—those women in Limehouse tonight. I don’t want to die. Death is very unpleasant, as I saw tonight, but I hope to keep my little flag flying whatever happens, my little flag of pride. I have a tradition behind me, a family code—I should hate to let that down. Those women in Limehouse have nothing of that behind them, but they’re incredibly brave. They crawl out of their ruins and say: ‘Give me a nice cup of tea, dearie, and to ’ell with ’Itler!’ So it’s up to you and me, John. We can’t show the white feather when all these people are so high-spirited.”

She added some words which wounded him.

“Of course it’s harder for you, being an American. This isn’t your war, old dear. It isn’t your country.”

“You’re wrong,” he told her sharply. “It’s my war and it’s my country now. England is in my bones, and I have an English wife in my heart.”

“Well, I must say you’re behaving very nicely,” said Anne. “You’re telling the right things to the American people, only it doesn’t seem to convert your naughty isolationists. Oh! I’m so tired!”

She was so tired that she went to sleep in his arms with her face against his cheek.

HE had other talks with her like that after a night when Chelsea was severely bombed and many little houses in the streets on both sides of the King's Road were utterly destroyed or badly damaged. John's mother and sister decided to leave London for the Surrey hills, and John had luck in finding them a house at Spurfold above the village, and very safe, he thought. It belonged to a B.B.C. man whose family had gone to the United States, and who was living in a hotel near Broadcasting House. He implored Anne to go with his mother and Judy, but her refusal was definite.

"I have my job to do, John. I can't desert it in face of the enemy. It isn't done, you know."

That phrase angered him, and set his nerves on edge.

"Those words get my goat," he said. "'It isn't done, you know.' That's how the English excuse themselves for their ghastly failures. 'It isn't done, you know, old boy,' say their generals, when they're up against the cunning and craft of their enemy. A most ungentlemanly war, they say, when Rommel gets the better of them in Libya, or when the Germans drop parachute troops behind their lines in Crete. It isn't done, you know!"

"John, darling," said Anne with a mild rebuke, "aren't you being rather rude?"

John Barton knew that he had been damnably rude. He hated himself for that, but he was fighting for all his chance of happiness in life—for Anne's safety.

"Wash all that out," he said harshly. "My nerves are all jangled tonight. Anne, my sweetheart, I want you to get out of London. That's all. This is the target of German attack. We're in the bull's-eye. Surely to God I'm being reasonable when I ask you to go with Mother and Judy to that Surrey village? You will find plenty of work to do there looking after evacuated children and all that. There is no dishonour in that. It would be doing your bit."

Anne shook her head.

"I can't let down my little crowd," she told him firmly. "I've been put in charge of our mobile canteen. I can't suddenly say 'Good-bye, girls! I'm off to a nice little village in the Surrey hills. I hope you have a good time.'"

"You're too damned heroic," said John. "I wish to God I had married a girl as timid as a mouse. That's how girls ought to be."

"That's how they were before my time," said Anne, laughing at him good-humouredly. "Now, girls are not afraid to say 'Boo' to a goose, or even 'Boo' to a bomb. Of course we're frightened all right, like most men, but we carry on with our jobs pretty well."

“Hark! Those devils are coming again. There’s the siren wailing like a banshee.”

She was off duty that night after the long hours of the previous night in Limehouse. John also had finished his day’s work and for once was keeping the same hours as his wife. They were in the drawing room of their house in St. Leonard’s Terrace. Judy and his mother were in their bedrooms beginning to pack up for their move from London. John remembered every little detail of those hours.

She was not in uniform, but had put on an embroidered silk dressing gown, and her body was soft beneath it when he put his arm about her. That was when the first bombs fell near enough to shake this old house in Chelsea.

“It’s nice being in your arms when that row is going on,” she said. “It’s better than Limehouse last night. That was pretty near, wasn’t it?”

“Too near,” said John; “blast them!”

“That’s exactly what they do,” said Anne, laughing in his arms. “How absurd you are, John.”

“How brave you are,” he said. “I’m a coward. I hate all this. It scares me stiff.”

“It scares everybody stiff,” said Anne. “Nobody really likes it. But thank God we have some guns now. Listen to that barrage. Quite impressive. Oh, well, let’s do a crossword puzzle or something. Or I’ll play you a game of chess. It’s best to do something instead of listening to noises off, as they say on the stage.”

He played her a game of chess, and he remembered that she made an unconventional opening with the king’s knight, baffling him for a moment. He found it hard to concentrate on the game because of the explosions near enough to shake the old house. But Anne was absorbed in her game, and while she thought out a new move he watched her face upon which the soft light of a shaded lamp fell, touching her fair hair and turning it to gold. Sometimes a little smile played about her lips when she devised some trap for him.

“Look out for your queen, John! The old lady is in grave danger.”

There was not much light in the room. The black-out curtains were tightly drawn and there was a shadow world beyond the range of the electric fire and the shaded lamp by which they played. A line of light ran down the top of the piano in the far recess, and the frame of an eighteenth-century mirror over the mantelshelf was touched by the glow of the fire.

This room is a little sanctuary of civilization, thought John Barton. And Anne belongs to civilized tradition at its best—the lovely flower of it.

“Check,” said Anne, moving her queen.

Other pieces moved without her touching them. The board was flung from the small table, and all the chessmen were scattered about the floor as though swept away by an angry hand. A heavy explosion rocked the house in St. Leonard’s Terrace. The floor boards shuddered and there was the noise of falling glass.

“Damn!” said Anne in a vexed voice. “I should have check-mated you next move.”

John Barton had sprung to his feet.

“That was mighty close,” he said.

The drawing-room door opened and Judy stood there with her baby wrapped up in a blanket. Her face was white and there was fear in her eyes.

"I'm scared," she said. "I'm going down to the cellar. Can you bring down the cot, John?"

Behind her was Mrs. Barton. She came into the drawing room and switched on another light. She spoke calmly, but there was a little tremor in her voice.

"I'm afraid some of the windows have gone. It's a mercy we haven't been cut by flying glass."

Anne had gone over to Judy and put an arm round her.

"You're trembling," she said. "Don't be frightened."

"I am frightened," said Judy. "I don't want baby to be killed."

The baby was sleeping as peacefully as though the guns now firing in a heavy barrage were a lullaby.

"I'll light up the cellar," said John. "We'd better all go down."

He knew it was quite useless going down. If there were a direct hit on this old house, the cellar would be no safer than the attic. He had seen the effect of high explosives on London houses more strongly built than this. But there was a kind of psychological instinct to get below ground when those things were falling. He had had the cellar strengthened by steel girders. Failing a direct hit, it might be safer.

"I'm not keen on cellars," said Anne. She had helped to drag out women and children from cellars in Limehouse. But she went down with Judy and the baby and Mrs. Barton, while John carried the cot. It smelt damp down there, though rugs had been put on the stone floor, and the walls had been hung with old carpets and bits of cloth, and an electric fire was switched on.

He had looked forward to sleeping in his bed with Anne, but for Judy's sake she stayed down in the cellar that night, which was a bad night in London, with many fires and much damage. She made some cocoa and insisted upon Judy drinking it. Then she fell asleep on an old horsehair sofa with her head on John's shoulder. He was stiff and cramped, but did not move lest he should disturb her. He was glad to feel the warmth of her body and the touch of her hair on his face. Once he kissed her and she stirred and said, "Hullo, John!" as though she had met him somewhere in a dream.

Long afterwards he remembered that night in the cellar—its damp smell, its picture of English life in wartime, with Judy asleep on a Lilo by her baby's cot, and with his mother in an armchair with a shawl over her head. He felt again in memory the warmth of Anne's body, and heard her murmur, "Hullo, John!" when he kissed her.

5

JOHN was alone in his house. Judy and her child and Mrs. Barton had gone off to the Surrey village of Spurfold. He had hired a car for them and had helped them to get away with innumerable small packages and several trunks. At four o'clock that afternoon he had to do a broadcast talk, and at nine o'clock in the evening he spent some time in a shelter under the Adelphi arches, where a group of pacifists were running a canteen for the real derelicts of London life, too verminous to be allowed in other shelters, and the old drunks and disorderlies who had been incurable until by some miracle these Christian pacifists lifted some of them above the slime into which they had fallen. In spite of their reputation, he found them entertaining and not at all inhuman. He laughed and joked with them, though again, at the back of his mind, he was desperately worried about Anne, who was on duty in the neighbourhood of the docks. He had an interesting talk with an old tramp who was a bit of a philosopher, and a merry old fellow who knew all the roads and field paths of England and all its doss houses. He laughed and joked with them though London was being bombed again and Anne was out in it. He was laughing when Anne was killed.

He was home shortly before midnight. Chelsea was quiet, but there was a red glow in the sky eastwards, and the guns were firing. Outside his house there were little heaps of broken glass. He would have to be careful about the black-out. There were great rents in the curtains and some of them hung in tatters.

He groped through the hall and upstairs without switching on a light, and then turned on a torch in the drawing room where he had blocked up the windows with cardboard after seeing Judy and his mother off to the Surrey village.

Then he switched on a light and stood motionless for several minutes. The full horror of this war was in his thoughts. He had never imagined anything like this before it happened. London under bombardment. Walking in its ruins. Millions of civilians abandoning their homes and sleeping underground. The extraordinary mixture of gay courage and blind fear, and cockney laughter, and the mutilation of women and children. He had laughed quite a lot that night under the Adelphi arches. There was a world of agony in Europe. Over the tape machine in his office that evening the record of it was told in brief messages. Russians and Germans were dying in heaps in the snow. Hunger was spreading in Occupied France. There were mass executions in Servia and Czechoslovakia. Typhus was coming westwards. What a world, and what ghastly mistakes and follies had led to it. The leaders of England had been stricken blind. The leaders everywhere.

John Barton, who had been the European correspondent of an American paper, and who had seen its menace coming, looked back to the days before the war when he had been reporting history as it passed. He had backed Chamberlain at Munich. This was

held against him now by American critics. He had been dead wrong. Everybody had been led up the garden path to the deep pit beyond. They were all in a deep pit now. How could England win? After the fall of France. After Crete. Their only hope lay in Russia, where the Germans were getting close to Moscow.

John Barton came out of his brown study and moved across the room. He stooped to pick up something. It was one of the chessmen which had been flung across the floor by the explosion. It was the white queen with which Anne had been playing.

The telephone bell was ringing in his study. It might be Anne, he thought, ringing him up from the underground station at Aldgate, as she sometimes did.

He hurried out of the drawing room and went into his own room at the back of the house where it was safe to turn on a light.

“Hullo,” he said, picking up the receiver. “Is that you, Anne?”

For a moment nobody spoke, but then a woman’s voice answered.

“Is that Mr. John Barton?”

“Yes. What is it?”

There was another hesitation before the woman’s voice spoke again.

“I’m afraid I have . . .”

She hesitated again and then spoke with a kind of breathlessness.

“I’m sorry. . . . I have to give you bad news. . . . Can you take it?”

“About Anne?” asked John.

His voice sounded quite calm, but he suddenly felt faint and sick, and he was possessed by panic.

“I’m dreadfully sorry,” said the voice. “Lady Anne has been killed. She was very brave. We all worshipped her.”

He heard a sob at the end of the telephone.

“Where is she?” asked John.

His voice was only a little harsh.

There was another hesitation.

“There is nothing left of her. It was a big explosion. We cannot recover her body. Please accept our very deep sympathy.”

“Thank you,” said John.

He was quite polite. Somebody gave him deep sympathy because Anne had been killed. He said: “Thank you” as though someone had given him a cup of tea.

He dropped the receiver. There was something in his hand. He wondered what it was. It was the white queen with which Anne had been playing last night. He stared at it for a moment as if surprised to find it in his hand.

Then he gave a great cry, as though his soul had been torn out of his body.

6

HE passed a terrible night in that lonely house with broken windows. It was a wonder that the noise of his agony was not heard in the street outside. He groaned loudly like a wounded animal. He kept crying out: "God! . . . God! . . ." He wept convulsively, clasping his hands above his head and pressing his forehead against the wall of the drawing room, into which he had gone again. A thousand times he called Anne's name, as though he could call her back. Once in the night he had the strange idea that she would come to him if he asked her. He said "Anne! Come back!" in an urgent voice. Surely to God, he thought, her spirit will come to meet me here in this little home of ours. If there is survival after death, she will hear this cry of mine. "Anne! Please—come to me!"

There was only one lamp burning, as when they had played chess together. He stared towards the door, as though she might come in. But it was no good—this cry in his heart. She did not come, or he could not see her.

"It's all a lie," he said bitterly. "We are utterly deluded. There is no life afterwards."

He wept again, and it was not until dawn that he fell asleep, exhausted in soul and body. When he woke up three hours later he felt hungry and went down into the larder to find some food. There was half a tongue in a glass jar, and he took it into the kitchen with some bread. His thoughts were busy inside himself. Anne is dead, he said to himself. Last night somebody told me she had been killed, but here am I eating bread and meat like a filthy animal. I cried a lot last night, but it was all hypocrisy. I don't care a damn because Anne is dead. I'm alive still. I must have my bit of bread and meat. I have no more emotion. I feel dry like a mummy. I feel empty of everything. I feel dead except for this physical appetite.

That mood lasted for a few minutes. Suddenly he found himself weeping again, and he was glad of his own tears because they were better than that cold deadness. He could taste the salt of his own tears.

Suddenly he felt a horror of being alone in this house. He felt an immense craving for human sympathy. He must tell somebody that Anne was dead. He couldn't keep it to himself like this in a house with broken windows now bunged up with cardboard.

"I must keep a stiff upper lip," he said to himself. "I'm in England. The English always keep stiff upper lips, as they say.

"They don't like emotion. A man who weeps is disgusting to them. I haven't seen any tears in those shelters."

He walked out of the house unaware that his hair was tousled and that he was as white as death, and that his eyes looked wild.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. The postman was going his rounds and looked at him curiously as he passed, turning round to stare at him.

Two typist girls from farther down the terrace—the mean and ugly end of it—beyond the eighteenth-century houses—came by chatting brightly, but gave him a sideways glance.

“Cheer up,” said one of the girls impudently. “There’ll be better news soon.”

She giggled to her companion.

John Barton did not answer. He did not hear.

A woman was washing down the crazy pavement of a house two doors from his own and pushed her pail away to let him pass.

“Is Mrs. Langdon down yet?” he asked.

“Oh, yes sir.”

The woman gave him a sharp glance. She knew him well by sight and he had often said good morning to her. The American, she called him in her own mind. She thought he looked like a film star, one of the tough guys, as they said in the movies. Now there was something wrong with him, she thought. Perhaps he had been scared by the blitz.

He strode past her and walked into the hall. This house had been his second home. Katherine Langdon had given him great kindness and sympathy, and was always charming and lovely. Langdon himself, the well-known novelist, had been his best friend in England, although they had argued incessantly about world affairs. He was almost a complete pacifist, partly because of his son Paul, and all youth whom he wished to save from such a massacre as in the last war.

He could hear the tinkle of teacups in the dining room to the right of the hall, and he pushed open the door and went in. Katherine Langdon, in a flowered dressing gown, was there at the breakfast table. Langdon was standing at the window looking at *The Times*.

“I’m sorry,” said John.

They looked at him with astonishment, and then with alarm. They had never seen him looking like this before, so wild, so deadly white.

“John, what’s the matter?” asked Mrs. Langdon.

She rose from the breakfast table and went towards him.

Langdon put down his paper and said: “My dear fellow.”

“Anne has been killed,” said John. “She’s dead.”

He spoke quietly and without emotion.

Then suddenly he lurched forward to Katherine Langdon, whose hands went out to him, and he put his head down on her breast and gave a strangled sob and wept terribly.

“My poor John,” she said. “My poor John.”

Langdon stood there rigidly with a look of great pain in his eyes.

“This frightful war,” he said. “This murderous war. Oh God—if there is any God! Oh Christ—if Christ cares for us!”

John Barton drew away from Katherine and mastered himself after a moment's struggle.

"I apologize," he said. "Please excuse me. I'm making a fool of myself. It isn't done, I know, in England. It isn't done much in America. Thanks all the same. I suppose I crave for a bit of sympathy. I suppose I'm rather enjoying this sob stuff."

He gave a bitter laugh.

"It's my infernal egotism," he said. "I'm thinking more of myself than of Anne. Quite soon I shall get hardened. I shall probably fall in love with somebody else. That's how men behave, isn't it, when they've lost their wives? They soon forget. I've already raided the larder and eaten heartily. All these tears mean nothing really, except slushy weakness."

He yielded to that weakness again, though he had condemned it. "Oh God!" he cried. "Anne has been killed. She was blown to bits when I was laughing in a tube shelter. I shall never see her again."

"My poor John," said Katherine Langdon again.

She poured him out some coffee and handed it to him as he sat down heavily at the table.

"Drink this," she said.

He gulped down some of the hot coffee, and it seemed to strengthen him. He spoke less wildly.

"I shan't even be able to go to her funeral," he said.

Katherine Langdon took his hand across the table and bent down to kiss it.

"I want to ask you two people a question," said John. "It's a straight question. Give me a straight answer. You are the most truthful people I know in the world, and one doesn't lie in the presence of death, even for kindness' sake. Do you mind?"

"What is it, my dear fellow?" asked Langdon, who had sat down at the table still with that look of pain in his eyes.

"Do you believe in survival after death, or is it just nursery talk for the poor ignorant babes?"

There was a moment's silence broken by Katherine Langdon. "There's not much sense in life unless one believes that," she answered. "And I believe it. I couldn't carry on unless I believed it. If Paul is killed I shall have a little courage, because I cannot believe that death is the end of everything."

"But what evidence is there?" asked John. "I can't find any evidence. Perhaps it's a wish dream and a fairy tale put over by priests for the comfort of men."

"Christ reappeared to His disciples," said Katherine.

John looked at her searchingly.

"Do you believe that, or is it a legend? How can we tell?"

"His disciples died because they believed it," said Katherine.

"Lately," said Langdon, "I've been thinking of this a lot. One can't get exact evidence, but one has psychological experiences, and science itself leaves the door open wide for some possibility of mind acting apart from matter. Lately I have seemed to get closer to a spiritual world. But it may be an illusion or a wish. We can't produce proof. I am gravely uncertain about all that, and yet, sometimes in my own mind lately, with all this death going on around us, I have had a kind of certainty."

"I'd like to know," said John. "I want to meet Anne again."

"You will," said Katherine, "in another dream world."

"I called to her last night," said John. "She didn't come. I called to her with a great cry of the soul. She didn't come."

His head drooped over the breakfast table. He raised it again a moment later.

"London can take it," he said with a mirthless laugh. "I wrote those words. Coventry can take it. I wrote that too. They became a kind of slogan in America. It means taking the loss of one's wife and children when they've been blown to bits, so that they don't even get a funeral. It means taking a hell of a lot. It means that one's crucified. And yet some of these people in the shelters and elsewhere seem to be able to pull themselves together. I suppose I shall have to pull myself together."

He tried to do so then with these two friends who had been so kind to him.

"How's Paul?" he asked.

"All right so far," said Langdon. "Two nights ago he did his twentieth raid over Germany. I shudder when I know he's going."

"I must telephone to my mother and Judy. They don't know yet." He rose from the table and said: "Thanks, a thousand times."

"Lie down upstairs for a bit," said Katherine Langdon. "I'll telephone to your mother and Judy."

"No. That's my job," answered John. "I can't shirk it. And there are others—Anne's father and mother. And I must go up to Limehouse and get the full story of what happened. I know nothing except that Anne was killed."

He spoke like a reporter talking about his morning assignment, except that his face was still pallid.

He shook hands with Katherine, but she drew him towards her and kissed his cheek. Perhaps she ought not to have done that, because he nearly broke down again.

"It's kind of you," he said in a broken voice. "You are always kind."

Langdon grasped his left hand and gave it a hard grip, but said nothing.

DURING the months that followed Anne's death—he had obtained all details of that and had been very brave—John pulled himself together, at least in the face of the world, and carried on his job with his usual efficiency and energy as a reporter for the American press, and by his broadcast talks to the American people, as an interpreter of English life in wartime.

He was surprised sometimes by the reputation he was building up. He seemed to strike the right note with his broadcast stuff, and to tell his own folk what they wanted to know and in the way they liked. Cablegrams and letters reached him from all parts of the United States, mostly addressed to *John Barton, American Commentator, London, England*. Most of them were full of enthusiasm and praise.

Grand stuff, John. Keep at it.

You have made us fall in love with England. You've broken down the ancient grudge. You make us weep and you make us laugh. I'm sending all I can spare and a bit extra to Bundles for Britain.

You are number 1 world reporter, John Barton, sir. We thank you a lot over here. My wife and daughters hang on to the radio every time you speak, and I go about repeating your stories of those Londoners and the heroic folk in other English cities. Take care of yourself and don't get killed. We can't spare you.

All that was pretty gratifying to an American newspaperman. John Barton liked to read those messages which poured in from the United States, and felt guilty by being warmed by them so much.

"It's just food for my vanity," he told his sister Judy, who refused to agree with him. "Besides, there's something disgusting about it. I'm making a national reputation out of the agony of England. And, in any case, what does it matter now that Anne has gone?"

"You've shared the agony, John," answered Judy in her matter-of-fact way. "You're taking the same risks. I wish you wouldn't take so many. You're the first to get to any place after it has been blitzed."

"Afterwards makes a lot of difference," said John. "It's damned easy to stroll about the ruins when the bombs aren't falling."

"Don't be absurd, John," said Judy. "Haven't you been in all the London raids? You deserve all that's coming to you in fame and recognition."

"It's not worth a row of beans," said John. "Besides, I get plenty of kicks in the pants."

Letters and cables of another kind reached him now and then. They were, to say the least of it, unfriendly.

A woman wrote from San Francisco:

How much do the English pay you for all your propaganda?

If you think you are going to drag us into this war by your sickening praise of the English, you're making a big mistake. We're not going to be hoodwinked again by sending our boys to pull England's chestnuts out of the fire. No sir! This war is not our war. You're a paid creature of the President, who is trying to force us into a war in which we are not interested. He, of course, is in the hands of the international Jews.

There was another letter from a man in Omaha, Nebraska. It was not a beautiful specimen of literary style.

Say, Johnny Barton, who's been leading you up the garden path? Why do you send over such slush about those lousy bastards, the English? You know as well as I do that the English leaders, including that bullfrog Churchill, are a bunch of crooks. You try to pull the wool over our eyes by your sob stuff about the cockneys and the shum dwellers. We're not taking it, Johnny. The English are only good at running away. They make a habit of retreat and let the other fellow do the dying. I'm a hundred per cent isolationist in this war. So is every level-headed American.

A man from Lexington, Kentucky, wrote:

You're a traitor to your own country.

You're one of those depatriated Americans who fall victims to the English snobs. Isn't your wife the daughter of an earl? Doesn't that account for your cowardly and treacherous disloyalty to the only true democracy on earth? You're a dirty rat, Barton, and it gives me great pleasure to tell you so.

If ever you show your face in these United States, it will be definitely changed in shape. We are not tolerant of traitors.

John passed over this letter to Judy when they were at breakfast together in the cottage at Spurfold.

She read it with anger.

"It's shameful," she said. "It's horrible, John, to think that our country is crowded with people who think like that. It accounts for their refusal to come in and fight on the side of liberty. I'm ashamed of my own people. I never want to go back. I'm English in body and spirit."

She was the mother of an English boy aged two, who was having a great time at the table with an empty jam jar from which he was pretending to feed a Teddy bear, a golliwogg, and a comic dog which he loved with passion.

John took back the letter and smiled.

"It comes from the Middle West," he said carelessly. "That's the stronghold of the isolationists—and not much of a stronghold at that, I should say. They're losing

ground, according to Charlie Seligmann, who wrote to me the other day.”

Charlie Seligmann was the news editor of John’s New York paper, and he kept John in touch with American opinion. He was a shrewd judge, but although he thought the isolationists were losing ground, he did not believe that the American people were ready for any active participation in the war. He wrote:

The President is having an uphill fight against our national apathy and the extreme reluctance of American women to send their sons overseas. Aid to Britain, but no fighting. That’s the present mood of the majority. Your last talk over the radio was the cat’s whiskers. It moved me to tears, and Charlie Seligmann ain’t much given to that kind of weakness, being one of the tough guys. Congratulations, Johnny. You’re doing grand. All the boys say so.

As the months passed with a wonderful respite in England from bombing raids now that Germany was desperately engaged in the Russian campaign, John Barton was able to hide his wound from most people, though he flinched when Anne’s name was mentioned by his mother or Judy. Sometimes, indeed, he forgot his wound, and then hated himself for that ease of mind. He found himself laughing with his friends again. He found himself telling funny stories in London teashops or club restaurants. His insatiable interest in English life and character had been regained, and in the company of other correspondents on visits to munition works, dockyards, airdromes, and army units, he talked a lot and laughed a lot, and was his old, keen, vital self, until in his bedroom in some provincial hotel on one of those journeys he was alone with his thoughts. Alone, horribly alone.

“I’m forgetting Anne,” he said in those lonely rooms, desperately cold and cheerless in an English winter. “I haven’t thought of her once all day. I made a monkey of myself telling funny stories to that bunch of pressmen. I’m like the rest of men—lousy, selfish egoists, disloyal to their wives. I’m disloyal to Anne. She is fading out of my heart. She’s becoming only a dream woman. She’s dead, but I go on laughing and eating and drinking and talking. Anne, my darling, forgive me. Life is worth nothing to me without your beauty and your love. I wish I were dead too. I wish I had been killed that night, and that you had been left alive. Speak to me, Anne, if you are anywhere about. Come to me in my dreams. Surely you can do that?”

Never once did she come to him in his dreams.

No ghost walked his way. Anne gave no sign from the spirit world.

Perhaps she went back to St. Leonard’s Terrace trying to find him? But he was reluctant now to go into that house again. It was so dark, so desolate. As often as possible he went down to the country cottage at Spurfold, and when he had to spend a night in London—and that was several times a week—he put up at his club in Pall Mall, where he could meet a few friends to discuss the war with them and get their minds and moods, which varied from unreasoning optimism, he thought, to unreasoning despair.

ONCE a week when he was in London he had lunch in a Soho restaurant called the Cheval Blanc, where he met another group of men—a rather distinguished group from the point of view of intelligence and range of knowledge—from whom it was always possible to learn something of the inside facts about the war and hear the frankest possible criticism of its conduct from the British side. There were four or five regular *habitués*—newspapermen and Government officials—at this lunch table in a restaurant which had escaped the blitz by some freak of chance, though it stood amid the ruins of its former competitors, and most of the street had been laid low. Others came at odd times and were queerly assorted—a war correspondent from Libya, a young airman who had been over Germany a score of times, a major general, an officer of the Coldstream Guards back on seven days' leave, a portrait painter, a poet, a French officer on De Gaulle's staff, the secretary to a Cabinet Minister, and several times the Cabinet Minister himself, amused by the free and brutal criticism with which he came under fire. He seemed to find it refreshing, or was glad, perhaps, that his sense of humour and his own cynicism passed the test.

This changing group of men centred about one of the newspapermen. It was his personality which attracted them to the table, as it was with John Barton who had met him first in Fleet Street. His name was Michael Dewhurst, not familiar to the general public, as he was a lead writer on one of the great dailies, and did not sign his articles. Before entering journalism he had been a don at Oxford, though nobody ignorant of that fact would have guessed it while listening to his violence of language, which at times would have shocked a bargee. John Barton knew him to be a most generous and lovable man, though he carefully disguised those attributes under a pose of cynical brutality. The French waiters in the little restaurant—there were two of them in addition to the *patron*—adored him, not only because of his liberal tips, but because he took an interest in their private lives, and did little services for their wives and children. As soon as he arrived they rushed to take his hat and coat with a “*Bon jour, M. Dewhurst,*” and gave shrill cries of laughter when he pulled their ears in the style of Napoleon, abusing them with a perfect knowledge of the Parisian argot.

He was a tall, heavily built man, with a high, bald forehead and a powerful, clean-shaven face which would have been handsome but for the scar of a wound received in the last war which ran down his left cheek from ear to mouth. He had a careless sense of humour, but underneath it John Barton discovered a desperate melancholy due to his detestation of war—this war particularly—and the impossibility of reconciling his ideals of life with the degradation of humanity by so much atrocious cruelty. Privately, also, he had a cause for melancholy, as John discovered. His wife, once a pretty actress, had killed herself by taking to the drug habit.

In earlier days, as a raw young American newly arrived in London, and sensitive to any criticism of his country, John would have resented Michael Dewhurst's frequent knocks at the United States. They were sometimes ribald and always unsparing, but they were balanced by an equally devastating criticism of the English mind, English snobbishness, English generalship, and English self-complacency.

John Barton went to lunch at the Cheval Blanc on the morning he received the letter from the United States inviting him to give a lecture tour. He wondered whether he should show that letter to Michael Dewhurst, but was afraid that it might lead to ironical comment.

Dewhurst was alone when he arrived rather early, and was deep in conversation with Jean Tilques, one of the waiters, who departed with a shrill, explosive laugh at something Dewhurst had said to him when John came to the table.

"Hullo, Barton," said Dewhurst. "I hope you're feeling shamefaced and abashed as you damn well ought to be, being an American."

John gave what the novelists used to call a hollow laugh.

"I don't," he answered, "being an American. What have the Yanks been doing?"

"That's my quarrel with them," said Dewhurst. "It was their infernal goading—mostly from your newspapermen—which drove us into this suicidal war, utterly unprepared as we were, and with no more chance of beating the Germans than a company of Boy Scouts. Now your isolationists in America are undermining Roosevelt's position and policy by every dirty appeal to American self-interest to keep out of the war. That was a particularly poisonous speech yesterday by your Isolationist number one—Val D. Turner."

"I agree," said John. "But I didn't write it."

Dewhurst's eyes flickered with a smile for a moment.

"No. I admit you take the other line. 'Brave little England!' and lots of sob stuff."

John took this jibe good-naturedly. He knew the English well enough to stand a lot of leg-pulling.

"I was amused by reading your leading article this morning," he said, by way of turning the tables. "It was not so critical of the Government as your conversation at this table last week, when you advocated poison gas for the whole Cabinet."

Dewhurst laughed loudly.

"*Touché*," he said. "I admit to being one of the world's charlatans. The Defence of the Realm Act and other outrages against liberty for which we are supposed to be fighting compel me to violate the truth that is in me. One day I shall break loose and spend the rest of the war in Brixton prison. It's the only honest domicile nowadays."

A tall man in uniform wearing the badges of a brigadier came to the table and greeted Dewhurst.

"What's your mood this morning?" he asked. "Are you out to attack the Army, or the Navy, or the Civil Service, or the Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"I'm not out to attack anybody," answered Dewhurst. "I'm over-tolerant, Cowdray."

Brigadier General Sir Champion Cowdray, wearing the D.S.O. and other decorations from the last war, grinned broadly.

"You have the over-tolerance of Torquemada," he answered.

"Not at all," said Dewhurst. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking this morning that we once produced a very good general."

"Wellington? Marlborough? or Viscount Gort?"

"General Booth," answered Dewhurst.

He was pleased at the effect of this little joke on a brigadier, who laughed and coughed, as if he had swallowed a crumb. "I must tell that in the War Office," he said when he recovered.

Another man came to the table and nodded to Dewhurst. He was a naval officer with captain's rank.

"Now we shall hear the truth about the Navy," remarked Dewhurst with dark irony. "We may even learn why the Silent Service—a damned garrulous crowd really—pooh-poohed the menace of the submarine, and informed the public that their beautiful battleships were immune from attacks by aircraft."

Captain Nicholas Coker of Naval Intelligence refused to blush.

"Don't turn your guns on me, old boy, before I've ordered a little food. How about calves' liver and bacon?"

He shook hands across the table with John Barton.

"You were splendid on Sunday evening," he said. "My missus blubbed, and I confess to damp eyes myself."

He was referring to a broadcast talk which John had done on the medium wave for English listeners.

"I'm glad," said John.

Dewhurst snorted.

"We like to have praise from an American or any other foreigner. We wallow in self-pity and self-adulation. What we need is somebody to give us a kick in the pants. We're not taking this war seriously even now. We're still playing at Boy Scouts, and 'Here we go round the mulberry bush,' and 'Ring-around-a-rosy,' while our enemies, who are professional soldiers, create new forms of devilry with their national efficiency."

"So it's a general attack on our national efficiency today?" said the brigadier good-naturedly. "A nation of amateurs who play golf while London burns."

"Quite true," said Dewhurst. "That's exactly what they do at week ends."

"Didn't Drake play bowls when the Armada was sighted?" asked the Naval Intelligence captain.

"For two minutes, to finish the game," answered Dewhurst. "But our Cabinet Ministers and public officials have been playing golf for two years while our tanks in Libya still have only two-pounder guns, and while our shipping losses mount to monstrous figures of tonnage. But I must not be gloomy. I must not be a defeatist. Oh

no, I must keep merry and bright, believing in the heaven-sent genius of those who lead us from one disaster to another, while forecasting the beautiful world we are going to make after the war which the Germans keep on winning. Jean, another bottle of *moulin à vent*.”

“*Bien, m’sieur.*”

Other men strolled in. Two newspapermen, the poet, Gerald Monk, and a young airman named Bellairs, who was Dewhurst’s nephew.

John Barton shifted his seat to get next to Gerald Monk, whom he liked a good deal, and for whose work he had considerable respect.

“Hullo, Barton,” said Monk in his melancholy way. “What train did you get this morning? I looked for you on the platform.” They both lived at Spurfold and often travelled together from Guildford.

Needless to say, Gerald Monk did not live on the financial proceeds of his poetry. He was doing work of a mysterious character for the Ministry of Information.

“Hard work, but not helping to win the war, I fear,” he said once with a twisted smile on his lean face, with his dark, brooding eyes. He had a great admiration for John’s sister Judy—for her gaiety, and courage, and common sense. He himself had no gaiety, no courage according to his own account, and no common sense. But John found him charming, all the same.

“The only person for whom I have respect at this table,” said Dewhurst, “is our friend, Gerald Monk.”

“That’s very gratifying,” said Monk quietly. “Why?”

“Because he doesn’t pretend to be a jolly optimist while we go on losing the war, and because he writes poetry with the full knowledge that no one can possibly understand it except himself—and then only occasionally. Recite some of your latest jingle, Monk. I am greatly in need of laughter.”

“I never can remember a line I write,” answered Monk.

“What a comfort to you that must be,” remarked Dewhurst. “They say that our heaven-sent leader can quote yards of verse. It probably clutters up his brains so that he doesn’t quite know whether he will send the Guards to die in the jungle in Malaya, or whether to prepare defensive positions in Tibet until the Fleet is ready to evacuate the women and children and the last remnants of the Australian Army somewhere in the Persian Gulf.”

“Dewhurst,” said General Cowdray, “sometimes you talk sheer blather. If I were you, my dear fellow, I should lay off attacking a man who has given a great lead to the British nation.”

“I admit the blather,” said Dewhurst amiably. “But I will not deny myself an occasional word of criticism against our national hero. I know all his qualities, and they are great, but I have an uneasy feeling, not without the evidence of recent history, that he is leading us up the garden path to a great black pit of disaster at Journey’s End. He was born under an unlucky star. I could quote you a bit of Greek about that, but I won’t

because you would think I was trying to put one over on you. Instead, I propose a toast.”

“Don’t make it too bitter, old man,” said Captain Nicholas Coker of Naval Intelligence. “I come to this table for pleasant recreation, not for a draught of moral poison.”

“Gentlemen,” said Dewhurst, “let us raise our glasses of ginger ale, or what not, to that benignant champion of democracy, that kind, sweet soul who believes so ardently in the liberty of the individual—Joseph Stalin, our noble ally.”

A slight uneasy laugh went round the table. None of these men believed in Stalin’s benignity or love of liberty.

It was John Barton who answered Dewhurst.

“I raise my glass to him willingly and gladly. May he keep the Germans back from Moscow. It was a miracle which brought him on to our side. Where should we have been now if the Germans and Russians had fought together, instead of against each other?”

“Hitler’s one fatal blunder,” said Brigadier General Cowdray. “I’m backing the Russians if they can hold out until the winter. The German Army will perish in the snows, they will be stricken with typhus and pneumonia, they will lose their feet by frostbite, and Hitler’s prestige will go to a low ebb with his people, who will want to know what is happening to their sons. The German Army is not clad for a winter campaign.”

“Is that a fact, Cowdray, or is it one of your bits of propaganda? Be honest with us.”

“It’s a fact,” said Cowdray.

“I hope to God it’s true,” said Dewhurst. “But so many of these alleged facts don’t stand up to the light of day. Hitler was going to run out of oil seven months ago. We had it at this table from a Government expert. We were to get air supremacy last April; we’ve dropped that fairy tale. America was coming into the war, giving us a new weight of man power. The isolationists are going to see about that, aren’t they, Barton?”

All eyes were turned to John Barton.

“We shall be in one day,” he answered, “but you mustn’t be in too much of a hurry. Give the President time. Step by step he is leading American opinion forward. Cash and Carry, the Lend-Lease Act, but he has to educate a nation to which the war seems very remote. I don’t think the isolationists are winning, though they’re making the hell of a noise. I’m backing the President against them all. He has the people with him. He knows exactly how far he can go, and how fast. He has an uncanny feeling of the public pulse.”

“Our propaganda over there is rotten,” said Dewhurst. “They send all the wrong people. English snobs who talk down to them, English fatheads who put their backs up. I know the Americans. There is one thing they won’t stand for, and that is being patronized. Isn’t that true, Barton?”

“It certainly is,” said Barton. “But we liked your Ambassador, Philip Kerr.”

“What about the man we’ve sent now?” asked Dewhurst. “He will frighten them by his look of austere virtue. He won’t speak the same language as the newspaper reporters, who are pretty rough guys and quick to size a man up. He will freeze their marrow bones.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” said John cautiously. “I think he will win their respect. He is a man of perfect integrity, and they like that.”

“What we ought to do,” said Dewhurst, “is to send over a real spellbinder, who would rout the isolationists and sweep the country.”

“It has to be done from within and not from without,” said John. “Roosevelt is the only man.”

“There’s another,” said the naval officer.

“Who’s that?” asked John, casting about in his mind.

“It’s a fellow who speaks on the wireless,” said Captain Coker. “An American who loves England, and understands us.”

“Raymond Gram Swing?” asked Barton.

The naval officer shook his head.

“He’s good, yes, but a bit dry, don’t you think? No, I mean a fellow named John Barton.”

“Hear, hear!” cried the general.

“Hear, hear!” said Gerald Monk the poet, with a smile at Barton.

“You’re pulling my leg,” said Barton, slightly flushed. “I’m no orator.”

“God forbid,” said General Cowdray. “We don’t want oratory nowadays. We want sincerity, and simplicity, and the human touch.”

“It’s personality that tells,” said Gerald Monk. “The spirit behind the words.”

They dropped the subject, somewhat to John Barton’s relief. Michael Dewhurst put out one of his fantastic ideas.

“There ought to be a staff of professional pessimists to counteract the jolly optimism of our generals, naval men, and Cabinet Ministers. It would be their job to examine the worst that might happen, and make plans accordingly. There ought to be one of the gloomy and critical fellows on every headquarters staff, acting as a cold douche to the generals, especially at breakfast time. The chief of staff ought to have at least two, to point out the flaws in his strategy and prophesy disaster for lack of men, insufficient material, and the amateur spirit of our commanders in the field.”

“I would nominate you as chief of the Pessimist Brigade,” said General Cowdray. “But you would have a malign influence.”

Dewhurst gave a laugh and a groan.

“Some of you fellows think I’m a defeatist. But it’s because I want to win this war that I get alarmed by our false optimism. We’re deceiving the people. We’re deceiving ourselves. We underestimate the hellish strength and efficiency of our enemy. They have the interior lines. We have to fight geography as well as Germans. It takes three

months for one of our ships to reach Singapore by way of the Cape. We are on the outside edge.”

“I’m in despair about this war,” said Gerald Monk in a low voice. “It’s too horrible. I don’t see how we can win.”

John Barton heard those words of despair and answered them. It was an answer also to Michael Dewhurst.

“If I were a stranger at this table,” he said, “I should go away with the idea that the English people had lost all hope, and that the war was as good as lost. But I know that behind all Dewhurst’s cynicism and criticism there is a burning love for England, and a kind of rage because things are going badly here and there.”

“Only here and there?” asked Dewhurst, raising his eyebrows and smiling ironically at the American correspondent.

Barton continued to have his say.

“I don’t go about in blinkers. I know there’s a hell of a lot to criticize in this country and its government. I could do a hell of a lot of criticizing if I weren’t an American accepting English hospitality and recording English heroism day by day. It would be darned easy for me to turn a searchlight on the ghastly mistakes that have been made in the higher strategy of the war, and on all the red-tape stuff, and snob stuff, and official obstruction in Whitehall and its purlieus. I’ve come up against a lot of it myself—the immeasurable stupidities of the censorship—and the blind conceit of Jacks in office. God knows that if I painted that side of the picture I could startle and horrify my American public. Some of my colleagues—I mean other American correspondents—can’t resist that temptation. But I’m not tempted. I know it would be an utterly false picture of England and the English spirit. I’ve been about a bit in this country, visiting its factories, and dockyards, and bombed cities. I’ve spent a few weeks now and again with the R.A.F., and down at Portsmouth with the naval cadets. I’m always sloping round the shelters and the pubs where I meet the common folk of this old island. All that gives me the other side of the picture, and it’s mighty bright! It shines with the spirit of a great people. I’m abashed by so much heroism among ordinary men and women. I’m kind of ashamed by their faith when I yield to frightful doubts. When I come in touch with the merchant seamen in their hostels down by the docks—they’ve all been torpedoed once, and mostly three times—I know that the spirit of Drake and the old sea dogs is still alive. Those boys of the R.A.F. are like young gods without fear of all hell. The women are just marvellous—those kid girls with a little curl at the back of their heads. And when I think of England’s weakness after Dunkirk, I’m staggered by the way in which her present strength has been built up. Somewhere in the Government, and somewhere behind it, there must be some good brains. The way the food situation has been handled in this country is a marvel. The work going on in the dockyards, mostly done by old fellows of fifty and onwards, is just a miracle. We sit here at this table indulging in free criticism, and taking a gloomy view of the situation—and I’m all for strong criticism and a bit of satire that’s good—but I’m backing the spirit of England as I’ve seen it. It’s like a burning flame. All the tradition of your history is in it. In the long run it will never be beaten.”

The men at the table in this Soho restaurant listened to this young American and did not interrupt his monologue. They were smiling a little as they watched his face, but without irony.

Even Dewhurst's eyes softened as he listened intently to this flow of words. It was he who reached out his hands when Barton came to an end abruptly.

"Thanks, Barton," he said, without affectation. "It's good for us to hear that from an American."

"Finely put, Barton," said General Cowdray. "A great tribute to England, my dear fellow, and utterly sincere, I'm sure."

"Oh, I know the other side all right," said Barton with a laugh. "Not a pretty picture, General."

"But you keep it in its right perspective," said the brigadier. "That's a rare quality."

He rose from his chair and said: "Now I must return to my labours."

"Don't go yet," said Dewhurst. "The longer you keep away, the better chance we have of winning the war. Have another coffee."

The general hit him a light blow on the shoulder and said: "You cynical devil!"

The others left in the course of the next ten minutes.

Barton was left at the table with only Michael Dewhurst.

He pulled a letter out of his pocket. It was the one from Washington.

"Could you glance at that?" he asked.

Dewhurst read it attentively and handed it back.

"Of course you'll go," he said. "It's your line of country. Besides, it's a royal command."

"I want to get out of it," said Barton. "I don't want to leave England until the war is over."

"Why not?" asked Dewhurst. "It's a damn good country to leave. Avoid the winter blitz, my son."

"I'm staying here," said Barton doggedly.

"No, you're not," answered Dewhurst, "if I know anything about you. I'm quite sure you won't shirk the best service you can do for England and her hard-pressed islanders."

He smiled through his glasses at Barton and added a few words.

"Tell your people what you told us at lunch today. It would have them on their feet. The isolationists would want to take you for a ride."

"Oh, well, I suppose I shall have to think it over," said Barton. "I hate the idea of going."

"I hate the idea of going to my office," said Dewhurst drily. "But I've got to go."

He glanced at the clock and clinked on his glass for one of the French waiters, who came running to him.

“L’addition, mon vieux.”

The patron had a word with him.

“The Vichy traitors go from bad to worse,” he said. “It is time someone killed Laval. It is time old Pétain dropped down dead.”

John Barton left the restaurant. He had an early appointment at Broadcasting House.

9

BARTON decided, of course, to accept the request from Washington. There was no other decision possible. Too much pressure was brought to bear upon him by his family and friends and by his own inner consciousness that here lay his way of service to England which he had learned to admire so much, and of which he now felt himself a part because of Anne. It was a big wrench from which he flinched. It seemed to him that in going to America again he would be going away still farther from Anne. Her spirit would never visit him there, he thought. In England, though she was dead, he still seemed near to her, though not near enough. The English scenery, the London streets, the house in St. Leonard's Terrace, all belonged to her. There were times when he thought he might meet her round the corner—or almost felt that in a kind of daydream. He could never feel that in Chicago, New York, or Detroit, or Omaha, he might meet Anne round the corner.

Her father and mother were among those who urged him to go, and indeed took it for granted that he would go. Their old house in the country, where he had once stayed with Anne long before his marriage, had been given up for a convalescent hospital, and they were now living in Sloane Gardens, where he went to see them now and then, but not often, as he resented his mother-in-law's stoic acceptance of Anne's death—as though she had only done her duty in dying—and regarded his distinguished father-in-law as one of the old caste with whom he had nothing in common, except a little pity such as he might have given to the last of a dying race.

To be fair to his father-in-law, Lord Stanfield, he had to admit that His Lordship had no illusions on the subject himself.

"I'm just a hanger-on from the dead past," he said one night, standing with his back to the fireplace in the drawing room of the house in Sloane Gardens. "I and my crowd of poverty-stricken peers are as much out of date as King John's barons. I can't think why the Government asks the King to create new peers. We shall all be swept away as soon as the war ends, when State Socialism will take over the former system. We're already taxed out of existence."

"Do you resent the idea?" asked John, who was moderately on the Left, although under Anne's influence he had modified some of his political opinions, and did not believe, with his former faith, that all virtue and intelligence resided in the Labour party.

Lord Stanfield, that tall, heavily made Saxon-looking man, whom once John had mistaken for a gamekeeper, laughed with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"What's the good? The mammoths and the Megatheriums did not resent the floods and cataclysms which swept them away. It's the natural process of historical evolution. We've had our day. Perhaps it lasted too long. I daresay it will be a better world without

us, though sometimes I have my doubts. In our time we stood for something. If you take us at our best, and not at our worst—God knows, we’ve produced a multitude of blackguards!—we’ve helped to serve England, and sometimes to save her. We and the common people together, peers and peasants bred on the soil. I’ve never had much use for the lawyer fellows and the professional politicians, nor for the little Jacks in office.”

He broke away from this discussion by referring to John’s coming visit to America.

“You’ll be seeing David,” he said. “He seems to be doing well at Washington.”

David was his youngest son, whom John had met first in the British Embassy in Rome—a delicately made fellow, unlike his sturdily built father.

He asked an abrupt question.

“Do you think Roosevelt will bring America to our side in this war? I mean with its man power as well as with munitions?”

“It’s going to be difficult,” said John Barton. “American mothers do not want their sons killed.”

Lord Stanfield nodded.

“I don’t blame them,” he said. “If I were an American I’d be an isolationist. I’d try to keep my country out of this carnage.”

John disagreed with that point of view. It was precisely the opposite of his deepest convictions.

“If we keep out of it,” he answered, “we shall let down the civilized world. If we keep out of it we shall be shamed forever as cowards and charlatans, mouthing ideals but refusing to fight for them, calling ourselves a democracy but not caring a damn if the dictators trample roughshod over all liberties. It would be an eternal disgrace and I should be ashamed to call myself an American.”

Lord Stanfield laughed good-naturedly.

“I’m afraid I’ve put my foot in it with you. Sorry, John. But I suppose I’m not an idealist. I wish Anne could have heard you say all that—she would have loved it.”

He gave a deep sigh at the mention of his daughter’s name. They had been good friends. They had understood each other.

“Anne was very high-spirited,” he said. “I miss her enormously.”

John was silent. Always the mention of Anne’s name seemed to reopen his wound.

It was during this silence that the door opened and a young girl came in. She was in some kind of uniform with a khaki shirt and jacket smartly cut. It was Lady Marjorie Ede, Anne’s sister, who had been rather wild as a long-legged thing, but now looked gallant and gay.

“Seeing ghosts?” she asked, coming up to kiss her father.

He ignored the question. He and John had been seeing one ghost whose beauty they had known.

“What sort of a time have you been having?” he asked. “How many love affairs are you having?”

“A perfectly wonderful time,” said Marjorie. “I’m driving staff officers from Whitehall to other places of delay and defeatism. They all flirt with me very nicely, but I’m walking out with a sergeant of the Grenadiers. He’s a perfect darling, Daddy, and he ought to be made commander in chief.”

“Why not?” asked her father with a short laugh. “I daresay we shouldn’t lose the war any faster.”

“We should win it,” said Marjorie. “He’s a highly intelligent young man, and very impatient of delay. He wants me to marry him on Monday next.”

“Are you going to?”

“’Fraid not,” said Marjorie. “I have my job to do. Marriage and babies will have to wait until after the war.”

She turned to John and put her small hand into his.

“Going strong?” she asked. “I heard your broadcast the other night. Good. That’s the stuff to give them.”

“High praise,” said John. “Thanks.”

For a moment he saw in this girl’s face a startling likeness to Anne. She was dark and Anne was fair. But there was something in the set of the eyes and the modeling of the cheek line.

“I envy you going to the U.S.A.,” she said. “I’d give my last shirt for that trip on the Clipper.”

She sent her love to her brother David and urged John to smite the isolationists hip and thigh—especially that reptile Val D. Turner.

ENGLISH village life had been a new experience to John Barton, and he liked it so much that it was one of the reasons for his reluctance to leave England for that journey to the United States.

Spurfold was a friendly village, he found, and its inhabitants had been kind to the Americans on the hill in the old cottage with the big chimneys, weathered tiles, and lattice windows. Judy and her baby had been the first to get acquainted with them. Old ladies had stopped in the lanes to make love to the infant Hercules, as John called his distinguished nephew, Robert Bramley, junior. That had led to invitations to tea from young ladies as well as old, and presents of fruit, vegetables, and honey, brought to the cottage door. They fell in love with Judy as well as with her baby. They liked her frank way of speech, her American accent, and the laughter in her eyes—those dark eyes which laughed out of the canvas of her husband's portrait on the wall of the sitting room. The old ladies took a liking, too, to Mrs. Barton, with her white hair, her downright way of speech, and her pursuit of truth into the mysteries of the spiritual world, including all the prophecies which foretold the downfall of the German eagle and the victory of the lion and the white bear.

"A delightful woman," said Mrs. Mulberry Jenkins, the vicar's wife. "For an American she's really most pleasant and sympathetic. She is very angry with those dreadful isolationists in the United States."

"That girl Judy is one of the best," said Eve Martindale, the young woman in riding breeches and polo shirt who did the village milk round in a filthy old car, now that Farmer Joyce's son had been called up for military service. She was the daughter of a retired colonel who was in the Spurfold Home Guard with his former gardener, whose wages he could no longer afford, and with a miscellaneous company including a garage hand, a schoolmaster, an Indian civil servant on the retired list, a writer of detective stories, and the man behind the counter of the village store, whose favour it was necessary to have if one wanted cigarettes, chocolate, and other precious things now rationed and getting scarce.

"Friendly folk," said John Barton, who came to know these people and others in the neighbourhood. "That American legend of the English being standoffish and icy to strangers is all wrong, although I used to believe it myself."

"Perhaps the war has broken the ice," said Judy. "I find them all very sociable, and they heap little kindnesses on me because Robin is a prisoner of war."

"I still find some of them very comical," admitted John. "When some of those old dames come to tea, and the old colonel gives tongue on India, and the vicar upholds the virtue of the old-school tie, it's like a stage play by Somerset Maugham. I have to retire now and then to laugh outside the door. It's almost unbelievable."

Judy laughed. She was glad to see that John could laugh again.

“There’s a lot of quality in them,” she said. “Those old dames have the spirit of Queen Elizabeth. They make a joke of being bombed.”

“Some of them are like Bloody Mary,” said John. “They would like to chop every German into small bits. I’m getting a bit bloodthirsty myself, but I don’t go as far as that.”

This village life amused him when he came down from the hill to post a letter, or buy a packet of cigarettes. He liked to hear the friendly greetings from those he met.

“Good morning, sir. Nice weather.”

“Good morning, Mr. Barton. How is your charming sister?”

“Fine morning, sir. How’s the war going, do you think? Are the Russians going to hold Moscow?”

“I ’eard your President Roosevelt on the wireless last night. ’E knows ’ow to talk, don’t ’e? You’ll be in with us one day, that’s certain.”

The man behind the counter in the village store winked at him with an air of mystery, stooped behind his counter, and slipped a packet into his hand as though it were a deadly secret.

“Fifty Gold Flake cigarettes kept for an American customer.”

“Thanks a lot,” said the American.

He seemed to find the real spirit of England in this village, as he had found it in factories, and dockyards, and underground shelters. It was not all good. He came up against snobbishness now and then. He found an irritating condescension towards his own people from the retired colonel and the Indian civil servant. Some of the “old dames,” as he called them, liked their little bit of scandal, and did not obey the Christian command to “love thy neighbour as thyself.” They were down on Eve Martindale because she had been seen about with a Canadian officer late at night, sometimes on the heath. They were bitter about Gerald Monk, the poet, whom they accused of being a pacifist and a defeatist.

“Why doesn’t he join the Home Guard?” asked Mrs. Mulberry Jenkins.

“He has a bit of a heart,” said John Barton, who liked him.

“I doubt it,” said Mrs. Mulberry Jenkins grimly. “Anyhow, he hasn’t got guts.”

But on the other side, thought John, there was valour, a stoical acceptance of adversity—the war was going from bad to worse—and a fine spirit of service for England’s sake. Almost everybody in the village had taken in mothers and children during the blitz. The peace of their home life had been broken up by this invasion from the London slums. Some of those refugee mothers were very troublesome with their feuds and grouings and unpleasant habits. Some of the refugee children were little demons. Valour? Yes. As the war went on in the skies and in the desert, village names appeared in the casualty lists. The grocer’s son had been taken prisoner in Libya. The vicar’s son had been killed in a raid on the Ruhr. Eve Martindale’s brother had been blinded by a mine. The schoolmaster’s boy had died as the result of a crash in his Spitfire. From one small village death had taken its toll of youth—the only sons. There

was a wonderful acceptance of this sacrifice. The grief was hidden. Just a word or two with wet eyes, and then the daily round as usual; no outward sign of agony as John Barton had shown when Anne was taken from him.

It's their code of expression, thought John. It's their old tradition. They've had a thousand years of war. But those mothers of the only sons have broken hearts, I guess. They just don't make a fuss about it, that's all.

From the hilltop where the cottage stood there was a panorama over the countryside, looking across the south downs on the far horizon. There was always a wonderful play of light over the woods and fields and those distant downs. On brief escapes from London it was a pleasure to John to have this view of England beyond his porch, though sometimes he found its beauty painful, because it made him think of Anne. She had loved this countryside, not far as the crow flies from her own home. She had ridden down its lanes and bridle paths. She had felt its wind and rain on her face. She had grown up in an English garden over there.

Spurfold was not quite so safe as John had believed when he sent his mother and sister there with the infant Hercules. On many nights when he stood on the little terrace with Judy or his mother he could see the flash of gunfire along the coast and hear the sound of the guns. More than a thousand bombs had been dropped over the woods and fields within a five-mile range of Spurfold. Thousands of incendiary bombs had lighted little fires hereabouts, threatening thatched houses and old barns. They had hardly done any damage, but only by freaks of luck. Mrs. Mulberry Jenkins, the vicar's wife, had a bomb explode within a hundred yards of her front door. It had made a crater as deep as a small cottage. A hundred yards this way or that was just the difference between life and death—a matter of luck, the odds of chance.

There was a respite from the bombing over London. The Germans were too busy with Russia. But a few raiders came over the south coast. A number of times during these summer nights, and several times when he was home from his work in London, or after a journey into provincial towns, John heard the wailing of the sirens sounding the alert. It was always after black-out time when Judy had pulled the curtains close.

It happened one night when Judy and he had invited Gerald Monk and his sister to supper, a frugal wartime supper of shepherd's pie, followed by stewed plums somewhat tart for lack of sugar. Mrs. Barton was apologizing for this meagre fare to Belinda Monk, who seemed very pleased with her portion of shepherd's pie, which she thought was perfect.

"Gerald and I," she said, "don't bother much about food, as long as we have enough to keep us alive. Gerald is so absent-minded that he doesn't really know whether he's had a meal or not unless he feels faint for lack of food; and when I'm painting I just grab at anything in the larder. This is luxury."

She caught John's eyes and smiled across the little table at him.

She had a very charming smile, he thought, and he had been helped at times after the death of Anne by her sympathy—never spoken in words, but somehow expressed.

It was when she smiled at him that the alert sounded over Spurfold village, rising to the hill on which this cottage stood. Down in the village someone blew a whistle. That

would be old Bugwood of the British Legion, who rode round on a bicycle with a policeman's whistle in his mouth.

No one at the table paid any attention to it beyond lending an ear to it. Judy listened for a moment, glanced at John, and then went on with a little argument she was having with Gerald Monk. He had been telling her that the war had brought his writing to a full stop. It made him feel completely dead as far as any creative work went. Needless to say, he couldn't write a line about the war itself.

"That surprises me a lot," said Judy, in her frank, blunt way. "I should have thought that the war would have given you everything that a poet needs for inspiration."

"Good God, no," said Monk hastily. "What kind of inspiration is there in the competition of mass murder and in all the demons of hate and cruelty which have surged up from the dark pit of man's apelike ancestors?"

"There's more in it than that," said Judy. "Not that I want to lay down the law to a poet. No sir! But as the wife of a painter, I see wonderful pictures which might be put into words, or paint, or music."

She blushed a little at her own boldness in talking like this. It was not a habit of hers. She didn't pretend to be one of the intellectuals. She was just "Plain Judy."

"What kind of pictures, Judy?" asked Belinda Monk.

Judy laughed and looked self-conscious.

"I think I'm talking nonsense. But sometimes I see little pictures down in the village and round about which make me want somebody to write about them, so that this life of England in wartime may be recorded for future generations. I mean so many little things will be missed. Children looking up into the sky at bombing airplanes when they ought to be seeing fairies. A cricket match on the village green when England was expecting invasion. A mother meeting her soldier son home on leave. Oh! Lots of little things like that which make me want to weep."

"For heaven's sake, Judy," said John with a short laugh, "if you go on like that I shall suspect that you are writing a novel in secret."

"Sorry, John!" cried Judy, now thoroughly embarrassed.

"What Judy says cuts pretty deep," said Gerald Monk thoughtfully.

Over the cottage with its big chimneys came the dull, heavy drone of bombing airplanes.

"John," said Judy suddenly, "I believe those are Germans."

Her face had gone suddenly white. There was fear in her eyes.

"I guess not," said John. "New British bombers. Big fellows."

He guessed wrong. The answer came instantly—five heavy explosions which shook the ground under Dawn Cottage like an earthquake. The oak table at which they were having supper seemed to rise and fall; a silver candlestick on the mantelshelf tottered and fell. There was a heavy pressure against the leaded windowpanes and the old plaster walls, and everything rattled.

"Not enormously far away," said Belinda Monk thoughtfully but quite calmly.

Her voice broke the silence which followed those explosions.

"I must go and grab the baby," said Judy.

She darted from the table and they heard her run up the narrow stairs.

"Silly business," said John Barton. "What do they think they'll get by dropping bombs on this hillside?"

"Most annoying," said Mrs. Barton. "It breaks our little spell of peace. Judy is always so scared, poor darling. It's because of the precious child."

"This bloody war!" said Gerald. "This war against women and children!"

"I expect the searchlights are up," said John. "Let's go and have a look. It's quite like old times after the respite we've had."

"Glad you enjoy it," said Gerald Monk grimly. "It makes me boil with rage."

He followed his friend into the cottage garden on the top of Spurfold hill.

The searchlights were up for the first time after several months following the Battle of Britain and the great blitz from the air. Long white fingers of light felt about the night sky, luminous because of a harvest moon. They made geometrical patterns, as though a lesson in Euclid were being demonstrated in the heavens. The trees and hedges were black below the sky, and the fields were a pale, unearthly green.

"How lovely it is here," said John. "England at night. God! How I hate the idea of leaving it."

Gerald did not speak for quite a time. His tall figure and lean, haggard face were motionless as he stared across the landscape to where the downs were faintly visible.

Presently he spoke.

"What Judy said was very interesting," he said. "If I could put the picture into words, this night sky, those searchlights, and the meaning behind—the meaning behind it all—I should be doing something wonderful. I wish to God I could."

"Why not have a try?" asked John, who admired this man's verse beyond all others of his time.

"Inside myself," said Monk, "I'm in a state of hideous conflict. I can't get it straight. I can't get myself straight with any integrity. If I were to write about the war—and what else is there to write about?—I should feel a charlatan and a blasphemer against the light."

"I don't get you," said John.

Gerald Monk spoke with a kind of passion, though very quietly.

"I can't see how anyone who calls himself a Christian, or believes anyhow in the Christian ideal, can reconcile this war with that code."

"Why not?" asked John. "We're fighting evil, aren't we?"

"With the weapons of evil," answered Monk. "An all-out competition with the enemy in the forces of destruction. Bigger bombs for destroying fine old cities and the civilians inside them. More powerful high explosives for blasting greater areas, with women and children in their ruins. How *can* one reconcile that with the command of

‘Love thy neighbour as thyself,’ or with the Spirit of Christ as far as we know it? But I speak as a man who writes verse rather than as a Christian. A man who writes verse cannot be a liar to his own creed. He tries to find the truth, or he damn well ought to. And the truth of life, as far as I have found it, is the direct opposite of all this orgy of hate and killing, this war in the air in which civilians are the victims, this utter degradation of humanity and swingback to the beast, highly mechanized, and very scientific. Man has sold himself to the devil for the secrets and the power of destructive science. Don’t you agree, Barton?”

Barton tapped a cigarette on his thumbnail, and lit it before he answered.

“I’m not one of the world’s idealists,” he said. “I’m just a tough American guy.”

Gerald Monk laughed quietly.

“A most inaccurate description of yourself,” he said. “You’re one of the thinkers, Barton. It’s your job to think. You can’t brush the Eternal Verities on one side by just saying you’re a ‘tough American guy.’ Besides, you go about with a broken heart. Hasn’t that brought you to a more spiritual view of life?”

John Barton winced. He did not like this touching of his wound.

“Leaving that on one side,” he answered rather harshly, “I don’t deny the inconsistencies of praying to the God of Love and Peace, while getting more young women to make more and better high explosives. But that doesn’t worry me a lot. It was Germany who sold herself to the Powers of Darkness—represented by Adolf Hitler and his murder gang. We’re out to kill that evil thing, aren’t we? Well, then, until we’ve scotched it, the innocent must suffer for the guilty. In a way they support that evil thing—German women who idolize Hitler.”

“German children?” asked Monk.

“Growing up to be faithful little Nazis,” answered Barton. “Of course, if you’re a pacifist——”

“I’m not,” answered Monk. “If I were, I shouldn’t have this conflict in my mind. I’m not honest enough to be an out-and-out pacifist. I’m in the Home Guard. I practise the belly crawl. I keep my bayonet polished and sharp for a German belly, the belly of some German boy of eighteen or so who may come my way and shriek when he sees my shining steel!”

“He shouldn’t come,” said Barton. “If he sets foot on English soil, he will have to die with the rest of them. You don’t propose to let him get away with it, do you? I’m sure you will help to defend Judy and the baby while I’m away—curse it!”

He hated the idea of being away from England—perhaps in her supreme hour of trial.

Gerald Monk laughed again, very quietly, under the luminous sky where the groping searchlights suddenly went out.

“You have me there, Barton. I shall do my best to defend your Judy if parachute troops drop down into Spurfold one day—or night. As a matter of fact, the Home Guard fellows think I’m a bit of a thruster, and that’s why I can’t write a line nowadays. I’m Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. I believe in the Spirit of Christ—I’m a corporal in the

Spurfold Home Guard. A grotesque inconsistency, but what the hell does it matter if I give up writing? All my stuff was slush, anyhow.”

“Far from it,” said John. He gripped Gerald Monk’s arm.

“I see your trouble, old man. We all have this secret conflict, I suppose. You say it’s my job to think. That’s nice of you. I’ve done a hell of a lot of thinking lately in the small hours. I’m looking for some proof of the survival of personality after death. I’ve been reading some of your stuff again, and find you have that faith.”

“Without doubt,” said Monk. “If I didn’t believe that, I shouldn’t be worrying about Christ’s message to humanity.”

“If we lose this war,” said John Barton, “there will be no more civilization on the Christian pattern, or at least with a Christian tradition behind it. No more liberty of faith or opinions. Say ‘Heil Hitler’ or be beaten to death by rubber truncheons. That’s why I’m a passionate propagandist for little old England. That’s why I’m going back to my own country to tell them the tale of English heroism, in the hope that they will come over for the same crusade.”

“It’s damn decent of you,” said Gerald Monk, forgetting the conflict in his supersensitive soul. “Good luck to you, old man!”

A voice spoke to them from the cottage doorway, opened just a chink. It was Mrs. Barton’s clear New England voice.

“Now, you two earnest talkers, come in and make a foursome at bridge.”

Though Russians were being beaten back round Smolensk, though British boys in night bombers were flying through the barrage of fire above Essen, although British ships were being sunk that night in the convoys creeping across the Atlantic under the big moon, Mrs. Barton liked her game of bridge, or, if no foursome were available, a nice, quiet time with a game of patience. As she truly remarked: one couldn’t go on worrying about the war at all hours of the day and night. It was a pity the nine-o’clock news interrupted the game. It was not good news.

11

THROUGH the American Embassy arrangements were being made to get John Barton by the Pan American Airways to New York from Lisbon, and by a British plane to that port of call. All this took time, with many papers to fill up before he could secure an exit permit from the United Kingdom and the magic password of priority, without which there might be long delays in Lisbon, the Clipper having a long waiting list. As the time drew near for his departure, Barton was aware of his increasing reluctance to leaving England. It amounted, indeed, to a passionate regret. After his first exasperations—he felt them still at times—he had come to love England and the English. He had made many friends among them, but what bound them to him now was his share in their ordeal by fire. He had sat in shelters with them under air bombardments, he had visited cities like Bristol and Coventry after nights of terror and destruction, and had talked with these people among their ruins, when they stood amid their dead. He had waited with them for invasion, knowing, as they did, their weakness in defence after the downfall of France, and the rescue from Dunkirk. He had been through the Battle of Britain, when the boys of the R.A.F. had been the knights-errant of the skies, challenging great odds, and winning a supreme victory in the air, so saving England. He had met these boys—hundreds of them—and had been to their airdromes, waiting for their return when any were missing. Their valour, their laughter, their high spirits, their little superstitions, their slang, and their jaunty way with death—going out to meet it without a tremor—had made him marvel. He had seen English life in its hours of darkest tragedy, and had gone deep into all its wartime activities. He had talked with the merchant seamen who worked their ships through minefields, dodged the wolf packs and sharks of the Atlantic and all other seas—the lurking menace of German submarines and surface raiders, in foul weather, in gales and snowstorms, under dive bombers and torpedo-dropping aircraft. They took all this as part of their job, and when their ships sank under them their only anxiety after their rescue was to find another ship and sign on again for the same service and the same risk.

He had gone into the munition factories, where men and women—masses of young women—were working for long hours under heavy strain to speed up production and get weapons into the hands of the fighting men who were their husbands and brothers. He had heard their shrill laughter when he had pulled off an American wisecrack. He had joined with them in singing choruses during their lunch-time entertainments, and in conversation with factory girls, and steel workers, and dock hands and riveters, he had heard their doubts and disappointments, and moments of despair, because the war went from bad to worse, and the Germans were always winning. He had shared those doubts and disappointments. There was plenty to criticize in the English setup. Ghastly mistakes had been made by those responsible for the higher strategy of the war. We had heard a lot about that from Dewhurst and other critics. The jolly optimism of the

generals and naval commanders had not been justified. Their self-complacency was at times appalling in their underestimate of the enemy's strength, in their amateur spirit against professionals and experts. Whitehall and its swarming officials seemed to strangle and frustrate the war effort by red tape and delaying action. He had seen frightful incompetence in high quarters. He had come up against British snobbishness, and British arrogance, and stupidities, entrenched and immovable—inconceivable and unbelievable stupidities, which had made him boil with rage inside himself, or laugh with harsh bitterness as an American onlooker, thwarted by the censorship in his own work, which was meant to be of service to England. And yet, all that was wiped out now in his mind, when he was about to leave England, by the spirit of the people; by their wonderful qualities of steadfast endurance under a frightful ordeal; by a historical tradition covering a thousand years, which made them endure adversity with grim patience, which made them risk death with gay fatalism, which caused them to carry on a semi-normal life in a casual, matter-of-fact way, even with games, and garden tea parties, and conversation in restaurants or drawing rooms, when only a miracle could save their nation from defeat and death. The miracle had happened when Hitler attacked Russia.

John Barton hated to leave England now, even for a few months, because it would be an exile of the soul. He was wedded to England through his dead wife. He wanted to see the war through in England, or die with his friends there, if he had the luck to find such a good death. There might be another winter of bombing—he wanted to be in it, he didn't want to quit. He would feel out of it all in his own country.

Yet he couldn't shirk that trip to the United States. The call back had come from the leader of the American folk. All his friends thought he might do a great service for England. They were wrong, he thought, but even a remote chance of that could not be ignored without a guilty conscience. He was dedicated to the service of Anne's people. In doing this job he would be fulfilling Anne's wish. She wouldn't have let him off.

"I hope to God," he said to himself one night in his little bedroom in Dawn Cottage, his suspenders hanging down, and one boot in his hand, "that I make a dent on isolationism over there. People seem to think that I have a gift of words. They get emotional, though I can't think why, over things I speak and write. I suppose my stuff gets over, somehow. I guess it's because I feel what I say. It's the feeling that comes through. It would be a bit of a miracle if I could weigh down the scales, even by a straw's weight, in favour of a fighting alliance between America and England." He remembered, suddenly and vividly, some words he had spoken to Anne when they were on a ship driving steadily across the Atlantic to England, in time of war. They were standing out on deck under the stars. They were talking gravely—not like a honeymoon couple—about the chances and terrors of this war.

"Before the end comes," he told her, "my people will be with you."

He was startled by the remembrance of these words which had never come into his head since.

Perhaps they were prophetic. Perhaps his trip to the United States might help to make them fulfilled—just by a hair's breadth, just by the weight of thistledown. That was his next job. He would put everything he had into it.

12

ON the day before his flight to Lisbon by a British military machine, Barton had to travel down to a west coast town from which he would begin his journey by air.

He had an afternoon in town after saying good-bye to his mother and Judy. His sister had hugged him at the garden gate and said gay words to him.

"Swat those isolationists, John. You're England's Ambassador Extraordinary for bringing America into the war—only don't let them know that. Kiss the dear great man for me, and take care of yourself as much as possible. Don't let the American women suffocate you under their warmth of hospitality."

His mother had sent many messages to relatives and friends in America, especially to her sister in Boston and her family of four now growing up to be young men and women.

"You'll have a grand time, John," she told him. "Everybody knows your name. They'll make a fuss of you."

"I hate the idea of it," he told her grumpily. "I can't think why I'm going on this fool's errand, to make a monkey of myself on public platforms."

"Come back with an American Army," said his mother. "Bring them over to help Britain. They'll follow you."

She was not talking seriously, being a little lady of great common sense. She knew that to her own people this war was a far-off thing, and of no vital concern to them, as they saw it.

Barton lunched that day in the Cheval Blanc. It was a useful rendezvous for saying good-bye to this bunch of men. They were all very friendly and encouraging. Even Dewhurst, that incurable ironist, did not pull his leg too much, and was quite affectionate when he gripped John's hand when he rose from the luncheon table.

"We shall miss you, Barton. We shall miss your fine balance between our wild extremes. Have a good time. Don't pile it on too thick about British heroism and nobility. Let 'em know we can't win this war without American man power. How the hell can we, now that France is out of the picture?"

General Cowdray gave him a friendly nod and raised one hand in salute.

"I envy you, Barton. Nice trip on the Clipper, and a change of scene from this squalor of London."

The patron of the restaurant was excited when he heard of Barton's coming journey.

"You go back to the United States? Ah! *Quelle chance!* To get away from Europe—this jungle, this madhouse, this torture chamber. A thousand congratulations."

“You have a great mission,” said a rare visitor to this table, one of the directors of the Treasury, whom Dewhurst singled out for particularly bitter jibes. He added some generous words.

“I’ve learned a lot from your broadcast talks. You will be able to tell your own people that we’re not doing so badly as it looks. Our attempts at getting the truth over to the United States have been pretty feeble. You will be our good interpreter.”

It was curious that he used that word—it had been used in the letter from Washington.

Barton felt touched by all this friendliness. The English weren’t so cold and icy as Americans thought. He had found that out years ago.

He turned at the door of this Soho restaurant with its little tables covered by checked cloths of blue and white squares like an eating house in Paris. Several followers of De Gaulle were lunching there, talking in low voices over their *soupe à l’oignon*, and two bottles of Mercurey. A young man was there with a pretty girl whose bare elbows were on the table, and whose clasped hands supported her firm little chin. Further down the room were two Tank officers and a young cadet in the Guards. A girl whom he knew as a typist in the Ministry of Information sat alone reading a novel propped up against the water jug, while she smoked a cigarette in a long holder and lingered over her coffee.

A restaurant in wartime London, with many ruins in its near neighbourhood. One night John had been there with Dewhurst during the blitz. The patron and the waiters had scurried down to the cellars, very frightened. He had been pretty scared himself. Now he would be leaving it for a time, but would carry with him the memory of extraordinary conversations, passionate criticisms, moods of despair, irony, wit, laughter, and intellectual comradeship. He had learned a lot about the English mind in this room which smelled of garlic, and onions, and French coffee, and stale tobacco smoke.

“Good-bye, Cheval Blanc,” said John Barton in his own mind.

He felt a bit morbid, like a man looking upon familiar things for the last time.

IN the afternoon of that last day in England he went to his house in St. Leonard's Terrace. He had not been there for some time now, and only then to fetch a few of his books and papers. The broken windows had been repaired, and his old servant went in every day to keep the place clean and free from dust. He was glad to find some freshly cut roses on the shelf below his wife's portrait by Judy's husband, Robin—one of his most brilliant works. Katherine Langdon must have done that, he thought. It was kind of her, kind with her usual charming sympathy, but of what avail was it after all? He stood in front of Robin Bramley's portrait of Anne. She was there as she had looked in life. Bramley had done her eyes marvellously. They had her smile in them, a little haughty perhaps. That is how Robin had seen her, sure of herself with a touch of pride and caste. That was how John had seen her in the first encounters, though afterwards he knew that she was straightforward and simple, without arrogance. Robin had failed a trifle with her mouth. It was not so hard as this, but he had reproduced the texture of her skin and hair with wonderful delicacy. A good portrait, but only a shadow picture; a thing of canvas and pigment, without life—a tragic souvenir of young beauty now dead . . . now dead . . . now dead.

"Oh Christ!" cried John, alone in his house. He touched things which her hands had touched—the rosewood piano, an ivory paper knife, a long, thin cigarette holder which she had often put to her lips. He put that in his breast pocket.

There was the chair in which she had sat while they played chess on the last night he had spent with her. For a moment he imagined her sitting there with her chin propped on her clasped hands as she studied the chessboard. She had a little smile on her lips as she devised a trap for him.

"Remembrance," he said aloud. "What's the good of it? Nothing more than memory. What's the use of that?"

He strode through all the rooms of the house, lingering a little time in each. The afternoon sun was streaming through the broken window of the bedroom they had shared. It gleamed on the oval mirror of the dressing table where she had sat each morning to do her hair. He stared into this mirror as though he expected to see her face reflected there as often as he had seen it when standing behind her to touch her hair with his lips. But there was only the reflection of his own face, lean, and tanned, and haggard, with tragic eyes.

I'm becoming a repulsive-looking guy, he thought.

He turned away to go out of the room, but as he was about to shut the door behind him he had an extraordinary experience. Somebody spoke to him, he thought, in a kind of loud whisper. He could hear the words—or he imagined he heard the words.

"Speak to me."

For a moment he stood quite still and rigid. His spine seemed to be touched by an icy finger. He was afraid.

I'm getting morbid, he thought. Perhaps I'm going mad.

He went back into the bedroom and stared around.

"Anne," he said quietly; "did you call me?"

There was no answer.

"Anne," he said again, "I'm going to the United States. I'll try to do a job for England. I'm sure you want me to do it. That's why I'm going."

After these words he listened intently, but there was no sound in the room except a faint noise of traffic outside—a taxi passing down St. Leonard's Terrace and a bus running in the King's Road.

Barton gave a deep sigh and presently walked out of his house and shut the door softly—it was his house of dreams—and slipped the key into his pocket.

HE had one more farewell to make before taking the night train to the west of England. It was to Peter and Katherine Langdon, his best friends in England.

"I feel as though I had come to say good-bye forever," he told them, when he was shown into their room, that book-lined room—it was Langdon's study—where he had had so many discussions before the war with this writing man whose novels had been an inspiration to him as a young man, and where he had met many intelligent people—all great talkers—in the years of crisis before the war. Langdon had seen the approach of war with horror. All his books had been dedicated to the spirit of peace, and he had gone far—too far in Barton's opinion—to create friendliness between Germany and England. Katherine's sister had married a German. German friends had come into this room, perturbed by the shadow of coming war, and torn desperately between admiration for Hitler's achievements and fear that he was leading their nation to a new war of conquest. Barton had behaved badly to them, and had been hardly civil now and then. But he revered Langdon's passionate desire for peace, and always the presence of Katherine, so wise, so fragrant in her mind, and so warm in sympathy and understanding, had helped him to wear off his rough edges and look upon this house so close to his own as a little sanctuary of civilization to which he was always welcome.

Now, when he came to say good-bye, he saw that something terrible had happened to these two people whom he loved. It was several moments before he became aware of that. He was self-centred because of that poignant hour in his own house. But there was something in the lingering clasp of Langdon's hand, and in the silence of them both, which brought him out of his own introspection. Katherine's face was dead white and he saw that she had been weeping.

"What has happened?" he asked. A terrible thought leaped into his mind, and he put it in one word.

"Paul?"

"He's missing," said Langdon in a low voice.

Barton looked into Langdon's eyes and saw the anguish in them.

"It had to happen," said Katherine. "I've been waiting for it night after night for months. Why should Paul escape when so many other boys were being killed? That awful nine-o'clock news. 'Seven of our bombers failed to return.' Those frightful raids over the Ruhr and Bremen, and Paul there in the barrage fire. 'One of our bombers failed to return.' To me, it was always Paul. One or seven, or seventy—who cared? People went on playing bridge, hardly listening. I've seen them when I had to sit in torture."

It was the first time Barton had ever heard Katherine speak with a touch of hysteria. She had always been so brave. She had always comforted her husband when he was in the depths of gloom, but now her control had broken down, just for a second. He went over to her and took her hands and kissed them. They were very cold.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "But isn't there a gleam of hope in that word 'missing'?"

Katherine Langdon struggled with herself, and after that moment of hysteria, when there was a sharp edge to her voice, she became calm and self-possessed again.

"Yes. We must cling on to that," she answered. "They think he might have baled out."

"Where was it?" asked John.

"Over the Ruhr—three nights ago."

"Over the Ruhr." John Barton dared not reveal his secret thoughts. The chances of baling out in that hell-fire were very slight.

"I've given up hope," said Langdon. His despair was complete, like a man standing at the deathbed of his only son, with tragic resignation.

"I believe Paul is alive," said Katherine. "I believe I should know if he were dead. I believe he would come to me at the moment of death."

"Do you believe that?" asked John Barton. "Do they ever come?"

He thought of that curious sense of having heard Anne's voice saying "Speak to me." He had seemed to hear the words quite distinctly, and yet it must have been a trick of the mind.

"I have heard so many cases," said Katherine. "I don't feel that Paul is dead. Perhaps I'm deceiving myself. But it's all I have now. Even self-deception is better than certainty."

"No," said Langdon; "I want certainty—one way or the other."

This was John's last night in England. He hated the idea of leaving these two people in this hour of their affliction.

"I wish to God I could stay," he said presently. "I feel like a deserter. I feel that I'm running away from the danger zone and all my friends."

"That's nonsense," said Katherine. "You're going out on a great crusade, to enlist help for England."

"I haven't a chance," said John. "I'm not a spellbinder. It will need a miracle to bring my people into this war."

"Sometimes I believe in miracles," answered Katherine.

It was an odd coincidence that she should have spoken those words, for a miracle happened then. It seemed like a miracle. It had the effect of a miracle.

The telephone bell rang, and for a moment or two no one stirred to answer it.

"I dare not lift that receiver," said Langdon. But while he said he dared not he rose from his chair and walked towards the telephone. But it was Katherine who was there

first.

“Yes,” she said. “Mrs. Langdon speaking.”

John Barton was standing up also. He watched Katherine Langdon’s face intently, while for a second or two she listened. She had been very pale when she lifted the receiver. Suddenly a flush of colour swept it.

“You are certain?” . . . she asked. “He is safe? . . . Oh, how wonderful!”

She replaced the receiver. Peter Langdon had listened to her words with all his soul in his eyes. John Barton had listened with a sudden shock of joyful relief.

“Paul is alive,” said Katherine Langdon. “Oh, my darling, our torture is at an end. Paul baled out over the North Sea and was picked up by a trawler. They say he isn’t badly hurt.”

She went over to her husband and put her arms about him.

“If God has anything to do with it,” said Langdon, “I thank God.”

John was profoundly moved. He dared not look at this father and mother as they clung to each other.

Then he gave a queer kind of laugh.

“I feel terribly glad,” he said. “I feel as if someone had given me the keys of heaven. It’s grand that it happened before I left.”

He stayed with them until it was time to make a dash for the station. They both kissed him before he went away. He went away with wet eyes. He hated to go.

15

THE plane to Lisbon flew very high, and to John Barton, one of its passengers, it seemed to take an incredibly long time. It was only eight hours, but that is a long time when one's mind is impatient for arrival and when one's body is cramped. His body was cold as well as cramped, owing to the altitude, and he could see nothing of sea, land, or sky, for some hours, as the windows were blocked up.

"Afraid of spies," said one of his fellow passengers, who sat next to him, and entered into conversation. It was an English film producer named Bennett Chudleigh, who was on his way to Hollywood by way of New York. The Ministry of Information had backed his going for propaganda purposes in American studios where he had been offered a job of work on a film dramatizing the blitz in London.

"I've no doubt Lisbon is infested with them," said John.

"So I've heard," said Chudleigh. "Thank God there's a gentlemanly agreement not to shoot down one another's planes within so many miles of Portugal. Meanwhile, we must be taking a most erratic course. Probably heading for the coast of Africa."

John wished he wouldn't talk quite so much. Personally, he wanted to be quiet with his own thoughts in which there were English scenes, and Anne, and the cottage at Spurfold, and those two dear people whose son had seemed to come back from the dead.

A very large lady, one of the largest ladies he had ever seen, was sitting on the other side of the little gangway. She had a beautiful face, John noticed—a Madonna face—and there was a sense of humour in her eyes. John had spoken to her before getting into the plane.

"I doubt whether I shall be able to scramble into that box," she confided to him.

"Oh, I'll give you a helping hand," said John gallantly.

She laughed at him for those words.

"My dear man, a helping hand is no good to me. I want a crane."

Like G. K. Chesterton, Jane Harrington, the famous contralto singer, whose glorious golden voice had often filled the Albert Hall and other concert halls in Europe and the United States, made a joke of her bulk.

"We're all very famous people," she told him, while they waited for the signal to get aboard. "Otherwise we shouldn't have seats on this plane. Who are you?"

He gave his name and said: "I guess you've never heard of it."

"Wrong," answered Jane Harrington. "Good God, man, I've shed buckets of tears while listening to your talks on the B.B.C., and you have made me feel more proud than I always was at having the blood of England in my veins."

"I'm a matter-of-fact speaker," said John modestly. "I just try to tell the truth of the things I have seen in the simplest possible way. I never emotionalize. I'm as dry as any New Englander."

"That's why you get across," said the lady Jane. "You tell terrible and heroic things in the simplest way. The story of the Crucifixion is like that. God preserve us from the false emotionalism of some of our speakers. Everything overdramatized. Everything overemphasized. False, with a falsity which I find disgusting. I'm glad to know you, Mr. John Barton."

She smiled at him and held out her large, plump hand in which his seemed lost for a moment.

"Are you going to sing to the American people?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I shall try to sing them into the war. It's my way of propaganda. They will say: 'England must win if they produce women like that.'"

John saw the laughter in her eyes, and laughed also.

"They love your voice already," he told her with sincerity.

He saw the pilot eyeing this lady with dismay and apprehension. She caught his eye and spoke to him.

"I don't weigh as much as I look," she told him. "I'm just a zephyr really."

The pilot coloured up and then laughed heartily.

Now in the plane on the way to Lisbon, John smiled at her again. She was a good sport, he thought. He had heard something about her from Bennett Chudleigh, who had spoken in a low voice, inaudible to Jane Harrington because of the vibration of the plane.

"That woman sings with a broken heart. Her only son was killed on the sands at Dunkirk."

"Oh God!" said John.

He glanced round once again at the other passengers. Probably every one of them had some tale of tragedy, or heroism, or torture of the mind.

There was a Jewish doctor and his wife. They sat hand in hand on this flight to the United States by way of Lisbon.

They had escaped from Hitler's Germany just before the war. Many of their relatives and friends had committed suicide as the only way of escape from Nazi cruelties and brutalities and the horrors of the concentration camps.

I would like to have some more talk with that Jewish doctor, thought John. He has a noble face. The face of an old scholar. One of the wise men, I guess. All the tragedy of life is in his eyes, even when he smiles.

"Who is that black-mustachioed fellow who looks like D'Artagnan?" asked John of Bennett Chudleigh, who seemed to know everybody.

"Oh, he's one of De Gaulle's men—the Baron de Plumoison. He escaped from France long after Dunkirk in a small fishing ketch crowded with his family and escaped

prisoners of war. They were shelled from Dieppe, and bombed from the air, so that their boat was dripping with blood when brought in by a British destroyer. The fellow's wife and daughter were both wounded—the wife died.”

“Oh God,” said John.

“He hopes to get support for De Gaulle in the United States and Canada,” said Chudleigh. “I was having a talk with him last night. A very decent fellow, I should say, and quite a gentleman.”

John Barton smiled. “Quite a gentleman” . . . so very English—so snobbish. It would have made him mad before he found his way about in England.

“The old-school tie?” he asked.

Chudleigh grinned.

“It's a habit of speech. Damn silly, I'll admit, now that we're all supposed to be democrats.”

He jogged John's elbow presently, as a little old lady with white hair spoke to one of the officers.

“See that old dame?”

“Probably a duchess,” said John, who had once met an English duchess and had mistaken her for a charwoman.

“Not on your life! She's going to Lisbon to do a job of counterespionage. It needs more courage to do that than to win the V.C.”

“I wouldn't do it for a million bucks,” said John.

He shivered slightly, not because of the dangerous job of the white-haired lady, but because he was darned cold. He also felt rather sick, and there was a terrific pressure in his ears. They were flying high. He fell into an uneasy sleep.

It was burning hot in Lisbon. John had never felt such heat since his last summer with Anne in Washington. But this was dry heat. In the full glare of it, beyond the blue shadows cast across the lawn of the Hotel Aviz by tall palm trees, it was reflected scorchingly off the pavements, and beat down relentlessly from an utterly blue sky upon the white blocks of houses and shops, down the long avenue from this hotel to the centre of the city. John bought a Panama hat and sunglasses, and resumed his former American habit of drinking iced water and other cooling liquids.

"Everybody here gets Lisbon tummy," said Jane Harrington, who sat with him after their landing on the lawn of the hotel—a lawn vividly and unnaturally green, as though the grass were artificial.

"What's it like?" asked John.

"A kind of enteric, due to flies perhaps. It lasts for weeks, I'm told, but we may escape it if the Clipper flies at dawn tomorrow."

The Clipper did not fly at dawn the next day. It did not fly at dawn on other days that followed, owing, it was reported, to bad weather on the other side of the Atlantic.

John Barton and his travelling companions had time to see the beauty of Lisbon—very beautiful under the cloudless blue sky—with its old palaces and churches, its courtyards and narrow winding streets, baked in sunshine except where blue shadows fell across the white walls tapestried with the wine-coloured flower of bougainvillea.

With Bennett Chudleigh, who was an agreeable fellow much interested in the personalities of life, John went over to Estoril and had luncheon at a big hotel where other travellers were awaiting their turn for the Clipper. Some of them without that magic word "priority" had already waited seven or eight weeks, and others seventeen and eighteen weeks, with their money running out and their hopes fading into despair. They were refugees from Hitler's occupied Europe. Some of them had escaped after tragic hardships across the frontiers to neutral Portugal, the last sanctuary of refuge. They had bribed their way out, or crept past the frontier guards at night. Jewish professors and their wives, Czechs, and Slavs, and Frenchmen, who had once been leaders or men of public distinction in their own countries. They had struggled their way through to Portugal with the supreme hope of getting an air passage to the United States—that paradise of peace and liberty. If only they could make this escape from the European jungle, and reach that American dream. But the Clipper had a long waiting list, and the privilege of priority was hard to get.

It was in the hotel of Estoril that John Barton had an encounter which he found painful and most objectionable. As he walked through the great dining room to a table which Chudleigh had booked, his eyes met those of a man who was already having lunch with two companions. The man smiled and raised his hand, but Barton stared

straight through him without a sign of recognition. He was a German whom he had known in prewar days—Helmuth von Metsen. He and his sister Elizabeth had known Anne very well, and she had gone to stay with them. For a little while he had been jealous of the man, because Anne had thought him so charming, until one night in London she had ticked him off because he had been critical of England.

“Who’s your German friend?” asked Bennett Chudleigh as they took their places at table. He had seen Helmuth’s smile and raised hand.

“He was never a friend of mine,” answered John, rather grumpily.

“He has a very pretty woman with him,” said Chudleigh.

“His sister,” said John. “What are we going to eat?”

“I believe I’ve got a touch of Lisbon tummy,” said Chudleigh. “I feel rather weak in the innards. I wonder if I shall die if I have a lobster, which always greatly tempts me?”

“I wouldn’t risk it,” said John.

It was after lunch when Barton came face to face with Helmuth von Metsen in the garden of the hotel. Chudleigh had found a party of friends, and Barton had gone to take a cup of coffee alone, in the shadow of the palm trees. There was a lovely view of the sea and shore, glittering in the hot sunshine.

Suddenly he was aware of Helmuth coming straight towards him.

“Damn it!” said John within himself.

“How do you do, my dear Barton,” said Helmuth. “I suppose you are going back to America? I envy you. Out of this jungle world.”

“You are one of those who made the jungle,” answered John stiffly.

“No, no. I am a diplomat. I worked for peace and had so many English friends. May I take a cup of coffee with you?”

“No,” said John. “I do not drink coffee with Germans.”

He spoke the words harshly, but Helmuth von Metsen refused to take umbrage, and laughed with apparent good temper.

“Oh! I am sorry! The United States are still neutral, after all. I don’t see why we should not have a friendly talk. How is Lady Anne?”

John’s face went pale under his tanned skin.

“Lady Anne is dead,” he said. “Your German bombers killed her.”

“Good God,” said Metsen in a startled voice. “I am deeply sorry. She was very beautiful, she was very lovely. I was devoted to her.”

He seemed quite stricken, and he spoke with great emotion.

“You have killed many of our women and children,” said John fiercely. “You have no mercy in your way of making war. You have not spared beauty wherever you could destroy it.”

Helmuth von Metsen ignored this denunciation.

“I wish I had known,” he said. “Her name was never published in the press. My sister Elizabeth, who is with me here, will be greatly distressed. She loved Lady Anne

very much indeed. We have often spoken of her visit to our home. Everybody fell in love with her.”

“I find this conversation painful,” said John. He was standing now, and looked sombrely into the eyes of this German.

“Yes,” said Metsen. “It is terribly painful. I beg you to accept my very deep sympathy, my most profound sympathy. We heard of your marriage through the American press.”

John wiped some beads of sweat off his forehead. His face was still pale.

“I don’t ask for your sympathy,” he said harshly; “I only ask you to go away.”

“You are discourteous,” said Helmuth. “There is a certain code, is there not, even between enemies, and your country and mine are still at peace?”

“Not for long,” said John; “not if I can help it.”

“I understand your bitterness,” answered Helmuth von Metsen. “I forgive it because of your great tragedy.”

“Blast your forgiveness!” said John Barton savagely. “You German swine have no right to forgive anyone. You have filled the world with agony. It is you who one day will have to beg for forgiveness, and by God you won’t get it. You will get only punishment for your innumerable crimes against humanity.”

For the first time Helmuth von Metsen took notice of Barton’s fierce denunciation. Perhaps it was those words, “German swine,” which touched him.

“You are uncivilized,” he said. “You have no manners. You are very insulting.”

“I mean to be,” said John.

“I thought, mistakenly,” said Metsen, “that you were a man of intelligence, with some understanding of world affairs. This war is very terrible and very cruel. As a civilized man I detest it, though as a German I serve my country. But it is necessary for a few of us to remain civilized and to maintain a code of decent civility. It is still possible, is it not, to be a gentleman?”

“For a German, impossible,” said Barton. “You are the slaves and panderers of a low hound who delights in torture and sadism.”

Helmuth von Metsen flushed hotly. There was a sword in his look.

“You have not been well brought up,” he said coldly. “You are a low-mannered fellow.”

He turned sharply on his heel and walked away swiftly.

Barton sat down again, took a sip or two of lukewarm coffee, and lit a cigarette. There had been a rage inside him at this encounter, but it died down now into cold ashes. He had a painful feeling that Helmuth von Metsen had humiliated him. He felt that he had been unmannerly, and coarse, and lacking in self-respect. He had been a damned fool, he thought, to bandy words with that fellow. Metsen had been civilized, as he called it; whereas he, John Barton, had been rough-tongued—a tough guy without even a thin veneer of cold civility.

An Englishman would have behaved differently, he thought, certainly an English gentleman. But then I'm not an English gentleman. I'm an American correspondent, and I hate that fellow's guts. Everything I said was true. Helmuth von Metsen may have good manners, but he is one of those who support, or do not overthrow, the murder gang now ruling Germany with their black police and their rubber truncheons, and now wading through Europe in blood and ruin. Helmuth von Metsen has been brought up as a gentleman. Good! He has the polish of an aristocrat. Fine! He may even have secret doubts about Hitler, and turn his eyes away from the horrors inflicted upon innocent peoples because of German lust for power. But he is serving those monsters of cruelty, those blood-soaked sadists. To hell with his good manners!

All the same, he had a guilty feeling that he had been made to look like a clumsy boor by this smooth-tongued German who had been in love with Anne, and whom Anne had thought charming.

HE had another encounter with a German in this city of Lisbon. It happened three days after his meeting with Metsen. He had walked out from the Hotel Aviz into the fierce sunlight, and had gone in the opposite direction from the city with its crowded streets, but after walking for half a mile he found the heat too much for him and looked around for some shade. There was no shade, as it was a treeless neighbourhood, but there was a handsome church, dazzling white and very new, a little back from the road. It would be cool inside, he thought, and he walked across to it and pushed open a side door. Yes, it was cool inside, and rather beautiful with its tall white columns and painted windows. A little red lamp glowed like a ruby by the altar, and some candles were burning below a picture of the Madonna in one of the side chapels. Two or three women knelt in prayer there, but otherwise the church was empty at this time of day, which was a little after noon.

He walked round quietly, looking at the painted windows and the statues of the saints. Not badly done, he thought, and less tawdry than some others he had seen in Lisbon churches.

Then he sat down in one of the pews looking towards the high altar. His thoughts strayed back to England for a time. It was odd, he thought presently, that he should be sitting in a Roman Catholic church in Lisbon. The idea came to him that in this place of prayer, this utter quietude, he might get into touch with Anne. People who believed in prayer might find such a place a rendezvous with the spiritual world. He was not a religious man, being deeply skeptical, but he envied those people who had a simple and certain faith like those women kneeling before the picture of the Virgin Mary. It was all very queer, this religious side of life which was outside his range and habit of mind. Those women probably found some comfort in what they were doing. God would seem close to them. They hoped, maybe, for special favours if they said the right words—a relief from sickness, the recovery of a sick child, forgiveness of sins. How did they come to believe all that? As far as he could make out, God did not interest Himself about human creatures. Naval officers and men gave thanks to God because their ship had been saved from dive bombers and torpedo attacks. But if God saved one ship, why did He allow the others to get lost, with blue-eyed boys aboard, the sons of mothers who prayed for them? It was very queer indeed, all that. Why was Hitler allowed by God to go on winning all the time, trampling over other countries, imposing his ruthless will on them, and massacring the innocent? Christ did not give any sign, if Christ were God. All very odd. All very irreconcilable with ordinary intelligence. Not that he would dogmatize about such things. He just didn't know. He just was lacking in any kind of faith even about a life after death. He must find out one day when he had time. He might turn his attention to it when this war was over. He would like to get some evidence about the survival of personality after death. It would be a great comfort to

know that Anne was still going on somewhere. He thought of that strange sense of hearing a whisper in that empty house in St. Leonard's Terrace—"Speak to me." He had heard those words with perfect clarity—or thought he had done so, as Joan of Arc had thought she had heard her voices. Could it possibly have been a message from Anne? By all rules of common sense and sanity, it was impossible, or at least vastly improbable.

So John Barton carried on his meditations in this new church on the outskirts of Lisbon. Presently he rose and walked out into the porch, hesitating before plunging again into the full glare of the sunlight. One of those women who had been kneeling before the image of the Madonna followed him swiftly and stood by his side in the porch and spoke to him in a low, emotional voice.

"Mr. Barton, forgive me. May I say a few words to you?"

John Barton saw that it was Elizabeth von Metsen, whom he had known in England and Germany. She was still a pretty and elegant woman. The war had not changed her in that respect.

He raised his hat slightly, but answered gruffly.

"I have nothing to say to you. I said too much to your brother and now regret it."

"You insulted him," she said. "But I am a woman. American men are polite to women, are they not?"

"It depends on the women," answered John stiffly. "What do you want to say to me?"

"I want to ask you a few questions. They are quite harmless, and here, outside this church, only God will hear them."

"What questions?" asked John guardedly.

"About Anne," she said. "Did she ever speak of me before she died? We were very great friends, as you know. I loved her very much."

"She didn't die," said John harshly. "She was killed by one of your German bombers."

"I know," said Elizabeth. "Many German women have been killed by your R.A.F. It is so very tragic, this war. But we will not argue about that, if you please."

"No," said John, "it is beyond argument." He answered her question.

"Anne spoke about you once. She said that whatever happened in the war it would make no difference to her friendship with you. I was angry with her for saying that."

"I am glad she said it," answered Elizabeth von Metsen, and her eyes filled with tears which she blinked away.

"And her brother David," she asked; "is he still alive?"

A slight flush of colour came under her fair skin. She had been in love with David, he remembered. She had had a passion for him, as once she had laughingly confessed.

"He's all right," said John. "I shall see him in Washington."

Elizabeth's eyes brightened.

“Oh yes, you are going to America in the Clipper. Helmuth told me.”

She hesitated for a moment, and then spoke timidly.

“Dare I ask you to give him my love?”

“I will give him your message,” answered John.

He spoke coldly again, but felt less hostile to this girl than he had towards her brother. That is because she is pretty, he thought. Like all damn fools I weaken to a pretty woman. But she’s a German, all the same.

Elizabeth von Metsen thanked him, and then hesitated again as though she had another question to ask, but was not quite sure whether she might do so, because of his hostility.

“There are so many things I would like to ask you about,” she said. “After all, we are two souls in the near presence of God. There will be Germans, and English, and Americans in the next world. I suppose we shall not have to cut each other there?”

John was tempted to say that most Germans would be in hell, but he refrained.

It was she who expressed his thought, startling him as though she had read his mind.

“It is possible that you believe all Germans will be in hell, and only English and Americans in heaven?”

There was for just a second, he thought, a glint of humour in her eyes, and he remembered that she had been a merry witch.

“I wouldn’t go so far as that,” he answered, “but I think we have talked enough.”

“Very well,” she said, with a little gesture of resignation. “But I wish you would tell David a few things which are in my heart. Tell him, if you please, that I have wept many tears because of this war between our countries; tell him that I shall always weep when I think about it; and tell him that when I kneel in church and say my prayers I pray for all the English boys, as well as for all the German boys, who are victims of this war, and for their poor mothers. Will you tell him that?”

“That is German sentimentality,” said John brutally. “How dare you pray to God when your Hitler does such devilish work, when your men commit such atrocities in other people’s countries, when the whole German population are involved in this crime against humanity and civilization?”

He looked her straight in the eyes, and her face went pale.

“Are we not all guilty of this war?” she asked. “Was not Hitler created out of German misery after the last war, when all nations were against us? In any case, our German soldiers do not commit atrocities. At least I have never heard of them. Have they not covered themselves with glory? Have they not died with great heroism on many battlefields?”

John Barton laughed harshly.

“Glory? Is it glory to make war on civilians? To rain high-explosive bombs on defenceless cities? To torture Jews, and Poles, and Czechs, to shoot hostages, and use every diabolical means to break the spirit of liberty-loving people?”

“The Russians are those who commit atrocities,” said Elizabeth von Metsen. “Our wounded men come back with terrible stories.”

“You are blinded by your filthy propaganda machine,” said John. “Your Dr. Goebbels is the father of all lies. You Germans are beyond hope, because you are never allowed to know the truth, and have minds incapable of perceiving it.”

“You are intolerant,” said Elizabeth von Metsen. “There will never be peace on earth if the whole German tribe are condemned because cruel things have been done in time of war. There are still many Germans who are good Christians, and who believe in the Spirit of our Lord, as I do.”

“How can you reconcile it?” asked John. “How can you obey Hitler and serve Christ? That beats me.”

“Hitler has done much for Germany,” said the girl. “He has wiped out our humiliation. He has given us back our self-respect. He is a great genius.”

“He is the devil incarnate,” said John. “He is the Spirit of Evil stalking through the world for the destruction of all goodness, and all beauty, and all truth.”

“You believe that?” she asked, as though deeply surprised.

“I guess I know it,” said John.

“I thought it was English propaganda,” she answered. “I did not know that intelligent people believed it.”

“There are hundreds of millions of intelligent people who believe it,” said John. “One day Germany will know the meaning and the terror of their vengeance.”

Elizabeth von Metsen looked into his eyes, and her face was white.

“I know that we are hated,” she said. “Perhaps we have done things that are not good. I do not know. It is possible that, in spite of all our victories, we may have to suffer as we did after the last war. Our victories do not give the people any joy. We conquer ourselves to death, they say. There is a sense of doom and dread over us. I will tell you the truth, though you must not repeat it.”

She held out her hand.

“It is a German hand,” she said, “but I loved Anne who was your wife, and Anne loved me. Good-bye.”

He took her hand for a second.

“I have been rather brutal,” he said. “Forgive me. I, too, have told the truth as I see it.”

“Perhaps we are both blind,” she answered. “Perhaps human beings cannot see the real truth. May Christ have mercy on us. We are all like little children wandering through a dark wood with demons and goblins around us. Do you not think so?”

Her hand slipped from his and he walked out into the sunlight and waited on the steps of the church until she had gone.

It was on the eighth day of his stay in Lisbon that John Barton received word by telephone from Pan American Airways that he must be at the airport the following morning by nine-thirty. For three days he had been suffering from Lisbon tummy and felt astonishingly weak and sick, unable to eat the hotel food, and living mostly on iced water. Bennett Chudleigh, suffering from the same malady, sat with him in the hotel lounge, and was amusing in his comments on the odd people who came into the hotel for lunch or dinner, or for conversation with friends who made a rendezvous there in between mealtimes.

“See that cove with the bald head and the monocle?” said Chudleigh on one occasion, lowering his voice.

Barton nodded.

“Who is he?”

“He’s one of Mussolini’s secret-service agents. I ran up against him in Rome once. He was trying to find out how far Eden was prepared to go in imposing sanctions during the Abyssinian affair. Of course all the waiters and chambermaids in the Excelsior Hotel were in his pay for getting hold of letters and other documents left unguarded by British officials, who are very careless over that kind of thing.”

He directed John’s attention to a man and woman talking earnestly in an alcove at the end of the lounge.

“See that couple? That’s a French politician and his Spanish mistress. That was one of the fellows who betrayed France.”

He mentioned the name of a French statesman.

John Barton grinned for a moment.

“Do you really know all these people?” he asked. “Or do you just make it all up?”

Chudleigh laughed and showed no annoyance.

“I have an insatiable curiosity about human beings,” he answered, “and as a foreign correspondent of a scandal-loving paper for something like fifteen years in many capitals, I got to know the leading characters in this world’s puppet show.”

Barton rose to his feet at the approach of that very large lady, Jane Harrington.

“I don’t know whether you can see me at all,” she said, looming up largely through the lounge, “but I’m reduced to a grease spot.”

On the evening of his last night in Lisbon, Barton strolled about carrying his hat in his hand to feel the evening air on his forehead. Along the avenue groups of Portuguese were sitting at little tables outside the cafés sipping coloured liquids. The young men were flirting with their girls. Little Portuguese officers strolled about with a swagger.

Some of the faces at the tables near the one at which Barton took his seat were remarkable, he thought. There was an old Jew like one of the ancient prophets with a long white beard below his hooked nose. He sat with a young woman, who was probably his daughter, and they did not exchange a single word, but remained quite motionless, as though in deep and tragic thought.

Refugees from Hitler, thought John. Behind them, and in their memory, are the concentration camps and the torture chambers.

At a table close by were two of their enemies, talking German in a low voice.

German spies, thought Barton. This place must be infested by the secret agents of all countries.

When he strolled away from the café table he had an idea that he was being followed by those two Germans who had been talking near him. Probably, he thought, it was only a coincidence that they rose and left their table when he paid his small bill and strolled on. But it was odd that they were still behind him when he had walked for ten minutes and turned into narrow streets which were quite deserted.

He heard their footsteps and stopped in a doorway to light a cigarette and observe them for a moment. Yes, they were the two men who had been sitting near him. When he stopped they stopped, and pretended to be looking into a shop window.

There's no reason why they should be shadowing me, thought John. I'm not carrying secret papers, and I'm an insignificant guy of no interest to international agents. All the same, I don't like having them on my heels.

The idea passed through his mind that they may have mistaken him for some diplomat or important fellow hostile to their country and their Führer. Another idea came to him when he had walked on another three hundred yards and still heard those footsteps behind him. He had been pretty rough with the fellow Helmuth von Metsen. Perhaps he had hired two thugs to bash him in a lonely street. He rejected that idea. Helmuth von Metsen was a fairly decent type.

Suddenly he swung round and walked towards the two men and spoke to them in English.

"What's your game?" he asked.

Whatever their game may have been, he did not hear their answer. It came from a loaded stick which knocked him senseless.

When he regained consciousness he was aware of two young men bending over him. One of them spoke with a strong Irish accent.

"Sure the poor fellow is not dead at all."

"Thanks be to God," said the other young man. "We'd better take him in."

"I'm all right," said John. "What happened?"

The young Irishman laughed.

"You fell among thieves. I thought they had killed you entirely. Do you think you can get up on your feet?"

The two young men put their arms under him, and with their help Barton was able to stagger up.

“If I could get a taxicab,” he said, and then gave a slight groan. His head felt as though it had been cleaved by an axe.

“Dear God,” said the young man who spoke with an Irish accent, “you’re in no fit state for travelling. Now if you’ll take it easy in your mind, we’ll take good care of you till you feel yourself again.”

Barton noticed for the first time that both these young men were dressed in white, as though they had come down to him in their nightgowns. He also noticed, in spite of his headache and a dimness in his eyes, that there was an open door in a big block of buildings close to where they stood, and in the doorway from which a light gleamed stood another figure.

“Now keep your arms round our necks, and we’ll take you in to rest a bit,” said one of the young men.

Barton had a sense of confidence in these newly found friends. He wondered how it was that they were speaking English, and why they wore white nightgowns.

“It’s darned good of you,” he said. “I can’t say I feel very strong on my feet.”

They laughed quietly, and as he sagged upon them like a drunken man, with his arms round their necks, they led him into the open doorway.

“Holy Mother of God!” said the figure in white standing there.

They’re not in their nightgowns, thought Barton. They’re monks of some kind. I’ve fallen into the hands of the Roman Catholics. Two more of these white-robed figures were standing at the foot of some wooden stairs.

“Is the man hurt?” asked one of them anxiously.

“We shall have to carry him upstairs,” answered one of the others.

They carried John Barton upstairs as though he were a featherweight. One of them was a powerful man with long arms and the strength of a blacksmith.

Barton was aware of being carried down a long corridor dimly lit with one gas jet, and then into a room with a floor of polished boards and whitewashed walls, on one of which was a crucifix with a life-sized body of Christ hanging on the cross.

He was laid on a hard sofa stuffed with horsehair and left alone in the room after a few friendly words by one of the young men who had bent over him in the street.

“We have to say a few prayers,” he said, smiling down at John. “That’s our job in life. You won’t be alone for more than five minutes, and perhaps that won’t do you any harm. I’m sure you have a splitting headache?”

“I’m quite all right,” said Barton, who felt quite all wrong.

One by one the white-robed figures slipped quietly out of the room, and he heard men’s voices chanting down some far corridor.

It’s an odd adventure in a foreign land, thought John, who was beginning to think with a more active brain, feeling less stupefied. His thoughts harked back to those men who had bashed him in the street after dogging his footsteps.

I wonder what they were after? he asked himself.

He found the answer rapidly when he slipped his hand into his breast pocket. His pocketbook was gone. With it had gone his Portuguese money and five hundred American dollars. With it also had gone his ticket of the Pan American Airways for a flight on the Clipper.

“That puts the lid on it,” he remarked aloud. “I shall probably have to beg my bread in Lisbon. I’m one of the suckers of this world. One of its sapheads. I made it too easy for those bohunks.”

He took more notice of his surroundings; the sofa on which he was lying was not like a bed of roses. It was as hard as iron. He stared at the life-sized crucifix showing the Agony of Christ. He was aware of a faint, sweet smell. That was incense. He had smelled it in many foreign churches. The chanting went on. It seemed far away.

I’m in a hell of a mess, thought John Barton.

Presently the chanting ceased, and he heard the swish of robes on polished floors and a soft padding of feet.

The door opened and fifteen or sixteen white-robed men came into the room. He noticed they had sandalled feet. He also noticed that there was a smiling curiosity in their eyes.

“How do you feel, my dear sir?” asked one of them.

“I feel like a darned fool,” said Barton. “I’ve been robbed of all my money and all my papers for getting away from this sun-baked city.”

There was the sound of quiet laughter from all the monks.

“There are worse misfortunes at sea,” said one of them. “I know, because I have been torpedoed halfway across the Atlantic.”

“Here is Father Bede,” said a quiet voice. There was a sudden hush of silence as a small-sized man dressed like the others in a white gown, showing his bare neck and prominent Adam’s apple and his sandalled feet, came into the room and advanced towards John Barton. John sat up on the sofa and tried to rise. This man was obviously the boss of this religious community. But there was something about him which made Barton quite unconsciously desire to rise as he came forward. It was perhaps something in his eyes and smiling lips—something which suggested a fine spirit radiating from him as though he had some inner light which shone from him. That was queer. He was an old man with a parchmentlike skin and very blue, vivid eyes.

“My dear young man,” he said, “please do not try to rise. How do you feel after that brutal assault?”

“Fine,” said John. “That is to say . . .”

He put his hand to his head and gave a little groan and then laughed faintly.

The old man whom they called Father Bede touched John’s forehead with his wrinkled hand. It had a cooling touch.

“You must rest here,” he said. “We will make some tea for you. You’re English, they tell me?”

“American,” said John. “But that doesn’t make me hostile to tea.”

One of the young monks went out of the room when Father Bede made a little sign to him.

“It was fortunate,” said the old man, “that Brother Joseph, our porter, happened to open the door just as you fell under the blows of those two men. In the very nick of time. I think Saint Philomena had something to do with that. She often does little things like that—funny little miracles, perfectly timed.”

Barton noticed a smile pass from one monk to another, a kind of humorous toleration of an old man’s whim.

“I’m afraid I haven’t the pleasure of knowing Saint Philomena,” said John; “and I haven’t much faith in miracles.”

“No?” said the priest good-naturedly. “How can you avoid them? They are happening every day. Saint Philomena keeps working them for me. Very odd little miracles. Very amusing little miracles, I assure you.”

He seemed to be aware of the smiles in the eyes of his brethren, especially the younger men.

“The young men think I exaggerate the good deeds of Saint Philomena,” he said. “She favours me too much, they think. But I won’t bore you with that. I just want you to know that you are in friendly hands, and that we are happy in having rescued you from evil men. This city of Lisbon is crowded with them, alas. They come from all countries. Desperadoes. Spies. Thieves. This war has liberated the spirit of evil of whom Hitler is the right-hand man. He is, of course, possessed by the very Spirit of Evil, and is well-beloved by his master, Satan.”

“I guess you’re right,” said John Barton.

The young monk who had disappeared from the room came back with a little tray on which were some tea things.

“A cup of tea may take your headache away,” said the old priest.

“Thanks a lot,” said Barton. After one cup of tea he felt a new man. His headache almost disappeared, and he felt more strength in his limbs.

“Give my love to the United States when you get there,” said one of the young monks. “I was in Baltimore for three years.”

“Are you a very famous man?” asked another. “Only famous men get a chance of a seat on the Clipper.”

“My name won’t mean anything to you,” said John Barton honestly. “I’m John Barton.”

He was surprised and pleased when he found that his name meant quite a lot to some of them—the younger men.

“What? John Barton who speaks over the radio?”

“That’s me,” admitted Barton.

“We hang on your words,” said one of the young monks. “You’re one of my heroes.”

"We owe you very much indeed," said another, more formally. "We always try to get you when you speak on the short wave."

"I feel honoured," said John. "It's nice of you to say so."

He looked at the faces around him with interest and curiosity. It was astonishing to him to find himself in this company of monks, and with his journalistic mind—he was a reporter of life—he tried to discover their characters and qualities, and their place in the puppet show. There were several old men among them with innumerable little wrinkles about their eyes, but there were others younger than himself. In their white robes of a thick blanketing stuff, and with their shaven heads, they looked, he thought, like some old Italian paintings, and very mediæval. There was a serenity in their eyes. They looked at peace with themselves, in the midst of a world war. But they talked to him in a normal way, with now and then a touch of humour and even a touch of slang.

But presently, at a signal from Father Bede, they all rose, and one by one said good night, hoping that he would feel better.

Barton was left alone with the old priest.

"We retire early," he said, "because we get up early. But you need not go just yet. I will take you back to your hotel. I do not need so much sleep. I am satisfied with four hours. Smoke a cigarette, my dear."

Barton lit a cigarette.

"This kind of thing is very strange to me," he said. "What do you call yourselves, and what do you do?"

The old priest smiled at him.

"Yes, I daresay you do feel that we are a strange company. But we belong to an old tradition of religious life. We are Dominicans. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Not much," said John. "But I know the name as one of the religious orders. It seems to me a bit out of date. I can't understand how and why those young men of yours abandon the ordinary ways of life. Is it an escape from life?"

Father Bede smiled and shook his head.

"We keep in touch with life," he said, "but we spend more time than most men in prayer and religious exercises. We try to keep near to God as well as near to men."

"Is it any good?" asked Barton. "I mean—do you get any effect from prayer? I've never observed it."

"Don't you believe in the spiritual side of life?" asked Father Bede, smiling at him with his blue eyes.

"I would like to," answered John frankly. "But I can't see any evidence. I'm a matter-of-fact fellow. But I would give a lot to believe in survival after death. My wife was killed in the air bombardment of London. Shall I ever meet her again? Who can tell me that?"

Father Bede gave a deep sigh.

"What you tell me is terrible," he said. "How very sad for you, my dear. But I can answer your question. You will meet your wife again. The evidence is overwhelming.

We are surrounded by the spirits of saints and angels. They help us if we ask them.”

“Isn’t all that a fairy tale?” asked John. “How can you believe it? I do not understand how honest and intelligent people can believe such things. Where is the proof?”

“Our Lord appeared to His disciples,” said the old man. “Have you not read about that?”

“It was so long ago,” said Barton. “The value of human evidence is very slight, even if something happened yesterday. I know that as a journalist. But all that happened nineteen hundred years ago and more. It may have been a mere rumour.”

Father Bede smiled.

“I have never heard the story of the Crucifixion called a mere rumour,” he said. “Thousands of people have died for their belief in it. Thousands have been tortured and put to death for it. People do not die for a mere rumour.”

“You talked about miracles,” said John. “If I could believe in one, I might have more faith in other things. But who has seen a miracle?”

“I have seen several,” said Father Bede. “I, myself, was brought back from death by a miracle.”

Barton looked at him and smiled. In his own mind he thought how very odd it was that an old man like this should believe such fantastic things. No one could look at him and think he was lying. There was a transparent honesty in his eyes. He had the simplicity of a child.

“Tell me,” he said.

Father Bede raised his hands and gave a little laugh.

“It’s a long story,” he said. “I was nearly dead and quite unconscious. They had given me the Last Sacrament. My doctor said he could do no more. It was merely a question of when the breath should leave my body. But that night I regained consciousness for a little while, and during that time I called to a little saint for whom I had a particular affection. I said: ‘Saint Philomena, help me.’ I had a vision of her, very radiant, standing by my bed, and next morning when the doctor came in he gave a cry. I was quite well. The colour had come back to my skin: My pulse was normal. I said: ‘Hullo, Doctor! I’m cured—but it wasn’t you who cured me.’”

“That beats me,” said John, unable to believe this story, and yet unable to deny it because of this old man’s evident sincerity.

He rose to go, and felt strong enough to go.

“A thousand thanks, Padre, to you and your young men,” he said. “I shall remember this adventure in Lisbon as a strange little episode in my life—between two worlds, as it were.”

“I will come with you,” said Father Bede. “The walk will do me good, and if you meet any more bandits they won’t attack you if I am with you. I am very well known in Lisbon, even by the thieves and cutthroats.”

He insisted upon coming, and with his arm tucked through John’s, walked all the way to the Hotel Aviz, chatting about Lisbon, and his work among the poor, and his

literary labours.

“I’m a bit of a journalist myself,” he said. “I run a printing press.”

Then he spoke of the war, very gravely, and in a tragic voice.

“The Spirit of Evil has come out of its old lairs again,” he said. “What cruelties! What abominations! What a revelation of the power of Satan and Satanism! But in the end Hitler and his ruffians will be beaten, and all the devils who are helping them will be swept back to the place whence they came.”

“You speak with great assurance,” said John with a laugh. “How do you know, Father Bede, sir?”

“I know,” said Father Bede. “Otherwise God would be betrayed. Otherwise the Spirit of Evil would prevail—which is impossible.”

At the gate of the Hotel Aviz, with its gilded eagles, the old man took off his black hat and held out his hand.

“Good-bye,” he said. “I and my young men will pray for your safe flight in the Clipper.”

John Barton yielded to a curious impulse. He raised the old man’s hand and touched it with his lips.

In this old man, he thought, is the spirit of goodness. Virtue goes out of him. He belongs to the fairy tale of life.

“We shall meet in the next world,” said Father Bede. “I will look out for you. I shall be there first.”

He laughed, raised his thin transparent hand, and walked into the velvety darkness of the Lisbon night.

Well, that was an odd adventure, thought John. Meanwhile, I have lost my money and my tickets. Gosh!

By the kindness of the Pan American Airways he did not miss his place on the Clipper, having been provided with duplicate papers and enough money to pay his hotel bill and other charges.

THEY flew on strong wings across the great glittering sea. There were thirty of them on this Clipper, oddly assorted in character and type, but all of some distinction in various ways. John Barton, a reporter of life, thought for a moment of a book called *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. If we were spilt into the sea, he thought, it would make a good novel on that line—all our life histories leading up by twisted threads of fate to this flying boat and that death. Among his fellow passengers were two officers of Free France—disciples of De Gaulle, that Jewish father and daughter whom he had seen at a café table in Lisbon, silent and with tragic faces, a famous little film star, an English general, the former Prime Minister of a captured country, with his wife and daughter, a Swiss diplomat, a Spanish dancer, the wife of a British Embassy official with her two little girls, two American senators, an expert on high explosives, a French countess recently escaped from occupied France, and a famous violinist born of peasant parents in Austria, but now of American nationality. There were also the very large lady Jane Harrington, Bennett Chudleigh, and others, who had flown from England to Lisbon with him.

What odd tricks of fate have brought us all together in this flying boat? thought Barton. Set the clock back thirty years, and not one of us would have seemed destined to fly the Atlantic—an adventure beyond all dreams.

He put this thought in words to Bennett Chudleigh.

“I was in Paris when Lindbergh arrived,” said Chudleigh. “It seemed like a miracle—a young god flying from one world to another. Now this Clipper service goes like clockwork, and no one thinks anything of it.”

Their craft was like a little hotel, with every gadget for comfort and luxury. The passengers strolled about from one compartment to another restlessly, sitting on the arms of other people’s chairs, talking in a friendly and intimate way to people they had never met before.

At one of the tables there was a foursome at bridge. Light refreshments were served. There were sleeping bunks for the night hours.

“One can hardly feel the vibration,” said Jane Harrington. “I have no sense of danger. Any aircraft which can carry me ought to give confidence to a coward.”

They were flying above fleecy clouds. The sea was invisible below them. Above them was the cloudless dome, deeply blue.

This suspension in space between heaven and earth had a four-dimensional effect upon their minds. They felt disembodied, or released from the trammels of conventional thought. Their conversation with strangers became intimate and without reticence.

“Now that I’m flying away from the war zone,” said Chudleigh, “I feel I’m escaping from a world of horror. I’ve no use for that war whatever. It ought never to have happened. But for the damned stupidity of those who made the peace—and a pretty mess they made of it, curse them!—it never would have happened. Now another generation of youth is condemned to death because their elders let things slide and were viciously dishonest. I mean the politicians and the big businessmen, and the fake idealists who spoke lovely words to dope the masses.”

“Hitler let down the idealists,” said Barton. “Your English statesmen believed him when he said he stood for peace. They were innocent gentlemen, who thought no one could be such a liar and perjurer.”

“I go back long before Hitler,” said Chudleigh. “I go back to the years that followed the armistice. The men who survived the blood bath of the last war were promised a world made safe for democracy, and homes for heroes, and all that. They were given the dirty end of the stick. There would have been no Hitler if we had given the Germans a fair deal and established a new sense of brotherhood among the common people of Europe.”

“The Germans didn’t want a fair deal,” said Barton. “They wanted revenge and a reversal of defeat. All the leaders did. All the militarists and Junker minds.”

“We ought to have helped the German people to get rid of their militarists and Junker minds,” said Chudleigh. “We ought to have backed a real revolution.”

Barton did not argue with him. There had been times when he thought likewise. Now he believed that the evil strain in Germany had gone pretty deep—not only the leaders had been guilty of atrocious cruelties.

The old Jew who had reminded him of an Old Testament prophet talked with him as they flew on strong pinions above the clouds.

“I am happy to be flying to the United States,” he said, “especially for my daughter’s sake. She is young enough to make a new life in peace and happiness after five years of agony and terror.”

“You have had a bad time?” asked Barton.

The elderly Jew raised his hands.

“We have been in hell, my daughter and I. My wife died of despair and terror. That was when I was put into a concentration camp. Our only son was beaten to death. My wife’s father and brothers were hunted like wild animals in the forests of Poland. Our relatives and friends have been killed, tortured, or committed suicide, to escape these things.”

John Barton groaned.

“Germany will have to pay for all that,” he said.

The elderly Jew raised his hands again.

“Strange as it may seem,” he said, “I have a sense of pity for the German people. They will be made to pay a terrible price for all the sufferings they have inflicted not only on Jews, but upon Poles, and Czechs, and Slavs, and all the enslaved peoples. One day there will be a terrible vengeance. It will be their turn to be hunted animals, hiding

amid their ruins. Their cities will be blasted off the earth. Their children will be buried under the debris. The sky above them will be dark with bombing airplanes. Their young soldiers will be killed in the streets of occupied countries by men and women without mercy in their eyes or hearts. I see a vision of Germany, once so civilized and so prosperous, swept by fire and drenched in blood, and as always happens the innocent will suffer for the guilty, and the children will pay for the sins of their fathers. I am sorry for the Germans. I have no lust for vengeance in my own heart, though the guilty must be punished. I pray only for a time when justice and liberty are as common as the air we breathe, and when even a Jew may walk about without fear of persecution, or insult, or social contempt.”

“I want vengeance,” said his daughter. “I shall be glad to see Germany soaked in blood.”

Her dead eyes came to life. There was a fire of hatred in them.

“You are young,” said her father, putting his hand on her shoulder. “When one gets old, hatred and desire for vengeance pass out of one’s mind and heart. One has only pity and love—pity, above all, for the wicked who spoil life for themselves and others—love for all humanity, so betrayed by its leaders, so blind and powerless, so ignorant of God and His Commandments.”

He bowed politely and said, “Thank you very much,” to a Clipper steward who brought him a bowl of bouillon.

Barton had a talk with Christabel Farley, the film star. She was a graceful creature, with the face of a young faun, with eyes rather apart, and a boyish look. She came up to him in the smoking compartment and sat on the arm of his chair until he surrendered his seat to her.

“You’re John Barton, aren’t you?” she asked with a friendly smile.

“How did you know?” asked Barton; “and what does it mean to you?”

“It means quite a lot,” she answered, “I’m one of your fans. Over the wireless. During the blitz. You helped me to be brave.”

John laughed.

“I can’t believe that.”

“Quite true,” she assured him. “My mother and I were quaking down in the cellar of our little house in Chelsea. We had a wireless down there, and when you told us about the courage of the people, and especially of the girls—nurses and ambulance drivers—I said I can’t let down that American who thinks so well of us. God, help me to be brave!”

“I expect you were very brave,” said John. “You London girls are mighty courageous.”

“I’m Irish,” she told him, “but I was born in London. My father was a coster in the Old Kent Road. I learned to dance round a piano organ. I’m a child of the slums.”

“You’re a fairy-tale child,” said John. “Every movement you make belongs to elfland.”

“Those are pretty words,” she said. “Are they sincere?”

"I always talk with sincerity," he answered, and he did not tell a lie.

She leaned towards him and spoke in almost a whisper.

"My heart bleeds for you. I wanted to tell you. I read about your wife's death. I weep for you in my heart."

"Thanks," said John, "but you must weep for many people, for many girls killed in the raids."

"I do," said Christabel Farley. "I weep for them all in my heart, though I keep laughing eyes. I suppose you think I'm a heartless little film actress, with the brain of a canary, or less than that!"

"Not at all," said John politely.

"Perhaps I haven't much of a brain," said Christabel Farley, "but Our Lady gave me a heart. I'm a Catholic, you know, being Irish."

"That's all right with me," said John.

She spoke in her low-toned voice again, which was almost a whisper.

"You may wonder why I talk to you like this. I don't as a rule to anybody. But I suppose it's because we're flying above the clouds in this dreamlike way, out of life for a little while, and rather close, perhaps, to the other world. Shall I tell you something else about myself, so that when you see me in a picture laughing and singing and dancing you will say I know the real woman behind that mask, I know how much she has suffered, and how salt have been her tears."

"Tell me," said John, "if you feel like it."

"I'm a married woman," she said. "I'm Mrs. Michael Hunt, and I'm a widow after a month of marriage. My Michael was killed on Dunkirk Sands. All my heart was his. I loved him with my soul. I thought I should die when they told me, and wished I was dead. Now I'm going to Hollywood to sing, and dance, and laugh."

"I'm sorry," said John; "but that's life, isn't it? That's the infernal tragedy of life in the world war number two."

"Are you going to bring your people in on our side?" asked Mrs. Michael Hunt.

"I'm going to have a try," said John. "But it's hopeless, I guess."

"It's a great mission you have," she told him. "You would be saving millions of tortured people, and all the beauty of life, if you could get your people to join us against Hitler."

"Too big a job for me," said John. "I'm no miracle worker."

She looked at him, with her head a little on one side.

"I'm not so sure," she told him. "You're the type of man who might put a spell on many people. And if you worked a miracle, you would only be the instrument of God. I'll burn a little candle for you before the statue of Our Lady. A little flame of faith in John Barton, Crusader. A little petition for his good luck. Do you mind?"

"I like the idea of it," said John. "It can't do me any harm."

He watched her later on this trip. One of the officers of the Clipper was greatly taken with her. She was laughing and joking with him.

She has a dead boy in her heart, thought John. He was killed on Dunkirk Sands. Perhaps in a month or two she will marry again. Life is like that—especially life in Hollywood.

Scraps of conversation. Self-revelations. Men and women talking to each other as though they had left their bodies for a little while and were looking back on themselves, and were between one life and another. Below them were the fleecy clouds. Above them was the illimitable sky, darkening as they flew onwards, darkening, presently, to a blue velvety darkness spangled with stars. John stretched himself on one of the bunks, and slept in his underclothes. Bennett Chudleigh had undressed and put on his pajamas.

People were drowsing in their chairs. Conversation ceased.

Lights were dimmed. The Clipper was flying through the night.

They dropped down in the Azores in time for lunch on a sun-drenched isle, with the sea golden and glittering around them.

“A pleasant little Paradise,” said Chudleigh. “I wouldn’t mind spending the rest of my life here with one fair woman and several books.”

“What books?” asked Jane Harrington.

Chudleigh shook his head and laughed.

“That’s too much like a question addressed to the Brain Trust on the B.B.C.”

“It’s very odd,” said the large lady, “but I feel as though this flight across the Atlantic is taking a long, long time. I seem to have been sitting in this aircraft for weeks and weeks.”

Chudleigh agreed.

“One’s mind travels so much faster than the Clipper. I have the same illusion, that I’ve been on the Clipper for a prodigious space of time.”

“I’d like to feel the solid earth under my feet again,” said Jane Harrington. “I am not really sylphlike. I want a lot of earth under my feet.”

But they flew away from the Azores and dropped down again after some hours of flight in Bermuda, on the edge of its low-lying shore. There was another meal interrupted for John Barton by a reporter with a strong Scots accent, who wanted to interview him.

“It’s grand to meet you, Mr. Barton,” he said. “The wife and I listen to you on the wireless, and you do a fine job. Why are you going back to the United States?”

“A bit of lecturing and broadcasting,” said John, always courteous to his brothers of the press.

“I hope you’ll bring over the isolationists,” said the Scot. “They’re very wrong-headed, in my opinion, but then I’m a Scotsman who fought in the last war, so I may be prejudiced.”

He wanted to know Barton’s opinion about the way the war was going.

“Do you think they’ll take Moscow?”

"I don't know a thing about Russia," answered John cautiously. "Hitler made his first great mistake when he attacked the Russians."

"What would have happened if he had invaded Britain after Dunkirk?" said the Scotsman. "It was a miracle for us."

Barton nodded.

"The boys of the R.A.F. worked the miracle and stopped Hitler's idea of invasion."

"Will the United States come into this war?" asked the reporter.

"I certainly think so," said John, "before the end."

"Can I quote you as saying that?"

"Why not?"

The reporter had other questions to ask, and then shook hands warmly.

"I want to thank you personally," he said, "for all the good things you've said about the British folk. For an American you've been very, very generous, Mr. Barton."

"No," said John. "I've only tried to tell the truth."

It was time to get aboard the Clipper again.

Chudleigh had something to say from his seat next to John.

"That reporter fellow picked you out, although there are some other distinguished people on board. You're a famous fellow, Barton."

John shook his head.

"Nothing like that. It's just because I'm an ordinary reporter. We have our secret brotherhood."

Journey's End came when the Clipper came within sight of the New York skyline, and when all those high towers piercing the blue dome tilted sideways crazily as the aircraft banked steeply and made a perfect descent at La Guardia airport.

England is three thousand miles away, thought John Barton. It is already like a dream . . . Anne . . . Judy . . . Bombs . . . Black-out . . . Spurfold Green . . . England in wartime.

He felt terribly far away from England, and homesick, although he had come back to his own country.

NOT having any great conceit of himself, Barton was surprised and gratified by his reception at La Guardia airport. His chief, old Mr. Lansing, proprietor of the New York *Observer*, for which he had been special correspondent, had done him the great honour of coming to greet him.

"Glad to see you, Barton," he said; "you've been doing fine work, and everybody knows it."

John grasped his hand.

"Say, Mr. Lansing," he said, "it's mighty good of you to be here today."

And there was Charlie Seligmann, the news editor, who had been his torturer and critic when he was a cub reporter, whose cables to him in London he had often cursed, but whose friendship was stanch and true.

He pump-handled John's arm and put a hard hand on his shoulder.

"Well, Johnny Barton," he said, "I can't say you look like a man who has been through hell-fire. But we're proud of you, son, and you'll have a great reception in the office."

There was sympathy as well as affection in this big fellow's dark eyes. John knew the meaning of it. He was thinking of Anne. Both Mr. Lansing and Charlie Seligmann had written very kind letters about Anne's death. He had read them with stricken eyes, and had failed to answer them.

There was a bunch of reporters eager to ask a thousand questions, as though coming from England he knew all about Russia, and Libya, and the morale of Germany, and the inner secrets of the war. Press photographers circled round him taking snapshots.

"Say, you boys," said Barton, "why are you making such a fuss about a guy like me? I'm not used to it. It's like dog eating dog. I'm one of you. It's my job to do the interviewing. Besides, I belong to a rival paper."

Mr. Lansing, his old chief, looking older than when he last saw him, laughed at these words.

"You've broken bounds beyond the *Observer*," he said. "Your broadcast talks are only second to the President's fireside chats. My personal prestige has gone up because you were still on my staff."

"I can't believe it," said John modestly. "All this takes me by surprise."

"You'll have to get rid of the English accent, sonny," said Charlie Seligmann, "but I must say those English clothes fill me with awe and admiration. Now we'll have to get you through the Customs."

They got him through the Customs in double-quick time. A word from Mr. Lansing, a nod from Charlie Seligmann, worked like a magic spell. His fellow travellers in the Clipper envied the rapidity with which he was passed.

He shook hands with those he had known best in the Clipper—Bennett Chudleigh, Jane Harrington, Christabel Farley, and the old Jew and his daughter. He had an idea that he would never see any of them again. They would belong to his dream world. He had come from one world to another, from one dream to another. Here he was in New York during a heat wave. Less than twenty-four hours ago he had been in England, three thousand miles away. The English climate had changed into this fierce heat which rose up and smote him from the pavements. His shirt was wringing wet already. In a taxi with Mr. Lansing and Charlie Seligmann, he plunged into the life of New York with its millions of Americans walking in their shirt sleeves, mopping their foreheads, crowding into the drugstores for cool drinks, hurrying on their usual business of life. What did they think of Europe? What did they care about England? All that was interesting drama for the films and the radio. They would take an interest in it if they had time to look at the headlines, or watched the news reel, but it would not affect their daily life or touch their minds for more than a passing moment each day.

Russians were dying in heaps on the roads outside Moscow, Germans were trying to smash their way through with tanks and flame throwers, and dive bombers, and weight of metal hurled against human flesh. In New York all that belonged to another planet.

“You’re looking pretty thin, Barton,” said Mr. Lansing. “American food will do you good after English rations. We eat too much, of course, and waste more. I daresay it will shock you at first, coming from the war zone.”

“What beats me,” said Charlie Seligmann, “is how you stood up to all that bombardment. But, then, I ain’t a brave man. I’m a coward.”

“When everybody has done shaking hands with you in the office,” said Mr. Lansing, “I’d like some quiet words with you. I want to ask you plenty of questions, and maybe you would like to know a few things about the United States.”

John Barton was surprised again by the cordiality of his reception in the *Observer* office. As he passed through the newsroom his old colleagues rose and crowded round him, gripping his hand and almost shaking it off.

“Three cheers for Johnny Barton!” shouted Charlie Seligmann.

They gave him three cheers. Such a thing had never been done before in the newsroom.

“Say, you fellows,” said John, “I just don’t know how to thank you. And I don’t know what it’s all about, anyway. I haven’t done a darned thing except report the heroism of the English folk. But I’m very much touched by this welcome, and if it goes on any longer I shall burst into tears.”

There was a laugh on his lips, but his eyes were moist. It was a great honour, he thought, for a fellow reporter, and it really made him feel like losing self-control. Perhaps that was due to the Lisbon microbe, and the bash on the head by the two

bandits, and the heat in New York, which made him feel faint and sick, and the kindness of men with whom he had worked, and the emotion of leaving England.

“Come into my room, Barton,” said the chief.

THERE was a time when Barton had entered Mr. Lansing's room with nervous apprehension. A summons to the chief might mean the sack for a member of his staff who had failed to make good. He had no mercy on reporters who faked their stories, or fuddled themselves by overdoses of alcohol. On the other hand, there were rare moments when he was generous in his praise, or at least spoke a few dry words of approbation.

"You've been doing good work. That was a fine story of yours." This ascetic-looking old man had raised his paper to a high place by his integrity, his cautious idealism, and liberal mind. The *Observer* stood for all that was best in the American outlook and character. It was also renowned for its handling of news under the untiring guidance and drive of Charles Seligmann, who had a genius for hunting down a good story by slave-driving his reporters.

"Have a cigar, Barton," said Mr. Lansing, sitting at his desk and lighting a cigar for himself.

He looked older and more frail since John Barton had last been in this room before sailing with Anne to wartime England.

"I'd like to put you wise to the mental and moral setup of the American people in this year of grace," he said presently. "Maybe you're out of touch with the present mood?"

"I'd like to know, Mr. Lansing," said Barton. "Your opinion is the only one I value."

Mr. Lansing smiled dryly and said: "That's nice of you."

He remained silent for a few moments, as though turning over in his mind the various points he wanted to make.

"The American people," he said presently, "are fast asleep. Nothing will wake them up except some mighty shock which I guess they're going to get one day. They're sunk in self-complacency and a false sense of security. They believe that American prosperity is set fair, and that nothing will ever touch their standard of life. Their imagination—they haven't any—is incapable of realizing that America cannot remain isolated and secure in a world on fire. They don't, and cannot, believe that Hitler and his demons are a menace to them. They are indifferent and disbelieving to any danger across the Pacific. They think the American Marines could hold up the Japs if they dared to get aggressive. The European war interests them rather less than baseball, and rather more than Walt Disney's latest film. It's good drama for daily reading—if they read, which most don't. The generation which followed the last war is materialistic in outlook and hostile to any thought of self-sacrifice or discomfort. It doesn't want to die

for any ideal. It doesn't believe in idealism. It wants to feed well, and food is abundant. It wants plenty of amusement, which it gets by running around in new model automobiles, lunching at one of Howard Johnson's roadside houses, going to the movies, dancing in dim lights, or throwing parties for the younger folk. They're sympathetic towards the occupied countries and subscribe a few dollars apiece for the aid of Greeks, Czechs, Poles, and other stricken peoples—quite generously—but as a rich baron threw largesse to the poor devils of life on his way. The American people put up a mental resistance to any suggestion that they will be touched by world events in Europe or Asia, or called upon one day—soon—to throw themselves into this struggle for self-preservation and democratic liberties. The isolationists are working behind the scenes as well as mouthing their falsities on public platforms.

“Big business stands behind them. Labour is too busy with its own war to trouble about Hitler's war. Its leaders are organizing strikes not to raise the standard of wages among the workers, but to get political power, and hold up the community to ransom. We're at a low moral ebb, Barton, and you have come back to a people steeped in self-indulgence, self-interest, and self-deception.”

“I find that too harsh, Mr. Lansing,” said John. “The President is giving a great lead. Step by step he is leading the way to our co-operation with those, like England, who are fighting for civilized ideals.”

Mr. Lansing gave a faint smile.

“The President is like the boy who cried ‘Wolf! Wolf!’ Nobody pays much heed to his warnings. The people get a momentary thrill out of his fireside chats, and straightway forget. They think the old man is talking highbrow stuff which doesn't affect them at all. Others—all his enemies, of whom he has plenty—hate his guts. They know—those who understand the meaning of his words and acts—that he is leading the way to participation in this war. It gets them scared. It makes them feel cold in their bowels. Participation in the war for liberty would mean grinding taxation, curtailment of profit, Government control of industry. They regard Mr. Roosevelt as Public Enemy No. 1. They just feel murderous about him.”

He continued on this theme for some time, until Barton could get a word in.

“I'll be finding these things out for myself, Mr. Lansing. But if you're right about the lethargy of the American people—and I'm not doubting it—what in hell is the use of my doing a lecture tour, and giving broadcast talks to the nation? I'm one of the world's worst speakers. I'm going to make a dumbbell of myself.”

Mr. Lansing did not agree.

“You've made a big place for yourself, Barton. Your broadcast talks from England thrilled us all. Your public believes in you. They'll take anything from you. They'll say: ‘That man John Barton gives us the real dope.’ It's not that you talk like an orator, Barton. You ain't that. It's because something comes through—truth, and feeling, and pity, and human warmth. You'll make a dint on the public mind. You'll help to kill the isolationists, that fellow Val D. Turner, for example. I regard your tour as important.”

“I'd hate to let down that good opinion,” said John. “But I know my own limitations. I'm not one of the spellbinders.”

He rose to leave Mr. Lansing's room, and felt a warm clasp of his hand from the old man.

Mr. Lansing lowered his voice and spoke huskily for a moment.

"I haven't said a word about Lady Anne," he said. "My wife and I were distressed beyond words when we heard the dreadful news. Mrs. Lansing was greatly upset, having known and loved your beautiful wife."

"Thanks a lot," said John quietly. His wound was healing. He could bear the mention of her name without flinching.

Barton had arranged to spend a little time before his lecture tour with some cousins of his in New York. He hated the idea, but had accepted their invitation under pressure from his mother. He hardly knew Marshal Staunton, whom he had met only three or four times, amused and attracted by the personality of the man who was the editor of a financial paper, and had avoided somehow the worse effects of the depression, so that he remained well off in a moderate way, sufficient, anyway, to keep his family in a big apartment on Park Avenue. His wife was a social worker in a New York settlement, and not unintelligent. He had one daughter whom Barton remembered as a pretty girl of nineteen or so, and a son two years older than that, and now—probably twenty-five or twenty-six at the present time—a sergeant in the United States Army, having been drafted soon after leaving Harvard.

Marshal Staunton flung open the door of his apartment on the sixth floor when Barton arrived and touched the bell.

"Grand to see you," he said heartily. "How's your mother? How's Judy? Come right in and make yourself at home. We're mighty glad to have you with us."

He was a tall, heavily made man, with a powerful, clean-shaven face, baldish head, and blue eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses.

Mrs. Staunton came into the hall and blushed slightly when John kissed her cheek, as a perfectly good cousin by marriage.

"It's good of you to come to us," she said. "We're all very proud of you. Let me show you your room."

It was a very good room with a half-poster bed in the colonial style—white wood furniture and Persian rugs on polished boards. He had his own bathroom and access to a balcony which looked down on New York.

"It's all very simple," she said.

John laughed.

"It's all very luxurious. I've been living in a Surrey cottage under old beams, the former habitation of English ploughmen."

"Marshal is looking forward to your visit," she told him. "But I must warn you that he has very violent opinions about almost everything. Don't take them too seriously."

She laughed a little nervously, as though afraid that John might take offence at her husband's violence of expression.

"I'm all for free speech," said John. "May I step out on to that balcony?"

He stepped out and looked over New York with its high towers and great blocks of buildings. Down below was a long, straight street, like a cañon cleft between two mountains. It was getting dark on this summer night, and lights were beginning to twinkle from millions of windows. As he watched, a button seemed to be touched by an invisible hand, and the tall towers gleamed against the velvet darkness of the sky.

"Gosh," said John. "I must say it's very beautiful. It knocks one every time after a few months' absence. How fantastic and unreal! In England at this time they would be putting up the black-out in every little home. Here, it's lights up and everything as usual. Let's have the hell of a good time while those Europeans are dying in heaps."

"Some of us think of those Europeans," said Mrs. Staunton quickly, as though resenting criticism. "I work on a committee of Bundles for Britain. We have sent over several ambulances and canteens."

"Fine!" said John. "When is America going to send over five million men?"

"I must say I hope that will never happen," said Mrs. Staunton. "Can't England take care of her own war? I mean if we send so many munitions."

"Only a dribble," answered John. "Nothing much has come yet, and England needs our man power to win this war which she is fighting for us as well as for herself."

"I'm afraid I don't see it from that point of view, Cousin John," answered Mrs. Staunton quietly. "But we won't argue about the war. Marshal is sure to have a few things to say about it later on."

She gave a little laugh, as though making an amusing understatement.

A girl came in with some cut flowers. She was a pretty girl, tall, lithe, and boyish, with her hair cut like an Elizabethan page. She wore blue velvet trousers under a yellow pullover.

"Hullo, John," she said. "I'm sorry I'm late with these stink-weeds. They were meant to welcome you." With none of the timidity of her mother, she presented her cheek to be kissed.

"I'm one of your fans," she said. "Whenever you're on the radio, I hang on your words and get terribly thrilled."

"Even if you're at a cocktail party, or dancing to a jazz band?"

Delia Staunton repudiated his suggestion. "I'm seldom at a cocktail party and never dancing to a jazz band. I take life seriously. I'm learning to fly, and on off days I'm attending lectures on first-aid."

"That's great," said John. "You're a farseeing young woman."

"I don't know about that," she answered, "but the indifference of everybody to this war makes me mad. They're all dumb. Can't they see that if England is beaten we shall be next on the list for Hitler's dream of world domination? In any case, haven't some of us English blood in our veins? Are we going to stand by while the little old mother country in which our own ancestors laid their bones, and in which their spirit moved, is reduced to dust and ashes, and put under Nazi rule? Oh, I just want to scream sometimes when we give a party and somebody makes a sneering remark about the English."

“Delia,” said Mrs. Staunton, “you take after your father in being so violent. I have to live with two volcanoes always in eruption.”

Marshal Staunton was not in the least violent at his dinner table that evening where he had some guests to meet John. He was a good host and mixed his cocktails with a generous hand. But there was often an ironical smile in his eyes when they did the talking, and once turned and winked at John when one of them—Mrs. Grant Fellowes, the wife of a professor at Columbia, who sat on the opposite side of the table—made the remark that there were too many war commentators on the radio and too much war news in the papers.

“It casts a gloom over the American mind,” she said.

“Let us forget these horrors,” she added.

“That is to say: let us eat, drink, and be merry, while the rivers of Europe run red with blood,” said Staunton. “Let us put our heads deep in the sand while the flames go raging round the world, so that we can smell burning while our noses are well buried.”

“Now, Marshal, you big darling,” said Mrs. Fellowes, “you know you’re trying to pick a quarrel with me. I’m not a heartless female, but I think we have a right to happiness. We’ve earned it, haven’t we?”

“How?” asked Staunton.

“By creating a good type of democracy. By showing the world how to enjoy liberty. By making ourselves the sanctuary of all oppressed races.”

“And by wallowing in a beastly materialism, by refusing to share responsibilities in human affairs, and by allowing ourselves to be ruled by bohunks!”

“Now, Marshal,” said Mrs. Staunton from the other end of the table, “don’t begin to get violent. You’ve been behaving very nicely until now.”

“I’m never violent,” said Staunton. “I’m a mild-mannered fellow.”

The conversation switched to plays in New York. There was a famous playwright at the table who told some amusing stories about actors and actresses, most of whom had almost killed his plays.

John knew nothing of these plays, and for a time his mind wandered away from the conversation. His mind wandered back to England. At this hour it would be a sleeping England. Not a gleam of light would show from one end of the land to the other. The moon would be shining over the ruins around St. Paul’s and all the other ruins now being tidied up. There would be a drone of airplanes over Spurfold village—British bombers and fighters on their way to a raid over France or Germany. Judy might be lying awake thinking of her prisoner of war. Mothers, hearing the sound of those planes, would pray to God for the safety of their sons. But they would die, those boys, at the rate of 5 per cent over Bremen or Düsseldorf. There would be empty larders in most little houses. Just enough to eat, and nothing more. Here there was too much food; too much of everything, and frightful waste. It was the land of abundance. They wanted to keep it like that, according to Mr. Lansing. They were utterly selfish, according to Mr. Lansing and Marshal Staunton. What was he doing over here? Why had he come on this futile mission to his own people? They didn’t care a damn about the war. In a way, why should they? It was a long way off, that war. He had just come from the war

zone, and already it seemed infinitely remote. So must it feel a thousand times more to people in the Middle West, in the Southern states, even in this New York.

A voice spoke to him quietly. It was the voice of his pretty cousin Delia, who sat next to him.

“Back in England?” she asked.

He nodded.

“Yes. I still feel strange in this city and in this way of life.”

“It must seem revolting to you,” said Delia.

John smiled at her.

“No. Not revolting, only strange. I feel a bit of an alien. I’ve become steeped in English life and English hopes. I belong over there. What are all these people talking about now?”

“The World Series,” said Delia.

They were talking about baseball matches now in progress. They became excited on the subject. They all talked together.

After dinner there was a game of darts in Staunton’s study. Staunton poured out highballs and served them round indefatigably, between his turns of dart-throwing, at which he was a master, though closely approached by Dewar Allen, the playwright. Bets were placed and taken.

“John is the dark horse,” said Staunton. “The fellow has a straight eye and a steady hand. That’s because alcohol costs too much in England. Gosh! Look at that man. I believe he has been playing darts every night in English pubs.”

“I’ve played in some of the London shelters,” admitted John.

He found himself getting interested in the contest. He was pleased when he made some first-class shots. He forgot about his wound—it was healing. He drank too many highballs and became flushed, and laughed excessively at Staunton’s wisecracks.

“Damn it, this long cousin of mine must be the champion of Peckham and Camberwell,” said Staunton. “While we thought of him walking under a hail of German bombs, and dragging English babies out of ruined houses, he was playing darts with London costers and taxicab men. Who will back the old favorite for ten bucks?”

“Daddy,” said Delia, “you’re drunk.”

“And you’re a little liar,” said her father. “I’m as sober as any poor devil in Sing Sing. I can’t get a kick out of this whisky. I believe it’s watered. And my own wife is playing far beyond her own average, just to beat the old man for once. It’s a conspiracy.”

He became very sober and very violent after all his guests had departed except Dewar Allen, the playwright.

“I’m going to talk about the war,” he announced.

“For goodness’ sake don’t, Daddy,” said Delia. “You always get violent, and you always talk the most dreadful nonsense.”

"I talk God's own truth," said Staunton, "especially when I've had one over the six. Now I want to question our distinguished cousin, who beat me to a frazzle at my own dart board. John Barton, lad, what do you want to do over here? I'm told that you're going on a lecture tour throughout the United States. Is there any truth in that rumour?"

"There is," said John.

"Laddie," said Staunton grimly, "don't do it. Take the advice of an older man. You will be talking to audiences of which 50 per cent are women—those frightful and pernicious women who go to hear all lecturers because they think themselves highbrows, and because they want to escape from dreary evenings with their dreary husbands. In any case, my dear fellow, you won't be able to stir up a ripple of enthusiasm in this country for participation in the war, which I take it is your object in coming."

"I'll have a try," said John.

"And why the hell should you?" asked Staunton. "This war ought never to have happened. The peoples of the world have been victimized again by their leaders, who are all a bunch of crooks."

"Marshal," said Mrs. Staunton, "don't get excited."

"John Barton," said Staunton, ignoring his wife's remark, "you're a newspaperman. You're behind the scenes. You know as well as I do that we have all been betrayed by political crooks who made a filthy mess of the last peace, broke all their promises of a new and better world for the common man—their gun fodder—and let things drift on to this second world war while they held on to power, wallowed in corruption, made hogs of themselves, and duped the poor deluded masses. Don't you know all that?"

"Some of it," said John. "But they're not all crooks. Winston Churchill. Mr. Roosevelt. Cordell Hull. Sumner Welles."

"Oh God, oh God!" cried Staunton. He clasped his big hands and leaned against the wall like a man flinging himself into the depths of despair.

"Daddy," said Delia, "you're getting into one of your bad moods."

"O God, our help in ages past," said Staunton. "I was in the last war. I was wounded at Château-Thierry. I saw my best friends killed. What came out of all that massacre? Filth. Corruption. Vested interests. Racketeering. Now it's all beginning again with the same old slogans—a world made safe for democracy—a war to end war, a universal justice, a new and lovely world. And, by God, the same old men are at the same old game—Churchill, mouthing big words in the heroic style."

"He's a great fellow," said John. "He speaks for the old spirit of England. After Dunkirk he gave a noble lead."

"Jesus Christ!" cried Staunton, clasping his hands in prayer. "Forgive this child because he knows not what he says. He's an American reporter, but he's been fooled by the English, and fooled by that bunch of crooks who are leading England into ruin and death after committing every folly and every crime of which mortal men are capable, and that's saying quite a lot. The English Labour party voted against rearmament and goaded on their government to declare war on almost everybody, starting with Japan and Italy. The Tory mind in England, represented by old Chamberlain and old Baldwin,

let the nation rot, and let Hitler drive ahead in armaments. In this country it is the same. In all countries it is the same. The mob is at the mercy of its political crooks. Men like myself are helpless against their control of our own destiny. Intelligence is ignored and overruled by those who have their grip on the political machine; the professional crooks, the dishonest spellbinders, the masters of dope and duplicity, the cynics, and hypocrites, and bloodsuckers, who get control and use it to their own power and prestige. Wasn't that true of France? Isn't that what's happening in England? Isn't it God's truth about our Senate and Congress? You know it is, John Barton. I defy you to say otherwise."

"I don't agree," said Barton. "I don't see this conspiracy of villainy. I see most men trying to do their best in a fumbling way. The British Members of Parliament aren't stage villains. I've been in Europe long enough to give up the American habit of seeing everything as black or white. Life, as I see it now, is made up of half-tones, not all good nor all bad."

"Weakness!" exclaimed Staunton. "Oversophistication. The damnable vice of tolerance, which is the curse of modern life."

"Aren't you being very rude to Cousin John?" asked Delia.

"I'm being rude to the whole setup of so-called civilization," said Staunton. "I'm being rude to dirty crooks who have set fire to the world—my world, in which I hoped to live in peace, playing a game of darts after a day's work. They're arranging for a new massacre of youth. My son will be killed in some jungle or desert. Millions of boys will be killed before they have had a decent share of life."

"If you talk like that," said Mrs. Staunton, "I shall go to bed."

A whiteness had crept into her face at this prophecy of her son's death.

"Daddy, you're dreadful," said Delia.

"I'm sorry, my dear," said Staunton, "but we are old enough to tell the truth to each other. I am telling the truth, and putting it very mildly. If I really let myself go——"

He let himself go somewhat later with a terrible denunciation of political crookedness, greed for power and wealth, and the deep-seated hypocrisy of the world's leaders, bankers, industrialists, and government officials.

He paced up and down his study like a caged lion. He groaned heavily at his own black view of life; he shook his fist at fate which decreed the eternal hoodwinking of the masses.

Then suddenly he stopped and laughed.

"Perhaps I've been talking too much," he said. "John, it's your innings. Tell us about England. Tell us about the chances of this war. Tell us what you are going to tell your American audiences."

It was four in the morning before John had told his tale.

He spoke of the spirit of the British people under months of air bombardment. He described the Battle of Britain and that victory in the air won by the boys of the R.A.F. He told of all the heroism he had seen among young girls, and old women, and small shopkeepers, and every class—so defiant of all that Hitler might hurl against them, so

gay in their fatalism, so grim in their determination to smash the tyranny which was enslaving Europe, and threatening their own lives. He told them of what he had seen in English dockyards and factories and air-raid shelters, and through it all came his deep admiration for a people who in this great ordeal had revealed the old qualities of Shakespeare's England. Whatever the poverty of their leadership, he said—barring Churchill—whatever the mistakes made by their statesmen—so many in the years after the last war—the people themselves had shown their will power, and a kind of spiritual sense of sacrifice, not only for their own liberties and way of life, but for the rescue of stricken peoples and the smashing of the evil beast which had come out of its ancient lairs.

“They are fighting a crusade against Satanism,” said John. “There can be no armistice with that. They will fight it to the death, even if it is their death. Are the American people going to stand by watching this frightful struggle, in which Britain and all civilized ideas may be destroyed?”

They listened to him intently. Delia and her mother had tears in their eyes once or twice. Staunton sat in a deep armchair, holding a glass of whisky, but not drinking it. His eyes were fixed on John's face. Never once did he interrupt. Once or twice he sighed heavily—so heavily that the sigh was almost a groan.

Several times he put a handkerchief up to his forehead, to wipe off beads of moisture, because of the warm night in New York.

Then at last, when John was silent, he rose and put his hand on his cousin's shoulder.

“You told that damn well,” he said. “If you talk like that all over the United States the isolationists will be routed. No, we can't let England go down. By God, we can't do that, though I hate to say so. I'm not anti-English—don't the bones of my old ancestors lie in an English churchyard?—but I've been anti-war, and anti all the bandits who have let it happen. To hell with Hitler, anyhow.”

Delia kissed her cousin John when he said good night.

“You were wonderful,” she told him. “You thrilled me to the marrowbones. God Save England!”

“And now to bed,” said Staunton. “It's four in the morning.”

BARTON had time—three weeks of time—to form his own impressions of the American mind and mood, as far as he could get in touch with it in New York, before beginning his lecture tour, which was due to start in Boston early in October. New York, as well he knew, was not typical of the American character. It was foreign, feverish, sophisticated, and exotic, in many respects. It was more in touch with Europe than the rest of the United States. Many of his friends knew Paris and the Riviera, Rome and Florence, Vienna and Berlin. Others belonged definitely to the intellectual set following the latest trends—that was a catchword of theirs—in art and music and literature, dwelling mostly in Greenwich Village, to which he had once taken Anne. They made a game of poverty if they were poor, and flung cushions on the floor for guests who crowded into their studios or apartment houses for many cocktails and much conversation. John knew that crowd of old and met them again. They stated fantastic theses, followed the lure of some farfetched idea, and talked for effect without being concerned with truth or reason. The women drank too much, smoked too much, and talked too much, with wild enthusiasms for some bit of genius which they discovered, or thought they had discovered. They dined in little foreign restaurants, or prepared sketchy meals in their own abode with the aid of Mr. Heinz and his fifty-seven varieties. They were in dressing gowns at eleven o'clock in the morning and merry and bright at two o'clock the next morning. Yes, he knew that crowd and liked them, because they happened to amuse him. But, coming from England in wartime, they seemed to be as futile as dancing dolls, and as negligible in a world war as was the cast of a musical comedy in a London blitz.

It was in the streets, and shops, and taxicabs, and subways, that he heard more honest stuff, and the voice of the people.

The New York taxi drivers were a shrewd lot with whom he often talked.

“Back from England, eh?” said one of them. “Well, you must have had a hell of a time. But what’s the matter with the English, anyhow? Are they making a habit of retreats and evacuations? And ain’t they leaving all the fighting to their colonials—Australians, and Canadians, and South Africans, and New Zealanders? Where are the English?”

John answered rather sharply:

“Wherever there’s fighting. Seventy per cent of the English do all the fighting and the dying. Their merchant seamen are doing a swell job taking ships through the wolf packs of German submarines and under the flights of dive bombers. The English boys of the R.A.F. are swell guys.”

“You surprise me,” said the driver. “You’re an American, ain’t you?”

“Born and bred,” said John.

“Now let me tell you,” said the taxi driver. “I’ve no love for England or the English. I remember their unpaid debt. They revoked on it and didn’t even say they was sorry. From all I hear about them they’re an arrogant people who look down on all others, and they’re ruled by a Tory crowd who have no use for democracy, and keep the common folk on a low scale of living as war workers, slaves, and slum dwellers. Didn’t you find that so?”

“They have been fighting for liberty through all their history,” said John. “They gave us our laws.”

“I was in the last war,” said the taxi driver. “I was one of the suckers. Now I have a son of fighting age. I’ll see England in hell before they get him overseas to fight their battles. Mark you, I’m sympathetic to sending them arms and ammunition. I’m hostile to Hitler. I’ll admit the London cockneys have stood up well to air bombardment. I doubt whether New Yorkers could do as well if the same thing happened. But I draw the line at an American expeditionary force. So does every mother in America, and most fathers, as far as I know them. Mr. Roosevelt is putting a strain on those of us who believed in him. Step by step he’s leading us into this war. We shall all be dumb if we’re caught again in pulling England’s chestnuts out of the fire. We didn’t make this war, did we? We don’t want it, do we? No sir!”

That was the authentic voice of the American people whose ideas were repeated to John Barton by many men and many types. They had a traditional mistrust of England. Wasn’t every American boy taught that in his reading books? Hadn’t England always been the enemy? And in spite of all the news pouring over the radio and set out in heavy headlines, the American public, it seemed, were deeply ignorant of England’s stupendous war effort, of her immense geographical difficulties or her marvellous recovery since the collapse of France, when England stood alone awaiting invasion, with few soldiers and few weapons. Propaganda and the old habit of English good form made them give all credit—if there was any credit—to the Australians and South Africans. Few English regiments were ever mentioned. It was a fatal blunder against which he had appealed in vain to the censorship.

No expeditionary force this time. Those words came to him in New York. They followed him when he travelled west and south.

It was necessary to visit Washington for an interview with the great man whose message had brought John across the Atlantic.

There was another reason for going to the capital. Anne’s brother David was there in the British Embassy, and he had already sent a telegram saying, “When shall I see you?” That would be a painful interview, opening his wound again, but he would have to face it.

He travelled in a night train that was very crowded. Before going to his lower berth he sat in the club car, glancing at the papers and sipping an iced drink. The news from Europe was bad. The Germans were advancing steadily in Russia over the scorched earth which the Russians were leaving behind them, burning their own cities and factories, and grain and stores. The British were not doing well in Libya after their sweep forward against the Italians. General Rommel’s armoured forces, supported by

German infantry, had pushed them back again. But there was not much night raiding over England. London had had a long respite now.

There was a lot of conversation going on in the club car. John Barton overheard some of it. They were mostly men, with only a few women. Probably they were going to Washington to arrange contracts with the British Purchasing Commission, under the Lend-Lease Act.

Four men in the chairs next to his were talking earnestly about the extension of factory plants. At the end of the car there was a group of men in tuxedos, hilarious over their highballs. They were laughing loudly at their own jokes. Opposite sat a husband and wife, silent. The man looked tired or sulky. The woman smoked Camel cigarettes nervously, stubbing one out after a few whiffs, and then lighting another. Other men were reading the *Saturday Evening Post* and other illustrated papers before turning in to their sleeping berths.

The four men who had been talking technical stuff were now on the subject of the war.

"I guess the Germans will take Moscow before the winter. Nothing can stop them. Those Russians can't compete in tanks, guns, and other weapons."

"They're putting up a great fight. Astonishing. The betting was they wouldn't last three weeks."

"The English are no good in this war," said one of the men. "They've gone soft or something. Or they haven't their hearts in the war. Don't do any fighting. They've developed a yellow streak."

Barton stared at him angrily and cursed him inwardly. For a moment he had the idea of intervening and saying: "You're wrong! I've just come from England. They're giving a magnificent lead to the world." What was the good? Why ask for trouble?

One of the other men took up the defence of England.

"There was nothing soft in the way they stood up to the air bombardment."

"I'm talking about the Army," said the other man. "The civilians are all right."

"The Army is recruited from the civilians," argued the other man.

"Maybe it's their bad generalship. They're all half-wits, I'm told. Old cavalry gentlemen who fought in the South African war, or on the Indian frontier. What what? Zwaa zwaa."

He gave what he thought was an imitation of the English accent, and the others laughed.

That's what I'm up against, thought Barton. How can I hope to break it down? Especially as there is a certain amount of truth in it about their generals. We don't really like the English until we get to know them. We hate the English accent until our ears get attuned to it. I went over with all those prejudices. It took me two years to shake them off.

He yawned, rose from his chair, and lurched with the sway of the fast train towards his lower berth. As he went, he heard one of them speak about him.

"Who was that guy glaring at us? English, do you think?"

“No. A perfectly good American, I should say.”

“Well, I don’t care a damn. If he’s English, it may do him a lot of good. They’re so darned arrogant, those English. And now there’s no excuse for it. They’re on the downward curve.”

Barton stayed until he had heard this out, and then departed from the club coach.

“What’s your berth?” asked the porter.

“Lower twelve.”

“Right here, Captain.”

Several pairs of legs stuck out below the green curtains.

“Jeepers creepers,” said a voice with a gurgle of laughter, “I can’t get my trousers off. One has to be an acrobat if one has an upper berth.”

Barton turned in and undressed, putting his collar and tie in the little net above his bed, and hanging up his coat and trousers on the hanger provided for that purpose. From his breast pocket he took out a little mascot and touched it with his lips before wrapping it in a handkerchief and putting it with his collar and tie. It was one piece of a chess set—the white queen.

In Washington he put up at the New Willard.

The reception clerk looked up when he signed his name.

“Mr. Barton who speaks on the radio?” he asked.

Barton nodded.

“It’s nice to have you with us,” said the clerk. “Just back from England?”

“Yep,” said John.

“Glad to get away, I guess? Not very amusing to be in the bull’s-eye of the German target. You certainly saw a lot of it, Mr. Barton.”

“Quite a lot,” said Barton. “What’s my room number?”

He took a cab later to the British Embassy, and asked the hall porter for Mr. David Ede.

“By appointment?”

“No, I’m his brother-in-law. He wants to see me.”

“Kindly fill in a form,” said the hall porter.

He was shown into David Ede’s room, and that young man, with his tall, slim figure and delicate features, rose from his desk and held out his hand.

“Hullo, John.”

They looked at each other for a moment of scrutiny.

David Ede had not changed since Barton had come across him in Rome before the war, when Anne had rescued him from a love affair with a little Italian lady which might have wrecked his career.

“You’re looking fine,” said Barton.

“Thanks. Sit down, won’t you? Have a cigarette.”

There was a slight silence between the two men. They were both thinking of tragic happenings since last they had met. It was some time before David mentioned one of them.

“I was stricken about Anne.”

“Yes,” said John.

That was all. There was no other reference to David’s sister—he had been devoted to her—and John’s wife.

“You have been doing good work for England,” said David presently. “I always tried to hear you on the radio. Great stuff.”

“Thanks,” said John. “What do you think of things here?”

David smiled. He did not seem to think much of things in the United States as far as the war was concerned.

“The isolationists are still pretty strong,” he said. “They want to tomahawk the President, of course. One way of getting at him and his administration is to attack the private habits of our British missions in Washington. They invent stories of licentious living at the expense of the Lend-Lease Act. You would think we were all indulging in Bacchanalian orgies. The fact is, we’re overworked and underpaid, and find it hard to make both ends meet. What’s your plan of action out here?”

“A lecture tour and radio work,” answered Barton gloomily. “I’m shirking it. It’s utterly futile.”

David didn’t think so.

“You’re exactly the man we want,” he said. “English propaganda has been quite negligible. A few English lecturers have come out, but haven’t impressed American audiences. Some of them have the wrong manner, and some of them say the wrong things. You will be a good interpreter. They’ll take what you tell them, being an American with a very big reputation—if I may say so.”

Barton was glad to hear him say so.

“I’m not much good as a crusader,” he said. “I shall be mightily surprised if I alter public opinion by a hairbreadth.

“What’s your own opinion of these United States? I guess you’d give a lot to be back in England?”

David shook his head with a smile.

“I’m having a great time. I’ve fallen in love with the American people. Their kindness is overwhelming. I like their way of life. It’s the nearest thing to real democracy that I’ve met in the world.”

“You surprise me,” said Barton.

He was surprised that this young man, of all men, so fastidious, so very English in tradition, so aristocratic in blood and temperament, should be enthusiastic about American democracy.

They talked awhile about the war and the air bombardment of England. David asked after many places he knew in London—clubs, restaurants, churches, and public

buildings. He was grieved that so many of them had been destroyed.

There was a little restaurant in Soho, now a heap of rubble, as Barton told him.

“I’m sorry about that,” said David. “I used to give little suppers there. They had very good wines.”

He was sorry about Middle Temple Hall, and old Chelsea Church, and the Guildhall, and the ruins round St. Paul’s.

“It couldn’t have been amusing while the blitz was on,” he said, with his English habit of understatement.

Barton laughed.

“No, it wasn’t amusing—unless hell is full of comedy for those who can see the fun of it.”

John remembered something which he had to tell this young man. He had promised to tell it.

“In Lisbon I met Elizabeth von Metsen. She sent her love to you. She says she prays for you.”

David’s fair skin flushed slightly, and he laughed with a look of embarrassment.

“She was a nice creature,” he said. “We were quite friendly for a time.”

He invited John to lunch at the Wardman Park Hotel, where he had a little suite of rooms. He was giving a small luncheon party. Perhaps John would care to join them?

“You will hear the latest rumours in Washington,” he said. “All rumours fly around here—and you will meet one or two amusing people.”

“I shall be glad to come,” said John.

HE did not find them very amusing, but he was interested. Two of the men were on the British Purchasing Board, and they brought their young wives with them. There was also an American journalist and war commentator named Ray Strong, whom John happened to know. Next to him at the luncheon table was a red-haired girl with a pretty face and laughing eyes, whose name was Sheila O'Connor. She played the harp like an angel, he was told by David, who drove him to the Wardman Park Hotel. "She's Irish, of course—I mean Irish-American."

The two English officials were youngish, middle-aged men, who led the conversation at table. One of them—Gerald Sutton—looked very highbrow and ascetic, but kept up a running commentary on the world situation and the state of things in Washington with a kind of acid wit. He took the gloomiest view about the war. He also took the gloomiest view about Washington.

"As a Treasury official," he said, "I know something about red tape and bureaucratic delays, but Washington beats everything in that way. It's the Slough of Despond for anyone who wants to get a move on." He gave some sharply etched portraits of his own chiefs on the British Purchasing Board. They were quite cruel in their caricature of the blimp mind and manner.

"If we go on at the present rate of progress," he said, "the Lend-Lease Act will reach its peak in 1952."

His friend and colleague, John Coverdale, groaned with sheer despair.

"How can we beat the Germans," he asked, "when we use Time as if we had a monopoly of that precious illusion? We have become almost oriental in our indifference to the passing of the hours, the weeks, and the years."

One of the young English wives piped up.

"I feel that I have been in exile for half a lifetime, and yet it is only six months since I came to the United States. I'm suffering from extreme nostalgia for English gardens and English flowers. Washington is beautiful, but barren."

"Have you heard," asked John Coverdale, "that the Comtesse de Beaulieu is passionately in love with the hall porter of the New Willard?"

"That doesn't astonish me at all," said his colleague. "Madame de Beaulieu is a romantic lady, and the hall porter of the New Willard is as handsome as a film star."

Sheila O'Connor, who "played the harp like an angel," turned her red head toward John Barton and smiled at him.

"You're not very conversational," she said. "We haven't exchanged a word yet."

"I'm a good listener," said John.

"You're a good talker also," she told him. "I've heard you on the radio. You've made me weep sometimes, and sometimes you've made me angry."

"Why did you weep, and why were you angry?" he asked.

Sheila O'Connor explained.

"You made me weep because of what you told us about women and children in London during the bombardment. I'm devoted to children. I want to have six when I'm married. And you made me angry because you are propagandist number one for England and the English. I call that un-American."

"You can call it what you like," said John sulkily. "I try to tell the truth about the things I see."

"Truth is very elusive," said Sheila O'Connor. "Is it truth if you turn a searchlight on to one corner of truth and leave out all the rest, all that is bad and black in England, for instance?"

"I haven't found much that is bad and black in England," answered John.

"No?" Her voice was ironical, although she lowered it below the hearing of an English company now in the full tide of Washington gossip. "What about English intolerance, and snobbishness, and social cruelty?"

"Social cruelty?"

"Their slums," said Sheila O'Connor. "You tell us about the heroism of the slum folk. Why should they live in such places? Why should they be heroic for a country which keeps them in such filthy conditions?"

"I'm not in favour of slums," said John, "but we have our own in New York and Chicago."

"I'm Irish," she told him. "Perhaps I'm prejudiced against the English. It's in my blood, I suppose. And it's in the history of Ireland."

"Isn't that old stuff?" asked John.

"Even as Americans," answered Sheila O'Connor, "we have no reason to love the English. They were always our enemies. That's why I don't like Americans who are trying to drag us into this war on behalf of England."

"Then you won't like me," said John. "That's my mission over here. I'm a crusader on behalf of England's war against the devil. It ought to be our war if there's any honesty in idealism."

"I'm an isolationist," she said. "Sorry, Mr. John Barton."

Her laughing eyes were turned on him, and he saw that they were very blue.

"You're the first I've met out here," he told her.

"I'd like to talk to you more, but not at this table," said Sheila O'Connor.

"I'd like to hear you play the harp," he answered.

She saw the subtlety of that remark, and laughed good-naturedly.

"No talk, no harp," she said. "Being Irish, I must wag my tongue a bit."

Before the luncheon ended he accepted an invitation to hear her play the harp one evening. He hoped she would not wag her tongue too much about her isolationism, for which he had no patience.

“The fact is,” said John Coverdale, “we are a nation of amateurs fighting against a nation of professionals. A very unequal combat. When I think of all our ghastly inefficiency I shudder at the future of this war. We are hopelessly outclassed.”

David Ede laughed in his quiet way.

“I find everybody in Washington steeped in pessimism,” he said.

“We know too much,” said Coverdale, “of what is happening behind the scenes. God grant that the Germans don’t know it all.”

“In the bombarded cities of England,” said Barton, “there’s greater faith in future victory.”

“It’s an illusion,” said Coverdale. “Such faith is pitiable. Winston puts a spell upon them. The B.B.C. glamorizes all the news and turns defeats into victories. But I must go back to my desk and pretend to get on with the war.”

It was the end of the luncheon party.

JOHN BARTON had a telephone call from a man at the White House by the name of Stephen Early.

“The President will be happy to meet you, Mr. Barton, after the Press Conference.”

John took a taxicab to the gate of the White House and was kept waiting for a minute or two at the lodge inside the gate until word came through to let him pass.

He felt slightly nervous at this approach to the man who held in his hands the destiny of the American people.

I suppose I ought to feel flattered, he thought. It’s only a few years since I was a cub reporter, now I’m being called to see the President. Well, it’s an honour, but I can’t say I’m keen on it. I feel darned uncomfortable, and my tummy is in a bad state, and I’ve got a headache fit to beat the band.

He was astonished at his own nervousness. That was partly due to physical conditions. Washington was still very warm; he had sat up late at night talking to journalistic friends and drinking bourbon whisky. In bed he had dreamed of Anne, and then had had a nightmare of being in a London bombardment again.

“Hullo, Johnny Barton,” said a voice.

The words were spoken by one of the men—Stuart Knox—who had sat up with him the night before, talking about the war. “Coming to the Press Conference?”

“Yes,” said Barton; “and I shan’t enjoy it. You fellows have got me down by your pessimism and dreadful gloom.”

Stuart Knox laughed.

“Oh, you can’t be cheerful in Washington. It’s Giant Despair’s Castle. We see too much graft, too much intrigue, too much boloney.”

Other pressmen were arriving, and they walked up the path to an old house like an English country mansion without much architectural design. Bits had been added on to the original building from time to time, but it still retained its old-fashioned character and simplicity.

The press men assembled in a big room with white-panelled walls. They gathered round Barton and gave him a good welcome. He had met most of them before when he was a reporter on the New York *Observer*.

“Just back from England? What’s wrong over there?”

“Don’t seem to get on with the war much.”

“Shocking bad generalship.”

“Isn’t it time they started a second front, now that Russia is hard pressed?”

“How long is this war going to last?”

“You made a big hit on the radio, John. How many bucks do they pay you for a talk?”

“You’re looking thin, my boy. English rations, eh?”

“It must be blue hell over there. Glad to be back?”

John Barton parried these questions. But those fellows made him feel good and lifted his headache. Here he was in this room of the White House holding a reception of his own. He had made good somehow. They seemed to think a lot of him for some reason. It was rather pleasing to a fellow. He would have been more pleased if he had not heard so much gloom about the unreadiness of the United States, mentally and morally, to help on the cause of victory. Labour strikes were starting up all over the country. Political labour was making trouble and playing power politics. Hamstringing the President. Deliveries had really hardly begun under the Lend-Lease Act. Production was only just beginning to move. There was no national enthusiasm behind the President’s appeals for aid to Britain. Wages were soaring. Contractors were getting big orders but not filling them. They were out for profit.

There was a move towards an inner door. The President was at his desk awaiting the pressmen. They stood in a half circle around him with their notebooks ready.

“Good morning, you fellows,” said the President genially. “I suppose you have a lot of questions, as usual? What’s on your mind this time?”

John Barton did not ask any questions, but he studied the man who answered those who did. He was a living miracle as he sat there in his chair, looking the picture of health with a ruddy complexion beneath his white hair. He had won an extraordinary victory of the mind over the body. He wore a white silk shirt, revealing a fine torso, and he moved easily in his chair and was restless with his hands. He had perhaps the heaviest responsibilities on his shoulders that any man might bear—to guide the destiny of one hundred and thirty million people in the most powerful nation on earth, at least in material resources and technical efficiency. Since he had come to the White House in 1933 he had led them some way at least out of that Slough of Despond into which their economic system had fallen. His New Deal had won for him the allegiance of the masses and the hatred of Big Business, and Wall Street, and the Republican party. At some dinner tables it would be dangerous to mention Mr. Roosevelt’s name. “That Man,” they called him, as though he were the personification of evil. His domestic policy had been a failure in some of its experiments. It had not been administered without graft and corruption. Public money had been poured out in billions. It was an inexhaustible pump-priming of social credit. He was accused of playing into the hands of revolutionary labour, and having truckled to its leader, an extremist, John Lewis, with whom he had now broken. Political passion had stormed about him. His enemies had used every secret weapon to discredit him and drag him down. Now the isolationists hated him ferociously and accused him on platforms and on the air of leading the people step by step towards a war which he had already declared in his own mind.

But he sat there smiling and cracking jokes with the pressmen as though he had no care in the world, and no enemies, and no physical disability.

He parried many awkward questions with a deft mind. Others he answered frankly, but with the proviso of "That's off the record." He handed out some information which set pencils scribbling in notebooks and was followed by further questions on that subject, which was the American policy in the Pacific and American interests in China.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I've given you something to write about. Now go away and write it."

"Many thanks, Mr. President."

One by one they filed out, but John Barton remained in answer to a sign from the President's secretary, Mr. Stephen Early.

"Who's this?" asked the President, swinging round a little in his chair and smiling at Barton.

When Barton's name was mentioned the President held out his hand and spoke cordial words.

"Nice to see you again. You've been doing fine work, Barton. As I think I wrote in a letter to you, you've been the best interpreter of England to the United States."

"It's kind of you to say so, Mr. President," said Barton.

The President waved a hand.

"Sit down, Barton. Take a cigarette. I'm glad to have a talk with you."

The talk was "off the record," as the President said, and John recorded it only in his mind. But it was a wise talk and heartening. Here was a man who did not blind himself to the enormous difficulties he had to encounter, but who was sure of overcoming them. They were difficulties of geography. The American people were far away on the map from the furnace fires of Europe. It was hard—it was almost impossible—to bring home to their imagination the nearness of the menace which threatened them, because it threatened all the ideals of civilized life, all the Christian code to which the majority still owed allegiance, and, least of all, but important to them, the material prosperity and way of life which they had built up by hard toil and their pioneer struggle. They could not believe that Hitler's New Order in Europe would create a system of slave labour and slave states which the Germans would use for economic supremacy in world markets, from which the United States would be shut out. The President would have to educate them before he could stir them to action. He would have to guide them spiritually and morally before they would be ready to support his foreign policy, which was ultimately—there could be no secret about that—complete co-operation with Britain for the defeat of Hitlerism, even at the risk and cost of war. The history and tradition, as well as the destiny which fate had ordained for them, forbade them to see England go down in a heroic struggle against overwhelming odds. The American Revolution had been with England, but it was, after all, a quarrel within the family, just as the American Civil War had been a family affair. England was fighting now, not only for her own survival, but for the freedom of all liberty-loving peoples. She was hard pressed. She was putting up a glorious effort under the leadership of Winston Churchill. The Americans could not let them down nor leave them in the lurch. But they were asleep. They were deep sunk in ignorance and indifference. The isolationists were working an underhand game, as well as putting out a noisy and plausible propaganda.

Labour was restless and revolutionary because of its leadership. The President knew his enemies. He knew their number and their virulence. He was not afraid of them.

This man, thought Barton, is curiously unafraid. It is more than ordinary courage. It is a kind of boyish confidence in standing up to bullies. He is very boyish, and yet very wise. He is shrewd, and even cynical, and yet unworldly and spiritual. There is a fire in his soul—a white flame—and yet he keeps a sense of humour, and is pretty good at wisecracks. He is very odd and very big. He has an astonishing personality. It is his personality which counts. It is bigger than his brain, though he has a brain.

So Barton thought while he listened to the President, watching the action of his hands, seeing the glint of humour in his eyes, seeing a sudden flash of challenge to his enemies.

He shook hands cordially when Barton rose to take his leave, afraid of overstaying his time.

“Come again. Good luck to you! Kill those isolationists.”

“I will do my best, Mr. President,” said Barton, answering with a smile.

He went out of the President’s room. Somehow he felt changed since he had gone into it. It was the effect of Mr. Roosevelt’s personality. There was some magic in it. Like all magic, it was hard to define—there was no definition possible. One cannot define the effect of radiance, and the President was radiant. It seemed to suffuse him. It was this odd combination of boyishness and sagacity, spiritual vision and shrewdness, a laughing humour and a sense of world tragedy. Perhaps at the back of it all was a kind of old-fashioned loyalty to the American tradition founded upon the English tradition. He knew Shakespeare. He loved many English books. To him, England was the old fairy-tale land of knights and fair ladies, of heroes and heroines, of the characters in Charles Dickens, of Tennyson’s poems, and Kipling’s prose. England was in danger. The enemy had blasted and destroyed many of its ancient shrines. As President of the United States, this blue-eyed, fair-skinned man would lead his people to the rescue of Old England.

“Thank God for Franklin Roosevelt!” said Barton to himself as he walked out of the White House. He repeated the idea that had come into his head about the President’s personality.

Radiance, he thought. There’s a queer radiance in him and about him. He has the magic touch.

John Barton was very much stirred by this interview. It brought him hope for England, where he had left his heart.

25

HE lingered for a few more days in Washington in order to see other people, and several times he walked in spirit with his wife Anne. She had been with him in this city. She had fainted one night in its heat wave. Here he had seen her in her beauty.

"I'm dead lonely now," he said to himself. "I'm a lonely man in these crowds, and I hate loneliness."

So he said to himself one day on Pennsylvania Avenue.

It was easy for him to avoid loneliness in Washington; he had many friends there besides David and the newspapermen. One night, according to promise, he went round in the evening to Sheila O'Connor's apartment in a pleasant-looking block among the woods of Rock Creek. It would be good, he thought, to hear some music.

She seemed surprised, but quite glad to see him.

"I thought I might have vexed you by my confession of being an isolationist," she told him.

"Oh, I hope to meet some more," he said carelessly. "I hope they will turn up at my lectures. It's no use preaching to the converted."

"I'll rally up some of my Irish friends in Chicago and Detroit," she said, with laughing eyes. "But I'll ask them not to egg you as they did the British Ambassador."

She had her mother there, a charming lady with a rather beautiful face. Sheila, he noticed, looked very attractive in a frock which showed her well-shaped neck and bare arms. Her red hair was like bronze in the light of electric lamps, and her dark blue eyes had the colour of violets.

It was a pleasant apartment overlooking the Park and its massed foliage already beginning to get red in the early fall. The harp stood in the corner of the room in the curve of a grand piano. There were some good Persian rugs on the polished floor. Into this room, presently, came two people—a young husband and wife by name of Harriman, who were both musicians. The talk was mostly of music for a time, and beyond the reach of Barton, who did not know music theoretically.

"I came to hear you play," he said, after some time.

"That's true," admitted Sheila. "And I've been wagging my tongue as usual, though not on the forbidden subject."

"What subject is that?" asked Meade Harriman.

Sheila O'Connor put her finger to her lips.

"A secret between me and John Barton," she said, shamming great mystery.

It was Meade Harriman who played the piano for her harp. Certainly, on that instrument, she was angelic, as David had said. She was pretty marvellous, thought John, when she struck tremendous chords and swept her fingers across the strings with magical harmonies.

“Gosh! That’s a grand instrument,” he said with enthusiasm at the end of one of the pieces. “And you play it wonderfully.”

“I like being flattered,” she confessed. “I can’t have too much praise. It’s meat and drink to me.”

“That was quite glorious,” said John again, after another piece. “I should say that was pretty old stuff, going back to the distant past? It has the cry of battle in it, and something very primitive.”

“You’re right, and I call it very clever of you,” said Sheila. “It’s one of the oldest melodies of Ireland, and the Irish harps played it into battle. Of course it has been filled out a bit.” She added a few words of historical comment.

“The enemy was always the English, you know. From the beginning, now, and ever shall be.”

“Can’t you forget the ancient grudge?” asked John, aware that this was a pinprick against his English sympathies.

“The Irish never forget,” she answered. “There has been too much to remember.”

Her mother, Mrs. O’Connor, laughed and rebuked her.

“Sheila, for goodness’ sake don’t spoil a pleasant evening by getting on to the woes of Ireland.”

“Very well, Mother,” said Sheila. “But I’ll play Mr. Barton an Irish dance which will set his feet twinkling. Will you play it for me, Meade? It’s a bit tricky.”

“I’ll have a shot at it,” said Meade Harriman.

“Very amusing,” was John’s verdict. “One can hear the rhythm of many feet twirling in and out in some formal pattern.”

Sheila seemed struck by this remark.

“You seem to understand music, Mr. Barton,” she told him. “I thought you were only a writing man—a newspaper reporter.”

“Does that prevent a man having a love of music?” asked John.

“Almost,” she argued.

“The reporters who interview me from time to time don’t know much about music. But I must say they give me a good show when I go on tour.”

“That’s because you smile at them,” said John. “When do you go on tour again?”

She told him that she was going quite soon. It would be a tour from coast to coast.

“We may meet in far places,” said John. “Detroit. Omaha. Cleveland. Ohio. Fort Worth, Texas. My lecture tour begins early next month, and I can’t say I’m looking forward to it.”

“If you come to one of my harp recitals,” said Sheila O’Connor, “I will come to one of your lectures. And I call that a generous offer.”

“Sheila,” cried her mother, “you really are very rude to Mr. Barton.”

“My harp is non-political,” explained Sheila. “But his lectures are propaganda for England.”

“I admit the generosity,” said John, answering with a laugh. “Won’t you play something else, and so heap favours on my head?”

She played something else—magnificently, he thought—and he enjoyed his evening. It was a treat to hear some music again in this quiet room. It was refreshing to get away from war talk and Washington gossip—Washington was like a scandal-mongering village, and crowded with pessimists.

26

JOHN put in another two weeks with his relatives in New York before starting on his lecture tour. His visit was made more agreeable by the arrival of young Edward Staunton, who had ten days' leave from his camp at Baltimore. He was a fine-looking young man of twenty-five or -six, amusingly like his sister Delia, and with none of the violence and verbosity of his father. He was quiet, thoughtful, humorous, and quite a bit cynical, especially regarding the United States Army and its drafted soldiers.

"We're just a rabble," he observed one evening when John tried to draw him out. "We're almost totally unarmed, and most of us regard the whole show as a futile waste of time. What are we being trained for? What's the use of all this marching about and drilling with dummy rifles? We're all sick of it. It wouldn't be so bad if we could see any object in it."

It was Delia who pointed out an object.

"Don't the boys think that one day they will be fighting Hitler and his crazy Nazis?"

"They do not, sister," answered Edward Staunton with a smile. "They can't see how Hitler's war in Europe affects the interests of these United States. And I'm darned if I can tell any of them, because I can't see it myself."

"John will tell you," said Delia.

John did not go out of his way to tell him. He was not on the lecture platform yet, and he preferred to let young Edward do the talking, with an occasional leading question.

"What do you fellows think about the war over there?"

Edward answered with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"It doesn't worry them. They glance at the headlines, and listen in now and then to the war commentators. But they switch 'em off in favour of the baseball news or the Quiz Kids. After all, the war is a long way off, and one can't believe any facts or figures about it. Each side puts out its own propaganda. They're pretty good liars, aren't they?"

John thought the British communiqués were fairly accurate. They were careful to be accurate about the number of planes shot down by the R.A.F. He had gone into that and, if anything, they erred on the side of caution. But they left out crashes and other accidents.

"The English don't seem to be doing well," observed Edward Staunton. "What's wrong over there?"

John gave an answer.

“Lack of shipping. Lack of man power for armies of a continental scale. Lack of good generalship.”

“How are they going to win?” asked Edward.

“They can’t, without American man power,” said John.

“Oh! Is that so?”

Young Staunton was thoughtful. It was a moment or two before he spoke his next words.

“Well, in that case they’ll have to take what’s coming to them. They’ll never get this country to send another expeditionary force. That’s sure.”

“How do you know?” asked John.

Young Staunton smiled in a modest way.

“Well, perhaps that’s overdogmatic. But we move around places. We hear comments and opinions from all types. As far as I know ’em, our people are dead set against sending men overseas. Not even the President could make them yield on that point.”

“Supposing Hitler declares war on us?” asked Delia.

“Why should he?”

“Why shouldn’t he? He wants the whole world.”

“Difficult to believe,” answered Edward. “Unless he’s more crazy than I think he is—and I don’t think him crazy. If so, it would be a good thing if some other people went mad in the same way. He’s always been right up to now.”

“Right?” cried Delia. “Edward, you’ve gone bughouse! How can he be right? That monster of cruelty and mass murder.”

Edward answered his sister in a slightly supercilious way, as though tolerant to a child.

“Not right morally. Right in his military organization and strategy. Hurling all his strength at one place each time instead of dispersing his forces.”

“You ought to be commander in chief of the United States Army,” answered Delia with sisterly sarcasm.

John was kept amused by these two cousins. They chipped each other continually, but underneath all that backchat they were devoted to each other. He made various expeditions with them, and during a long week end motored with them up the Mohawk Trail to see the scarlet miracle of the fall in Massachusetts and Vermont. The trees were marvellous in every tint of red and gold along the foothills of the green mountains, and then into its ravines and up into their high, winding roads. They had picnic lunches by lively little streams rushing over rocks. It was glorious weather, and the sky was blue above them without a cloud. John enjoyed himself, but was accused of brooding by his cousin Delia.

“John,” she said one day as she sat on a rock above one of the rushing rivulets, “you always look unhappy. You laugh when I venture to make a little joke, but your laughter

creaks. For the last half-hour you have sat in this woodland scene like the melancholy Jacques.”

“Sorry,” said John. For the past half-hour he had been thinking of the war. He had been thinking about it deliberately, forcing his mind to think of it, because for several days he had forgotten it. It was beginning to fade a little, as if that London bombardment which had killed Anne and so many more belonged now to another life. It was becoming remote, all that, even in his mind. He was forgetting too quickly and too easily. He was losing touch with that tragic history. It was like a news reel which he had watched with intense interest, and then became blacked out before another picture, equally dreamlike. Just dancing shadows on a screen, here in the mountains of Massachusetts and Vermont, amid this riot of colour, beyond the range of a painter’s brush, startling in its gorgeous tapestry, one of Nature’s astounding glories. Hitler’s war was as distant, it seemed, as life and death on another planet. Not so far as this was it possible to hear the beat of hoofs, as the Four Horsemen rode their way in Europe. There was no bridge between that world and this. Even in his own mind the bridge was breaking down. He had not seen a paper for three days. He had not bothered to buy one. He had not heard the radio news in the roadside houses where they had dined and slept. He had played cards with Delia and Edward. Were the Germans marching nearer to Moscow? Had German bombers been over England? How many ships had been sunk?

That night, in a guesthouse in Manchester, an old wooden house painted white like all its neighbours, spotless inside and very charming, people began to talk about the war. His name had become known, and one of the ladies staying in this house had questioned him about England. She was very sympathetic about the sufferings of the English people in the air raids. She was an American novelist, Virginia Crossley, and spoke well. Her husband was a quiet-mannered man who let her take the lead.

“I have been terribly thrilled by some of your broadcasts,” she told John. “One of them hit me so hard in my conscience that I rushed off to the committee working in Taunton—that’s my home town—on Bundles for Britain. I want to help, I said. I want to help until it hurts. What do they want in England?”

“Very good of you,” said John.

“There’s only one thing I won’t send,” she declared, looking into John’s eyes emotionally.

“What’s that?” asked John.

“My son,” she answered.

There were other married women in the room. One of them, young-looking, yet white-haired, joined in this conversation.

“I agree with Mrs. Crossley. We will help Britain to the utmost, but we will not send our sons this time.”

Virginia Crossley’s husband ventured to say something.

“They made fools of us in the last war. We helped to save Europe, but we didn’t get any thanks, and left a lot of our boys in France.”

“Are you prepared to let England be defeated?” asked John.

Virginia Crossley gave a little gasp.

“That would be terrible! God could not let that happen.”

“I don’t know much about God,” said John, “but if you believe in Christianity and all that it means in a decent code, aren’t you holding back your sons and shirking your share in this fight against evil?”

Virginia Crossley answered his challenge.

“If England goes down it will be the final tragedy except one, and that must not happen. We must keep out of this war. We must keep our sons out of it. I will not sacrifice my boy even to save England!”

She spoke with an intensity of emotion. There was no doubting her sincerity. She was not romancing as a novelist.

John spoke to her quietly, leaning forward a little in his chair with his hands clasped.

“I understand your reluctance,” he said. “I don’t want to see the sacrifice of American boys. But if England goes down, we go down and all good things go down, including liberty and the American way of life.”

There was a silence in the room. It was broken by young Staunton.

“I can’t say I should mind going. I’m not very keen to end my young life, of course. I want to live to a ripe old age. But I think I should enjoy the adventure, and it would give some reality to my military training which now seems so futile.”

This speech from a young man eased the tension. Everybody smiled.

“That’s just what we might have expected you to say,” said Virginia Crossley. “I like to hear you say it. But, all the same, we mothers of America won’t let you go. The cost of the adventure is too great.”

“Time for a game of bridge,” said one of the ladies. “Haven’t we been talking too much?”

“Virginia always talks too much,” said that lady’s husband.

“The worm turns,” said Virginia, thrusting her fingers through her husband’s hair, to his great annoyance. Some of the guests played bridge. John, Delia, and Edward played rummy. The war was forgotten.

THE lecture tour opened in the grand ballroom of the Hotel Statler in Boston.

"You're going to have a great audience, Mr. Barton," said Professor Robertson of Harvard, who was to be his chairman. "They're already crowding in."

"God help them!" said John. "I'm the worst speaker in the world."

He felt extremely nervous, and smoked innumerable Camels until his mouth was dry. The professor had come up to his bedroom and found him in a state of desperation, because his black tie refused to assume any decent state and was rapidly becoming like a bit of chewed rag.

"See if I can fix it for you," said Professor Robertson.

He fixed it rather well.

"My mouth is as dry as a sand kiln," said John.

"I'll go down and fetch you a packet of Life Savers," said the Professor. "I find them helpful. They encourage the saliva."

John went down with him into the main hall of the hotel which stretched away to a far vista with glimmering lights from candelabra. It was as crowded as the Grand Central in New York. Several big dinners were on the hotel programme for the evening as posted up on the notice board. Bostonians were arriving in phalanxes, the men in tuxedos which the English call dinner jackets, the women—many pretty girls among them—in long, trailing frocks, with bare arms and shoulders.

"Say, where's the lecture by John Barton?" inquired a man with a rasping voice.

"Grand Ballroom. First floor," announced a uniformed young man who repeated that sentence over and over again as groups of visitors arrived.

John wished he had not seen these people close at hand. They made him feel more nervous. They were the socialites of Boston, and the earnest seekers after truth, and the women who did good works as a means of salvation for their souls. There were innumerable white-haired dames with their bald-headed husbands.

"A very distinguished audience, Barton," said Professor Robertson. "All the best Bostonians."

He knew many of them, and answered their greetings of: "Hullo, Professor. In the chair again?"

"I'd like you to know Mr. Carvell," he said, introducing John to a tubby little man who smiled behind a pair of pince-nez. "Mr. Carvell, this is our distinguished speaker, John Barton."

“Well, now, this is an honour,” said Mr. Carvell, grasping John’s hand. “I always listen to you on the radio, and I’ve read many of your dispatches in the *New York Observer*. Yes sir!”

“I’d like you to know Judge Carrigan,” said Professor Robertson a moment later. “Judge, this is our distinguished speaker, Mr. John Barton.”

“I’m glad to know you, Mr. Barton,” said the judge. “The wife and I have listened to you many a time on the radio. We’re Irish and not ashamed of that, but you have sure given us the real dope about England—I’ll say you have!”

“I’d like you to meet . . .”

John cursed his own folly in coming down to this hall with his chairman. What he wanted was to be utterly alone, so that he might collect his thoughts and memorize the chief points of his speech.

“Now this is a real pleasure,” cried one of the white-headed dames, holding on to John’s hand. “When I saw you announced in the *Boston Herald* I said to my husband: ‘Henry, I’ll never forgive you if you don’t take me to the lecture on Friday night. John Barton, the newspaperman, is going to speak.’ ”

“You’re going to be disappointed,” said John gloomily. “I’m the world’s worst speaker.”

“You can’t make me believe that,” said the white-haired woman, with a good-natured laugh. “I’ve heard you before on the radio. You’re one of our spellbinders.”

“God forbid!” said John in a distressed voice.

He felt like a man condemned to the guillotine, relieved when, at last, he had to walk to the scaffold.

“We’d better get behind,” said Professor Robertson, looking at his watch.

He led the way to a little room off the Grand Ballroom, where John had a glimpse of his scaffold, or, rather, of a big platform—it looked as big as a three-acre field—on which there were two chairs and a microphone.

Heaven help me, said John, inside himself.

He was sucking an orange-coloured Life Saver, which corresponds to the English acid tablet. He felt very weak in the stomach. He looked, and felt, haggard.

“There will be questions afterwards,” said Professor Robertson. “How long shall I give ’em? Twenty minutes?”

“Twenty minutes?” exclaimed John in a voice of horror. “Can’t you cut it down to ten?”

“They’d be disappointed,” said the professor. “When once they warm up it’s hard to stop them.”

I wish I’d been blown up by a bomb in London, thought John, who was not a natural-born lecturer. He felt a deadly hatred for this professor of Harvard, so damnably at ease with himself—so used to this kind of thing that he didn’t turn a hair.

“It’s a very intelligent crowd,” said that gentleman. “They’ll ask good questions, and there won’t be any heckling. Boston knows how to behave itself.”

He looked at his watch again.

“We’d better go on.”

“I feel like death,” said John.

The professor smiled at him.

“You’ll be all right as soon as you’ve started. I know how you feel. I used to be like that.”

He was not like that now. He strode on to the big platform, smiling and debonair, while John took his seat on one of the two chairs, wishing he were dead. There were fifteen hundred people in front of him. He could see their faces in a blur of subdued light—rows and rows of them. Bald-headed men. White-haired women. A sprinkling of younger people. Elegant-looking girls. Harvard men. The sons and daughters of rich Bostonians. They were all staring at him. Fifteen hundred pairs of eyes were fixed on him. How the devil could he get hold of another Life Saver without attracting their attention to this act? His mouth was as dry as a piece of pumice stone. He slipped his hand into his trouser pocket, fumbled with a little packet of sticky sweets, and raised one furtively to his lips. Fifteen hundred pairs of eyes were aware of this action.

The professor was enjoying himself. He told a funny story which raised a laugh. John missed the point of it. He said something about an open mind, freedom of speech, and a non-political lecture.

“I have the pleasure of introducing to you tonight a very, very distinguished speaker, and a very famous American correspondent. Really, he needs no introduction from me. We have all heard him over the radio, relayed from England. Mr. John Barton has been our best interpreter of the British ordeal during this terrible war. He has taken us into little English homes. He has revealed the heroism of the humble folk.” . . . And so on, and so on. . . .

That darned Professor is taking up all my time, thought John. So much the better.

“I will now call upon Mr. John Barton.”

The professor was bowing to him. John rose to his feet. He swallowed the orange-coloured Life Saver—or nearly swallowed it. It was halfway down his throat.

I shall probably choke to death, he thought, swallowing hard, and feeling relieved when he had got rid of the obstruction to his vocal cords.

Something was happening in the audience. They had all risen from their chairs. They were standing up for him as a mark of respect.

Gosh! thought John. Why do they do that? I suppose I shall have to make a bow?

He walked stiffly until he was in front of the microphone. Then, instead of bowing, he raised one hand in a kind of salute.

“Ladies and Gentlemen . . .”

He was aware of the harshness of his own voice. His ordeal had begun. Perhaps the ordeal of his audience had begun.

He had made a lot of notes in New York and on the way to Boston, but he had discarded them all. He had memorized six headings which were the milestones of his

long journey in narrative. If he could go from one to another, he would keep on his track and not get lost in bypaths.

It was all about England, beginning with the threat of invasion which followed the downfall of France. They had never reckoned on such a frightful calamity in France. Their whole plan of war had been based on the belief that the French armies would hold their lines while England built up her air force, kept open the sea lanes by a strong navy, and forged the weapons of war for France and other allies by intensive production in her factories. She had never planned to raise an army on the continental scale. All her man power would be needed for recruiting the airmen, and the seamen, and the war industries. Now, after Dunkirk, when her expeditionary force had lost everything, the English people awaited invasion and knew how weak they were to face it. British troops stood on the coast without adequate arms and ammunition. In all the villages of England people waked up each morning listening for the sound of church bells which would be the signal of invasion, as in the days of the Armada the bells had rung. Some of them—and John himself—had had the illusion that they heard the bells faintly and afar off. “It has come,” he said to himself one morning, throwing open a lattice window. But it had not come, and some heroic boys, many of whom he knew, having met them in their training camps, prevented it from coming.

He described the Battle of Britain—that heroic victory which the boys of the R.A.F. gained over the German Luftwaffe against great odds—five to one, ten to one, often twenty to one. Whatever the odds, they attacked. He had seen some of these battles in the air, from the lawns of country gardens, or from the Sussex Downs. There was an amazing summer in England that year. The sky had been cloudlessly blue day after day. In that blue overhead one could follow the manœuvring of the planes by the white tracery of their exhausts, and one could hear the bursts of machine-gun fire, and see just now and again the glint of wings and, presently, things falling out of the sky—the German raiders shot down by those young Knights-Errant of the Air. He had been with them those days. He gave little portraits of some of them—boys who risked death carelessly, with a gay gallantry, with an utter recklessness, because each one of them knew he was fighting over English earth and English villages, in the defence of their mothers and sisters, for England’s life and liberty.

There was one young fellow . . .

From the audience came a burst of applause as John told of that heroic boy. It interrupted him for a moment. He was bewildered, and lost the thread of his narrative—something about the Spitfires. Something about German losses: 186, one day; 185, another. Goering, that fat boaster, had vowed that he would sweep the little English Air Force out of the skies as a prelude to the German invasion. It was the German Air Force which had been swept out of the sky over Britain, until the battle was called off because its price was too heavy.

Winston Churchill . . .

At the mention of that name there was another sharp burst of applause. He quoted some of Churchill’s words and gave a little portrait of the man. He had spent a day with him once at his country house. He made them laugh at an amusing anecdote before he paid a tribute to his leadership of the English people in this time of deadly menace. He

belongs to the old heroic tradition. He has the history of England in his blood. He speaks with the voice of the people, with its humour, its defiance, its unconquerable faith, its brutality, and its generosity of sacrifice. He belongs to Chaucer's England, and Shakespeare's, and the England of his own great ancestor Marlborough. What he says, England thinks. What he asks, England does. In the pubs they believe in him. He is blood brother with the soldiers and seamen. The boys of the R.A.F. say "Great stuff" when he talks over the wireless before they go out on another tournament in the air, and challenge death.

The air bombardment, commonly called the blitz.

John Barton came to that, and did not need his notes. He had lived through it all. He had seen it in London, and Coventry, and Bristol, and other towns. How could he ever get an American audience to understand what it meant, how people behaved in it, how it came to little English homes, to mothers of small children, to the crowded population whose homes had no defence against high explosives? He built up this picture by many small details from the time when every evening the black-out curtains were put up and presently there came the first double drone of the first German bomber. He described the little things unrecorded by newspapermen or war commentators. The cellars of English homes made into dugouts, furnished for the night. The alert when the first bombs fell. The family going down—mothers carrying their sleeping babies, and servants flitting downstairs in curl papers; games of cards by the light of candles; cups of cocoa halfway through the night; the crash of bombs in London streets; the cascade of falling masonry; the quivering of the earth; the trembling of the walls.

He had forgotten his nervousness. He had forgotten his audience. He spoke like a man in a trance. He was groping back to these memories of the blitz. He visited the shelters again, describing the people in them. The odd types. The terror of some of them, the laughter and gaiety of others. He had danced the Lambeth Walk with them, and jerked up his thumb and called out "Oi!" while up above hell raged. He remembered one night when he had gone from shelter to shelter, coming up above ground while the German planes were overhead. There was bright moonlight. The London streets seemed paved with silver, all glittering and burnished. The roofs and spires were shining white. But above, the sky was red. It was scarlet like blood, like hot, boiling blood throbbing from many fires rising like torches. He was alone in the streets. Buildings were crashing. The guns were firing. He heard the whine of shrapnel like the twanging of harps. He stepped over a dead body in a pool of blood—it was the body of a young girl. That night there were many young girls out in the furnace fires. They were ambulance drivers and nurses. They went straight into the fiercest fires rescuing the wounded. They were too busy, they said, to be afraid, when he talked with them. They were all heroines that night, though they were quite unconscious of their own valour, and thought that others were so brave. It was on that night . . .

It was on such a night that Anne had been killed. On this platform in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Statler in Boston, John Barton thought of how Anne had been killed. He was silent for a moment or two, remembering that. There was a look of anguish in his eyes, and his voice broke before this silence came to him. The audience was aware of his emotion. They sat very still watching him. Some of the women had wet eyes.

Anne! thought John Barton, forgetting his audience. My beautiful Anne! Why am I here talking this muck?

“In the English countryside . . .” said John Barton, resuming his talk. He described the life in an English village during wartime. There were amusing bits in it. He made his audience laugh at his anecdotes about refugee mothers and children.

He shifted to the British Merchant Marine. He had been out with the mine sweepers. He had talked with the seamen in London hostels and heard their stories of attacks from submarines and dive bombers. Most of these men had been torpedoed once and flung into the water, many of them two or three times or more, but as soon as they were rescued they signed on and went to sea again, undaunted.

Why do they do all this? asked John. What is the impulse which makes these humble folk in England so dogged in their courage? What goes on in their minds and in their souls?

He tried to get into the English mind—the mind of the ordinary man in the street, the working mother and little shopgirl, who went sauntering through the parks even when the siren sounded for a daylight alert. He had spoken to thousands of them. He thought he knew them. He recorded some of the things they had said to him.

“We’ve got to beat that man Hitler. . . . Life wouldn’t be worth living if we didn’t get him down. . . . There wouldn’t be any liberty. We couldn’t call our souls our own. . . . It’s a fight to the death this time. Well, if it’s my death, I don’t care. If my name is written on a bit of shell, I shall get it all right. It’s a question of luck, ain’t it? . . . We’re not fighting to save our own skins alone. We can’t let down the other peoples of Europe. It’s got to go on until they are liberated. . . . We’ve been up against it before. We shall win in the end, somehow. This is a war against the Evil Beast. We’re fighting for civilized ideals. If we go down, all goes down—all that makes life worth while.”

These people, said John, do not speak light words when they say they will fight to the death. Many of them have been put to the test. Many of them are dead. The mothers of England are mourning dead sons, but have others ready to go, because of their belief that this war is not for greed or power of their own, but for goodness against evil, liberty against tyranny, civilization against filthy barbarism and dirty cruelty. I have seen the spirit of a great people. I have told you something about it, but only a little. I hope I haven’t bored you?

He broke off. He gave no flowery peroration. He nodded slightly to his audience and turned on his heel, and then sat down stiffly in his chair by the side of Professor Robertson.

I’ve made a mess of it, he thought. That was a terribly bad talk. I left out almost everything I wanted to say. I got all tangled up. I wonder what the devil I did say?

He was astonished at the noise that was coming from the audience. They were clapping. They went on clapping. He could see their hands clapping—fifteen hundred pairs of hands clapping!

Professor Robertson leaned towards him.

“You’ve made a big hit,” he said. “You were inspired.”

“Good God!” said John. “I’m the worst speaker in the world.”

Professor Robertson laughed.

“I wish I were half as bad. But you had better get up and make a bow.”

John got up and raised one hand, and a faint smile twisted his lips. These people, he thought, had been darned friendly to him. They had been very patient with his tedious talk. They even seemed to have liked it.

Professor Robertson now called for questions. John had forgotten all about those, and thought he had done his job. Now he felt anxious again. What kind of questions would they fling at him? There was a little hesitation in the audience. Everyone was loth to raise a voice at first. It was a woman’s voice which called out to him in a high-pitched note:

“Mr. Barton, do the English know that the women of America are working and praying for them?”

John unwound his long legs from the chair on which he was sitting and rose to his feet.

“They certainly appreciate the gifts sent over from this country in Bundles for Britain. I don’t know about the prayers.”

There was a slight murmur of laughter at this last sentence.

“Mr. Barton,” said a man’s voice, “I should like to ask why the English don’t form a second front, now that Russia is so hard pressed?”

That was a teaser. One could hardly answer that question in a few words.

He mentioned the losses in shipping, and the absorption of British man power in the Navy, the Merchant Marine, the Air Force, and the factories.

“Mr. Barton, why do the English leave their colonies to do all the fighting?”

John rapped out his reply.

“They don’t! But they give all the credit to other people. That’s the English way.”

“Mr. Barton, by what means has the British Government prevented strikes, and why does Labour submit?”

“Labour has called off strikes during the war,” said John, “because of loyalty to England. It’s voluntary, not coerced.”

There was scattered applause from some of the bald-headed and white-shirted men. As Bostonian Republicans, they hated American Labour leaders and the epidemic of strikes.

“Mr. Barton,” cried a woman, “why does England prevent food from going to the stricken countries? Do you defend that cruelty?”

John had somehow expected that question. It was a difficult one.

“The occupied countries,” he said, “are short of food, starving, because the Germans have taken it away. I’m for feeding women and children everywhere, and all hungry souls, but the British have no guarantee that any food they let through would not be taken by the enemy. In any case, it would prolong the war by relieving Hitler of his own responsibility towards the captured nations. He would take more of their food while letting in supply ships.”

“Mr. Barton,” said a dry New England voice, “can you tell us something of England’s chance of victory—if any?”

John paused before answering this. He did not want to bluff these people. He did not want to speak false stuff to them, or give them the answers they wished to have, so that they might sink back into lethargy.

“They’re getting stronger in the air,” he told them. “They are building a formidable air force which one day will hammer Germany more than they are doing now, and that is not negligible. Will the Germans stand up to bombing as the English did? Or will the civil population crack as they did in the last war? I don’t know. It is perhaps a hope, but in my judgment”—he paused again and stared down at the platform—“in my opinion, the English can’t win this war to a clean finish without American man power.”

A silence followed his words. It was as though he had thrown cold water on them. It was quite a time before somebody else spoke. It was a woman, shrill, harsh, and aggressive.

“Mr. Barton, are you a paid agent of the British Government? Have you come here to drag us into this war?”

There was a murmur of disapproval. The majority of the audience resented that question because of its discourtesy.

Professor Robertson rose and made a gesture to John so as to prevent his answering.

“I do not allow questions of that kind,” he said sharply. “We have here a very distinguished American correspondent. American correspondents are not the paid agents of any countries or governments.”

This rebuke was greeted with warm applause.

Other questioners followed, friendly and eager for information. They wanted to know about the food rations in England, about the health of the people in the shelters, about the effect of the black-out.

“Well, we have tired our speaker enough,” said Professor Robertson. “He has been very frank and informative in his answers. On your behalf I thank him for a most inspiring address, which makes us have a deeper sympathy with the English people in their terrible ordeal of war.”

The applause was generous. John Barton walked off the platform stiffly and lit a cigarette. He felt as if he had been beaten by rods. He was utterly exhausted. He ached in every limb.

Thank God, he thought, I’ve got through that.

But he hadn’t got through “that.”

“Lots of people will want to shake hands and thank you,” said the professor. “They’re lining up.”

“I’m tired,” said John. “I can’t face them.”

“It won’t be such an ordeal as a night of blitz in London,” answered the professor. “It’s the American habit, as well you know.”

“God help me!” said John, following the professor’s lead into the Grand Ballroom below the platform.

There was a long queue of people waiting.

“Oh, Mr. Barton,” said a youngish woman, who clung to his hand, “you were terribly thrilling. You made us laugh, and you made us weep, and I’m just crazy about your description of life in the shelters.”

“Thanks a lot,” said John, trying to rescue his hand.

A timid little woman grabbed it.

“I’m English,” she said. “I was born in Kensington. I’d like to thank you for what you said about England and the London cockneys.”

“They were grand!” said John, feeling kind.

“You got across with it, Mr. Barton,” said one of the bald-headed men. “Yes sir. It was a very fine tribute to the English people, and I’m proud of having English ancestors. Their bones lie in Devon churchyards. I can trace back my family tree to the thirteenth century. One of my ancestors fought with Harry at Agincourt. Yes sir!”

“I’m Irish,” said a young woman, whose dark eyes and smiling mouth might have told him so.

“Did that spoil my talk for you?” asked John.

“It did not. I said to myself, I’m Irish, but this man is telling a tale of human courage which goes beyond ancient grudges or racial hatreds. Anyhow, I wept, Mr. Barton.”

“I’m sorry you had to,” said John. “I told a straight tale, without false heroics, I hope.”

“You have the human touch,” said an elderly man. “I have to confess that I was deeply moved. I had no idea the English had taken so much.”

John was kept standing for another three quarters of an hour. A group of college girls demanded his autograph, and produced a number of little books for that purpose. A young Harvard man asked his advice on journalism as a profession. A very spiritual-looking lady asked him what he thought of the teachings of Upsinsky, of whom he had not previously heard. An Irishman wanted to know whether he was acquainted with the prophecies of Ste. Odile; he was not. A middle-aged man with the New England accent asked why the British didn’t knock hell out of Berlin. A lady of Boston, with a string of pearls round her neck, inquired whether Queen Elizabeth slept in the cellar of Buckingham Palace. A Harvard professor asked whether Winston Churchill had any of the military genius of his great ancestor Marlborough. A young woman in green, with very large eyes in a very pale face, announced herself as the authoress of the book of poems entitled *The Shadow of a Dream*.

“I just want to say to you, Mr. Barton,” she said, “that your speech was a prose poem. I must say you have the gift of rhythm.”

“Mr. Barton,” said a rubicund man with a double chin between the ears of his collar, “put it right there.”

He held out his hand and gave John a viselike grip.

“I’m a Republican and a bit of an isolationist, but, by God, sir, I take off my hat to those English cockneys. They’re tough guys. I’ll say they are.”

John Barton twisted his lips to a fixed smile. He felt extremely tired and rather weak. He had had no food before his speech. His head was aching as though it had been hit by a hammer. He wanted a strong drink. He wanted to sit down. He could do very well with a club sandwich. He was yielding to a sense of horror at the thought of the long vista of his lecture tour. He had done this once. He would have to do it forty or fifty times throughout the United States.

“Well, it’s been a grand evening,” said Professor Robertson. “You were fine, Barton. A thousand congratulations.”

He said good-bye at last, and Barton staggered to the elevator, and upon reaching his bedroom on the eleventh floor of the Statler Hotel flung himself on to his bed and gave a groan like a wounded animal.

“Jeepers creepers!” he said aloud after his exhaustion had passed somewhat.

CLEVELAND—COLUMBUS—DETROIT—CHICAGO. MANY cities in many states.

Because lecture dates have to be booked according to the convenience of societies and organizations, there was no well-arranged itinerary for John Barton. He had to zigzag, retracing his journeys, even coming back to New York from time to time. He spent nights and days on the American railways sleeping—or failing to sleep—in lower berths or upper berths, breakfasting, lunching, dining on streamlined trains, or fast expresses, which rattled his bones and his nerves. It was luxurious travel, and yet astonishingly fatiguing and infinitely boring. Often after his lecture and question time—those questions!—he had to take a taxi to the railway station and wait with his bags in the waiting room for the midnight train to the next city on his list. Early next morning, after a short and sometimes sleepless night, while his thoughts ran round like rats in a trap, he would get on to a platform where he was awaited by a group of newspapermen and press photographers and distinguished members of the organization which was backing his lecture. They were all very kind. They were all very friendly. They were all very active and alert at this early hour in the morning. They desired to give him a good time. They were anxious to show him the treasures and the glories of their city—its art gallery, its museum, its factories, its war plants, its public gardens, and parks. They had arranged hospitality—a lunch at the women’s club and just a short speech; or lunch at the Rotary Club and just a short speech; dinner with the lecture organizers, with some distinguished citizens, and just a short speech; a talk to newspapermen; a few words to the ladies working at Bundles for Britain; a tree-planting ceremony—the British Ambassador had used the golden trowel last week—and after the lecture, a reception at the university, or the governor’s house, or the Catholic College, or the American Legion, with just a short speech. Radio interviews. Broadcast speeches. And always the tale to tell to the reporters on the local press, who hailed John Barton as one of them.

They were all very friendly. They were all very kind.

He was sleeping in his bedroom in a Detroit hotel after a short night on the train when he was aware of men moving about his room. He opened his eyes and saw three sinister-looking fellows with their hats on, shifting his furniture. One of them saw his open eyes, and reassured him.

“It’s quite all right, Mr. Barton. Don’t you worry. We’re just arranging to take a few pictures. We’ll give you time to dress.”

He was led to the radio in Chicago. A persuasive and intelligent lady sat opposite to him with the microphone between them.

“We are now going to have the great pleasure,” she said, “of introducing on this platform a very distinguished visitor to this city, Mr. John Barton, the famous European

correspondent, who will tell us something of his experiences in hell-fire. But before asking him to speak to you there is a special message for American mothers. It's a message which will bring new joy into many American homes, relieving our devoted women of nerve strain and tired feeling. It's the glad tidings that Mother Hubbard's snowflake soap is now available at fifteen cents a packet. Do you know how many mothers use Mother Hubbard's snowflake soap? Would it surprise you to know that fifteen million mothers use Mother Hubbard's snowflake soap every day of the year? They use it because they like it. They use it because it saves labour and nerve strain. They use it because of its ethereal purity, its creamy foam, its cleansing virtue, its snow-white loveliness, its soft, silky, soapy luxuriance. Does it wash out all stains and spots? It sure does. Does it lengthen the life of linen? We give you our word for it. Does it make women's hands softer and more supple? Fifteen million American mothers say yes in one glad chorus. Does it make their eyes brighter because of its labour-saving quality? The laughing eyes of fifteen million American mothers give you the answer—Mother Hubbard's snowflake soap. It is a priceless gift to every American household. . . . I will now ask Mr. John Barton, the world-famous correspondent, to answer a few questions about his recent experiences in the furnace fires of Europe.

“Mr. Barton, I understand you have recently come from England?”

“That is so,” said John.

“And you travelled on the Clipper from Lisbon to New York?”

“I did,” said John sulkily.

“Now what are your reactions, Mr. Barton, to the American setup after living so long under storms of shells and bombs?”

“I can't say I have any reactions,” said John in a tired voice.

“But surely, Mr. Barton, you must feel a sense of joyous escape from dreadful scenes in dark shelters and heaps of ruins?”

“I can't say I do,” answered John wearily. “I would rather be back in England.”

The lady at the microphone raised her eyebrows. She was genuinely surprised by this answer.

“Now how do you explain that, Mr. Barton?”

“In England,” said John Barton, “one lives among people who are dedicated to the service of their country, whatever the danger or the sacrifice. They face the realities of life and of death without flinching, and with a kind of gaiety. Over here there is no awareness of reality. The American people are living in a world of illusion. They turn their eyes away from the danger signals. They believe they can remain isolated with American prosperity, while the war sets the world on fire. While the British people are hard pressed by overwhelming odds, the American people are living in a fool's paradise, which is beginning to crack under their feet.”

The lady at the microphone frowned slightly and shook her head. It was a signal to John that he was saying the wrong things.

“That is very interesting, Mr. Barton,” she said brightly. “But surely you are proud of American civilization, and glad of the happiness of our people, so richly endowed

with the fruits of science and civilization?"

"We're a darned sight too self-complacent," said John. "Our American prosperity won't be worth much—not a damn—if Hitler wins this war. Our American happiness is rather selfish—isn't it?—when so many countries in Europe are under the heel of a monstrous tyranny against which England—and now Russia—is putting up a heroic fight."

The lady at the microphone looked at John and put her finger to her lips, as an urgent warning to watch his words.

"I find that very moving," she said in her bright, cheerful way. "But, of course, Mr. Barton, you are aware of all that the United States are doing to aid the cause of liberty? The Lend-Lease Act. Bundles for Britain. The outpouring of munitions for Britain and Russia?"

"The rate of production is still very slow," said John. "England still has to be her own arsenal. She has got us whacked in production in spite of all our big words and big promises. All these strikes are holding up American production, while the German armies fight nearer to Moscow, and Britain is defending her outposts against superior numbers. The President keeps calling for work and service. He utters the gravest warnings, but the American people turn deaf ears, and the isolationists have no conscience and no morality, but preach the gospel of selfishness and self-complacency, and a shirking of all nobility."

The lady at the microphone coloured up. Mr. John Barton was answering her questions in a very dangerous way. She might lose her job. She might get into trouble with those who sponsored the programme.

John Barton became worse and worse. In answer to a question about the loveliness of American motherhood, he made an appeal for American man power to aid Britain.

The lady at the microphone waved a hand at him as though to say, "That's enough!"

"I have a message for American mothers," she announced. "I have good tidings for the dear mothers of the United States. Have you not heard of Mother Hubbard's snowflake soap? Do you wish to save nerve strain and back strain? Do you want to bring new joy into your homes and households? Mother Hubbard's snowflake soap . . .

"You are dreadful," she said to John after this advertising appeal. "You said very terrible things. Maybe I shall lose my job in consequence. But do you care? No sir. I guess you don't."

"Sorry," said John. "I had to tell the truth."

"Why?" asked the lady very coldly.

It was a good question.

Barton had been away from the United States long enough to look at its people and way of life with fresh eyes, and to see its sharp contrasts with England. Little things which had been quite ordinary to him in previous years now struck him as amusing and noticeable. The floor ladies in the big hotels in which he put up for a night or two amused him by their professional benevolence.

“Sorry you’re going,” they said, when the porter carried his bags to the elevator. “Come again!”

That was part of their training, as it was the training of the desk clerks and the sub-managers to greet his arrival as though he were their most honoured guest, in whose comfort and smallest desires they had a particular and special interest. Well, it was pleasant, though entirely artificial. But the floor ladies were really human, motherly, and helpful. They were also intelligent. Knowing his name, and having heard him on the radio, some of them engaged him in earnest conversation when he went to their desks to get his keys.

One of them in the Palmer House of Chicago—that vast caravanserai as crowded as a railway station, into which all day long there poured masses of people, and in which there were shops, lecture halls, cinema shows, and even a theatre—questioned him about the war and its causes.

“Didn’t the English bring it on themselves,” she asked, “by letting Hitler rearm, and not stopping him when he put his troops into the Rhineland?”

“There’s something in that,” answered John. “But the English are a civilized people, and couldn’t believe that Germany had fallen into the hands of a gangster. They thought they could keep the peace with him.”

“They ought to have known,” said the floor lady. “Lots of people were telling them, including our own correspondents.”

“Oh yes,” said John, “we gave them a hell of a lot of advice, but we didn’t propose to do anything about it ourselves.”

“I guess you’re pro-English?” said the floor lady. “Well, I don’t blame you for that, having lived with them through the terrible days, but I want to ask you a straight question, if I may?”

“That’s O.K. with me,” answered Barton.

“I want to ask you, Mr. Barton, if you think we shall be in this war before long? The President seems to be leading us step by step to the brink of the precipice, doesn’t he? Is he going to line up with England against Hitler’s Germany?”

She asked the questions anxiously.

“I hope so,” answered John, stubbing out a Camel in the ash tray on her desk. “It ought to be our war as well as England’s, if we have any moral sincerity, or any guts.”

The floor lady sighed. Her sigh seemed to reach the elevator and blow its doors open—but that was only an illusion of timing.

“I hope it won’t happen,” she said. “I have a young son in college. That’s why I’m here. My husband was a musician, and when he died he didn’t leave me a nickel. But I found this job and earn enough to send my boy to college. He’s quite bright and has a real literary gift. Some of his stories in the college magazine are beautiful, and I’m not the only one who says so. He’s eighteen, and a fine boy. The girls are beginning to take notice of him, but he likes his mother best, he says. What’s going to happen to me if he has to give up his career and join the army in a war against Hitler? What’s going to happen to him? Are all our boys to be flung into the fiery furnace because England

doesn't seem to be getting on with the war, and can't take care of it herself? I'm asking you."

John Barton was silent. This was not professional stuff from the floor lady in the Palmer House. This was spoken from her heart. It was all very well for him to hope that the President would lead the United States into the war, but it would mean a great sacrifice of young manhood on the battlefields of Europe, the sons of mothers like this, who had devoted their lives to these boys and then would see them perish.

"It's like this, as I see it," he answered. "We've always stood for liberty, haven't we? If we believe in it in an honest-to-God way, and I think we do, isn't it worth fighting for? I guess it is. Wouldn't your boy say so?"

"He does say so," said the floor lady. "That's what makes me scared."

She gave a little sob, and then coughed to strangle it.

Two men came to the desk and wanted their keys.

John went to his own room.

That poor soul is like millions of American mothers, he thought. She's getting scared. She's putting up a resistance to the idea of getting into this war beyond sending aid to Britain. How can I blame them? Maybe they're right. Maybe I'm wrong in trying to persuade them otherwise.

He paced up and down his bedroom for half an hour thinking that out. For the first time he was beginning to have doubts about his own mission—this Crusade for England.

If Hitler wins, he asked himself, will these people of mine really be touched by the shadow of German tyranny? Will their liberties be in danger? Maybe I'm a charlatan in saying so. Maybe I've got it all wrong. Why should those boys get into this hell of war? He was self-tortured by those creeping doubts about the validity of his own mission. They were increased from time to time by the sense of American remoteness—geographically, as well as intellectually—from Hitler's war. When he got as far as the Middle West, or met the people of Texas and Kentucky, still more when he reached the Californian coast, this remoteness was in his own mind, as well as in the minds of the people there. England? It was six thousand miles from California. The war? There was no sound of guns vibrating through the ether. No bombs fell, or would ever fall, on these Kentucky horse farms, or these Texan ranches. American civilization, such as it was, the American way of life—its setup, as they called it—seemed secure and untouchable.

Yet, beyond his doubts—or behind them—was his intellectual certainty that all this was an illusion, and that a shadow lurked in the blue sky above this American scene. If England went down, overstrained by the power of her enemies, without sufficient man power to defeat them in the field, and a small target for German bombing, with her life lines of the sea gravely threatened already by the frightful figures of her shipping losses, where would be the security of the American people? The world would be in flames around them. Tyranny of the cruelest kind would dominate the greater part of that world. The economic life of peoples would be in ruin. Pestilence and famine would be world-wide. Germany would capture all markets. Hitler, the supreme dictator, would

not leave the Americans beyond his range of vision. Her seas would be infested by his submarines. Latin America would be his happy hunting ground for attack upon the United States. They would not be forgotten nor left alone. But that was the least of the argument, based only on self-interest. They had goaded England to stand up to the dictators. American correspondents had heaped contempt upon the policy of appeasement. What filthy hypocrisy that would be if now they said “We shall not be touched. Let England and all liberty-loving nations be overthrown and put in chains, so long as we wallow in abundance and save our skins.” It would be a surrender of the soul. It would be the ultimate moral degradation, surely.

This argument nagged at him in railway trains, and hotel bedrooms, and even on lecture platforms while a chairman was introducing him and a big audience was waiting to hear him speak.

In spite of his critical attitude towards some aspects of American life and thought, he fell in love with his own people on this tour. Although he had left his heart in England—Anne’s country—he was able for the first time, because of this wide survey of American life, to see its distinctive qualities, and on the whole he found them good, especially among the ordinary, unpretentious folk. They were kindly, not only to him, but to each other. They had a sense of humour which played about their social intercourse, and kept them vivacious and alert to the comedy of life. Some little joke, some shrewd and amusing comment, jumped into every conversation, even if it were only a morning greeting between neighbours at a street corner.

They’re more expressive than the English, he thought. They have a gift of verbal wit beyond the English, who are just as humorous, but less good at wisecracks. And they’re darned intelligent on the whole. Amazingly so in coffee shops, and shoeshine shops, and garages and drugstores.

Education, he thought. The American educational system had reached down further than in England. It was beginning to bear fruit, he thought. It didn’t go very deep but it was widespread, and gave almost everybody a certain elementary background of knowledge upon which they could build, if they liked, as some of them did, by reading best sellers and going to the movies. Superficial, but enlivening and quickening the intelligence.

The coffee-shop girls had read Shirer’s *Berlin Diary* and other books by American correspondents abroad. He liked talking to those coffee-shop girls over a zinc counter where he sat on a high stool eating his breakfast of grapenuts and fried bacon and soft rolls. They were pretty creatures, some of them, and they took a friendly interest in him, because his name was in the headlines of the morning papers.

“Speaking at the Town Forum tonight?” said one of them in Fort Worth, Texas.

“Yep,” said John, sipping his grape juice.

“My! I would like to come and hear you.”

“Why not?”

“Can’t get away. What are you going to talk about?”

“Mostly about England in the war.”

“That’s what I guessed. Say, Mr. Barton, you must have seen terrible sights. And yet you sit here looking as though nothing had ever happened to you. How did your nerves stand it?”

“Not too well,” said John.

The girl seemed to be thinking back to something. She spoke in a low voice.

“I remember. Your wife was killed by the bombs. How dreadful for you.”

“Yes,” said John.

“I’m sorry. That sounds inadequate, but it’s what I want to say. You have all my sympathy.”

“Thanks,” said John.

The girl poured him out another cup of coffee.

“I read history and English literature in college. Sometimes I had a dream that I might go to England. I wanted to see the historic places—Shakespeare’s house, and the Middle Temple Hall, and Westminster Abbey, you know.”

“After the war, maybe,” said John.

“They may all be in dust and ashes,” she said. “When I think of that I want to cry. Is St. Paul’s Cathedral still standing?”

“Badly hit,” said John. “Surrounded by ruins.”

“How ghastly! Well, thanks for letting me talk to you.”

She was a college girl. Many of these coffee-shop girls had been to high school and to college. Compared with the girls in most English teashops, they were better educated, they spoke better, and they had better manners.

There’s a lot to be said for the American setup, thought John. We have developed a pretty good average standard. We’re not all so dumb as I thought we were.

The American sense of humour was sometimes a bit exasperating, and started too early in the morning. He had put in a call for seven o’clock next morning. There was a train to catch.

He seemed to have been asleep only an hour when his telephone bell rang loudly.

“Oh, gosh!” he said, stretching out a sleepy hand.

“What is it?” he asked.

“There’s something burning,” said a girl’s voice.

“What’s that?”

“Something burning.”

John raised himself on his elbow and stared round the room.

Good heavens! Had he left a lighted cigarette somewhere? He could smell nothing.

“What’s burning?” he asked.

“Time,” said the girl. “It’s seven o’clock and time to get up.”

John Barton was well awake.

It was in Chicago—that monstrous hive of termite humanity, as John called it, when he walked its streets—that he came up against the isolationists. So far they had failed to put in an appearance at any of his lectures. At least he had not been challenged by them, and not one had squeaked at question time. But a group of them came that night in Chicago to the lecture hall in the Palmer House. He had a big audience. They listened attentively. They applauded his stories of the British Mercantile Marine. They laughed at some of his character studies in the London shelters. They were dead silent when he described tragic experiences in the night bombardments. Afterward the questioners seemed friendly and out for information, though as usual they wanted to know why Britain did not open a second front to aid the Russians and why England had let down the Greeks so badly in Crete. He was questioned also about the coming of Rudolf Hess—that incident still stuck in their imagination—and about the Cliveden House Set, which still seemed to them a sinister group of fascist conspirators.

Suddenly a woman's harsh voice rang out.

"How much does the British Government pay you for this dirty job?"

The question scandalized the majority of the audience.

"Sit down! Behave yourself!"

A man's voice rose above the hubbub.

"Why have you allowed yourself to be pap-fed by English propaganda?"

"Sit down!" shouted many voices. "Don't talk such rubbish! Shut up!"

"The speaker said he would welcome questions," shouted another male voice. "I want to ask one. Why should we go to the rescue of England again, as Mr. Barton seems to think we should? We went once before. Did we get any gratitude? We did not. Did they pay us the money they hired from us? They did not. We were fooled once, as Mr. Barton knows. Why should we be fooled again?"

They were legitimate questions, though asked in a truculent manner.

John Barton stepped nearer to the edge of the platform.

"England didn't pay her debt because we prevented her from paying by putting up high tariff walls which shut out her goods—the only means of earning the credits which would have enabled her to pay. Meanwhile, she had let off all her own debtors."

"Mr. Barton," shouted a shrill-voiced woman, "how does your conscience, as an American citizen, permit you to stand there and advocate the massacre of American youth in a war which does not touch American interests?"

The chairman, who was an Episcopalian bishop, tried to pour oil on the troubled waters by a smiling comment.

"That lady begs the question," he said. "She also makes an inaccurate statement. Our distinguished speaker was no advocate of massacre, so far as my attention to his most illuminating speech serves me now."

"I demand an answer," said the lady in shrill tones.

"I am willing to give it, ma'am," said John. "First of all, I must assure you that my conscience is perfectly at ease."

This opening caused laughter and applause in some parts of the audience.

"My chairman," said John, "has dealt with the charge of advocating massacre of American youth. I am not the ogre in the fairy tale."

"You want to drag us in!" cried the woman. "You want our boys to die on European battlefields, fighting England's battles for them to uphold her cruel and outworn Imperialism. Do you deny that?"

John Barton lost his temper slightly.

"I do not trouble to deny absurdities. England is fighting, first of all, for her own survival—and it will be a heavy crash in civilization if she does not survive; and secondly, but with all her will power, and all her guts, for the liberties of all freedom-loving peoples, including her own. I say we ought to be with her if we have any moral sincerity. I say this is our war as well as hers if we mean something more than mouthing platitudes about liberty and democracy."

Again there was scattered applause in the audience, though the main body of it sat silent, as though keeping neutral in this dispute.

"You're a renegade!" shouted a voice. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You're un-American!"

"Sit down! Shut up! Don't disgrace Chicago!"

Violent arguments ensued in the body of the hall.

John's chairman rose and stretched out his arm, as though appealing for silence.

"We have had a most interesting address," he said. "Many of the questions were intelligent and legitimate. I regret that others were coloured by political passion and put to our distinguished speaker with un-American discourtesy. But I propose a hearty vote of thanks. . . ."

Nobody heard him except a few people in the front rows from whom came loud applause. The isolationists were arguing their case in the body of the hall.

John followed the bishop off the platform to the small room behind.

"Amusing, but fatiguing," he remarked.

"It means nothing," said the bishop. "In my judgment, the isolationists are losing ground rapidly."

"I am not so sure," said John guardedly. "In every American mind—everyone I have met—there is a line drawn on the subject of aid to Britain. Thus far and no farther. All the weapons of war, but no expeditionary force."

"I agree," said the bishop. "The President is leading the people too far and too fast. They are lagging behind. Their minds are reluctant to admit the possibility of war

calling upon their own young manhood.”

“Britain can’t win without American man power,” said John. “That’s the devilish truth of it.”

“That’s bad news,” answered the bishop. “I was hoping . . .”

There was a tap at the door. Outside was a line of people coming to shake hands with the speaker, to get his autograph, to express their thanks, to ask privately a few questions they had not been able to put publicly. John was anxious for them to go. He had promised to meet a lady in one of the suites of the Palmer House. It was Sheila O’Connor, who had sent him a little note saying: “There’s an Irish whisky for you after your speech—but no Irish politics!”

“Mr. Barton,” said a lady, “I want to thank you for what you told us about England. My father was an Englishman from Yorkshire.”

“Well, he couldn’t help it,” said John carelessly.

He gave the wrong answers to some of these people. He was tired and nervy, and he wanted to escape to a quiet room.

THERE was a quiet room waiting for him on the sixteenth floor of the Palmer House. The door was opened to him by Sheila O'Connor, who was in a black evening frock with a little string of pearls round her throat.

"It's nice of you to come," she said, holding out her hand—a little hand, beautifully shaped, which seemed hardly strong enough to strike those majestic chords which she produced from her harp.

"I'm glad to come," he told her. "This is an escape from the madding crowd."

"The audience loved you," she said with a laugh, as she led him into a big drawing room with shaded lights and many flowers in tall vases on little tables and cabinets. "I was among them, so I know. 'Isn't he just too wonderful?' said a group of female enthusiasts who surrounded me."

John Barton stared at her with incredulous eyes.

"What? You came to hear my talk?"

"Yes sir, and I'm not lying to you at all at all when I say that you brought tears to my eyes more than once. You were marvellous. You certainly put a spell on us. I forgot that I was an Irish-American with hereditary prejudices against little old England. Yes sir! If I had been asked to stand up and sing 'God Save the King' I believe I should have done so without a qualm."

John Barton laughed incredulously.

"I just can't believe that, lady. You're pulling my leg, as the English would say. I'm a poor guy as a public speaker."

"You're sincere," she told him. "You told us the things you had seen, and your emotion came over to us without any fine phrases. That's what held us. There's a nice chair for you. Will you have a highball or a coke?"

"A coke would be perfect," said John. "And I must say this is a nice room you have."

She looked round her room in the Palmer House and smiled.

"The management have given me the bridal suite, though I'm no bride. Mrs. Potter Palmer, number three, is one of my fans."

"You seem to have a lot," remarked John. "Those flowers are wonderful."

"Yes. Exquisite, aren't they? Some from the management, and others from unknown admirers. Isn't it sweet of them?"

She touched one of the bouquets with the tips of her fingers, and then stooped down and kissed the petals.

"I like to be spoiled," she said. "I like to be loved for my harp's sake."

John Barton had the idea that she deserved to be loved for her own sake, but did not communicate this thought. She was graceful and charming, and now and then there was an Irish lilt in her voice which was rather pleasant.

Her big golden harp stood at the end of the drawing room, and John thought that it might be unfair to ask her to break its silence.

"There are lots of things I would like to say about your speech," she said presently, "but some of them might make you angry."

"You have said some pretty things," he answered. "I shan't get angry if you balance them by a little criticism."

She laughed, and seemed to hesitate before she answered.

"Sometimes I pretend to be more Irish than I really am. I'm a perfectly good American. And as a perfectly good American . . ."

She broke off and thought out her thoughts.

"Yes, lady?" asked John, taking a sip of Coca-Cola. It was pleasant being in this room, he thought. It was a little sanctuary of peace from the noise of massed humanity in the city of Chicago. No sound of that human whirlpool came up to this room with its double windows. The curtains shut out its blinking, blinding lights, advertising American products to the high heavens.

"Although you made me weep tonight," said Sheila O'Connor, "I'm all against the thing you want us to do—to come into this war by the side of England."

Barton laughed a little.

"Then I must have been a ghastly failure as a speaker. If I stiffen the isolationist sentiment of my audiences . . ."

"It was so horrible what you told us," said Sheila; "heroic—yes, of course—but very horrible. All those women and children being dragged out of the ruins of their little homes, all those boys of the R.A.F. on bombing raids over Germany, with barrage fire reaching up to them and killing them—so many of them, you say, like moths in a candle flame. Why should we in the United States ask for all that, and join in this murderous game, and enlarge the boundaries of horror and slaughter? Can't we keep out of it?"

"No," said John. "And we ought not to keep out of it."

"Our interests aren't touched," said Sheila O'Connor. "Hitler won't come over here unless we goad him—not even then, I guess."

"That's a very selfish viewpoint," said John.

He was not getting angry with her. He was talking to her as though she were a child.

"In a way it's selfish," she admitted. "Everything comes down to self, I suppose. I can quite see that I hate war partly because I have two young brothers—Michael and Daniel. My harp pays their college fees, and I'm proud of that, and I love them as though they were my own chicks. I've worked hard for them. One can't play the harp, or anything else, without hard work for long hours. Feel the tips of my fingers."

She touched the back of his hand with the tips of her fingers, which were hard and horny.

"I have worn my fingers like that," she said, "for the love of my two kid brothers. Our father is drinking himself to death—poor darling—but he's been doing it for years and doesn't die, so he's quite expensive. I keep the family pot boiling by this harp of mine, and it makes me happy to think I can do it. But it won't make me happy if we get into this war and Mike and Dan are blown out of the sky by German barrage fire. Such a waste of all my work. Such a pity, don't you think?"

There was a smile in her eyes, but behind the smile was a sense of tragedy at the thought of the two boys' deaths.

"I see all that," said John. "But this war . . ."

She interrupted him and spoke with emotion.

"This war is a frightful war. It's a war against civilization, as well as a massacre of the innocents who go into the Army, and the Navy, and the Air Force. I can't see anything civilized in it. The Germans bomb England. England bombs Germany. They compete with each other in the size of their bombs to blast their cities off the map, and to maim and mutilate young mothers, and newborn babes, and school children, and poor old people, who are quite defenceless. I can see no civilized idea in all that. I can see no beauty in it."

"It's not beautiful," said John, remembering things he had seen.

"Isn't it a denial of everything that we've struggled for?" asked Sheila. "I mean, we're all trying to get more civilized, and then put the clock back by mass murder. Why shouldn't we keep the United States out of all this? We've made a rather good civilization for ourselves, haven't we? Can't we keep it and get on with it?"

"'Fraid not," said John. "If England and the British Empire go down, there won't be much civilization left for us. We should lead a damned life in a damned world crowded with Hitler's slaves. Can't you see that?"

"I cannot," answered Sheila. "I'm on the side of the isolationists. Yes sir!"

"You are on the side of the angels when you play," said John. "Play something, won't you?"

He treated her as a child. She was a pretty child. How old? he wondered. Twenty-three? He liked that tale she told of keeping her kid brothers by playing the harp. That was gallant. She had a charming way with her, not to be spoiled by isolationist stuff.

She played for him a little, and sang two or three songs to her harp in a soft Irish voice.

"Delightful," said John. "Very pleasing, I guess, to the angelic choir. How about another?"

"It's getting late," she told him presently. "In the interests of propriety, you had better go, John Barton, sir."

"Propriety?" asked John, raising his eyebrows. "Does that matter?"

"Not much," she admitted, "but I want my beauty sleep."

He thanked her for a nice hour or two. Where next might they meet?

Their dates would coincide at Fort Worth, Texas.

That night before going to bed John took a walk in the streets of Chicago. He had a bit of a headache. Those flowers in Sheila O'Connor's room had been rather sickly perhaps.

There were still crowds in the streets of Chicago. They were coming out of movies, and theatres, and restaurants, and drinking bars. The advertisement signs were still flaring above the street lights—red, and blue, and yellow—flashing up, and flashing out, winking and blinking, whirling and whisking. Those neon lights were as restless as the crowds below them, hurrying, jostling, shoving.

What does it all mean, this American life? asked John to himself. What are all these people doing? What's their purpose? Where the hell are we all going?

He thought of what Sheila O'Connor had said about civilization. Was this civilization? This mass-produced humanity. All this mass-produced materialism. They were all like termite ants, swarming. Those neon signs were stimulating the mass desire for more articles produced by the million. All over the United States the releases of new film stories, utterly unreal, belonging to a world of false values, would be seen by countless numbers. All over the United States the people would listen to the same jazz tunes, the same news commentators, the same stunt, like the Quiz Kids. Nobody would be thinking his own thoughts. Nobody would be living a quiet, individual life, developing his own soul, or his own way of life. Not one human being in this vast seething, squirming ant heap would be thinking of the war on the other side of the Atlantic. It didn't touch them. It wasn't their war.

So he thought until he spoke to one individual in the crowd. It was a man selling newspapers at a street corner.

"What's the latest?" asked John, handing out a nickel.

"The latest? Well, it depends what you're looking for. It seems the Germans are getting nearer to Moscow."

"Does that mean anything in Chicago?" asked John.

The man laughed harshly.

"Not yet, maybe. It will mean something when Mr. Roosevelt tells the American people that they're in the war, and that he wants their last dollars and their first-born sons."

"Will it go as far as that?" asked John, trying to get at this man's mind—this one ant in the great ant heap called Chicago.

"Now I'm telling yer," said the man. "We're in this war already, but we don't know it. We can't keep out of it, though we shut our eyes to it. If the Russians and the English get beaten up by Hitler, it won't be no nice kind world for nitwits in Chicago. As far as I can see things——"

He saw pretty far, that fellow at the street corner in the Windy City.

He saw as far as an American declaration of war against Hitler's Germany.

"Do many people think like you in Chicago?" asked John.

The paper seller laughed harshly again.

“They’re all dumb,” he said. “They don’t think. They just get along by instinct, and haven’t too much of that, believe me.”

“As a thinker, you must be lonely?” said John, grinning at him.

“You betcher life, yes sir.”

John retraced his steps to the Palmer House, his mind across the Atlantic on the way. He went back to Anne’s England.

LETTERS arrived by air mail from England and John read them with a kind of nostalgia. Though he was a “perfectly good American,” as Sheila O’Connor had called herself, he had left his heart over there. Anne’s spirit was there. He had a home there, and he felt an exile sometimes in his own country.

One letter arrived from Judy with strange and perhaps tragic news in it. She had not heard from her husband Robin—that whimsical man, and good portrait painter—for more than two months, and this long silence had begun to break her down. She had gone round to the Red Cross in St. James’s Palace, where their staff dealt with all affairs relating to prisoners of war. They could not trace the present whereabouts of Captain Bramley. He had been moved from a camp near Düsseldorf, where he had been a great favourite with his fellow prisoners, according to many references in their letters, and even with the prison guards, who did not resent his humorous ways, and laughed very much at his jokes in German. Then, suddenly, he had disappeared. Parcels from Judy sent through the Red Cross had not been claimed by him. There were a few mysterious references to him in recent letters from his fellow prisoners, partly cut out by the German censors. What did it mean? Judy wrote:

I saw a very nice girl in the Prisoners of War Department, and she saw that I was all on edge, and tried to cheer me up. I don’t think he’s dead, or we should have heard. No doubt he has been moved to another camp, and somehow has not been registered. Cases like that do happen now and again. . . . But why doesn’t he write, I asked, and I heard the anguish in my own voice. I couldn’t help it, John. One can’t hide one’s torture all the time. Then the girl said something in a low voice which startled me and keeps me afraid. There’s just a chance, she said, that he may have escaped. I don’t want to give you false hopes. Somehow, it doesn’t give me hope, John. If he’s caught they may shoot him or beat him up. It makes me terribly anxious. I would much rather he had remained in the old camp teaching the officers and men to draw, and giving them talks about art and all that. But I knew something was happening in his mind. He longed to see the baby. In one letter he said, “I don’t think I can stick this out much longer!” That was when I first began to get frightened. Oh, John! I’m living in a state of terror, though I try to be brave.

Poor Judy! thought John, putting the letter into his pocketbook.

He, too, wondered what had happened to that extraordinary fellow, Robin Bramley, who had been through the last war and hated the idea of another, though at its outbreak he had volunteered at once. John remembered him in his studio above the mews where Judy had fallen in love with him. Although he was Anne’s cousin, he hadn’t a bean to

bless himself with, and sold very few of his pictures. He always talked fantastic nonsense which had kept Judy in little squeals of laughter. Now, poor devil, he was either dead or wandering about Germany like a hunted animal. If he had escaped he was bound to be caught again.

The last lines in Judy's letter had had no reference to Robin. They were about himself, and made him review his own progress, if any.

I hope you are routing the isolationists! When are we Americans coming in to defend that liberty of which we talk so much? It's up to you, John! I pray for your success.

All that was an illusion. He was not routing the isolationists, because he did not meet them. They remained in the background—or, rather, they were doing their work in an underground way, more dangerous than if they had come into the open. He was preaching to the converted, or, rather, to sympathizers with England's ordeal with that dead line of reluctance to fling American man power into the war after their munitions sent to Britain and Russia. He was cutting no ice at all, in spite of a fair success as a public speaker. The Americans just didn't want to come into the war. Nothing that he said, or could say, would move them from that position. He had come out in the spirit of a crusader. He had really had a passion of desire to help England by helping them to understand. What a conceited ass he had been to imagine that one man—himself—could turn the tide of a nation's thought and lead them against their will into the dark adventure of war, for the defence of liberty and civilized ideas!

He was just wasting his time, he thought. He was becoming an actor, prating stale lines, while losing the sharp edge of the sincerity with which he had first spoken them.

So he thought, gloomily, in an airplane on the way to San Francisco.

He was flying through the darkness of a still night. The sky was scattered with stars, brilliant in the high dome which was darkly blue; American cities and townships, far below, were magical in beauty. Only their lights were visible, strung out like diamonds on the velvet cloth of earth.

Thus it was over Denver, as the plane banked steeply for its landing.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said the girl who looked after the comforts of the passengers and brought them light refreshments; and, when they were coming down, a packet of chewing gum, because mastication was good to relieve air pressure in the ears.

"It's like a fairy city," answered John. "I never saw anything more entrancing."

"The cities wouldn't shine like that in England," remarked the young woman.

"They wouldn't shine at all," answered John.

This girl had been very chatty with him, having taken a vacant chair by his side. She knew who he was, and had heard his broadcasts from England. They had discussed the war—she was quite intelligent, he found—and then she had told him the story of her life, which he found interesting because typical. Of course she had been to high school and college. Of course she was doing this job to earn her own keep and to send home a few dollars every week to help out her father and mother. She was engaged to a nice boy who had been drafted into the Army.

“That’s why I don’t want America to get into this war,” she said. “I don’t want Freddy to be killed on some Central European battlefield. You understand that, don’t you, Mr. Barton?”

“It’s easy to understand,” he agreed, avoiding further argument.

At Denver, after a few minutes’ halt to take on more fuel, another passenger entered the aircraft and took the chair next to John’s. He was a young Chinaman going back to his home in San Francisco, where he had learned to speak very good American.

“I’m a Chink,” he said, introducing himself to John. “I’m saying that in a hurry, because I’d just hate to be taken for a damn little Jap!”

“Thanks for the information,” said John, who had mistaken him for a Jap.

“My name is Wong,” said the Chinaman. “It’s a very respectable name. My family are fruit farmers outside San Francisco. I’m a third-year man at the University of Washington, but I’ve been spending a few weeks with relatives in Chicago.”

“Glad to meet you,” said John, who wanted to go to sleep. “I hope you had a good time in Chicago?”

He stifled a yawn and stretched out his legs a trifle longer.

“I guess I had a bad time in Chicago,” answered the little “Chink,” as he called himself. “I learned a darned lot too much about the stupidity of the human species, and the American people in particular.”

“I’m sorry about that,” said John.

“You’d be sorry if you knew,” answered his travelling companion. “The American nation will be sorry when they have to sit up and take notice. Jeepers creepers! They’ll sure be sorry!”

“The European war, do you mean?” asked John sleepily.

“No sir. I’m not referring to Adolf Hitler, or anything on that side. I mean the war we’re going to have with Japan, and that very damn quick!”

“Think so?”

Only two men in America had spoken about the possibility of war with Japan. One was the President of the United States, the other was this little Chinaman. The President had spoken about it gravely, but only in a sentence or two, and what he said had been off the record. It had not made much of a dent in John’s brain. All his mind was on England’s war with Germany, and now Russia’s war. He had no first-hand knowledge of Japan, and subconsciously—like every American—did not think the Japanese would dare to attack the United States. Hadn’t they their hands full enough in China? Hadn’t they bitten off more than they could chew in trying to dominate the Chinese? And wasn’t their economic position in a parlous state?

The little Chinaman turned his head sideways and smiled at John, showing a set of very white teeth.

“You say, ‘Think so?’ in a careless way. That is like my friends in the University of Washington. They say ‘Think so?’ when I get mad about it. Think I’m just crazy. But they’re all blind, and deaf, and dumb; like the American Administration and Big

Business! Yes sir; I'm telling you. We Chinese have been watching this thing—we read the signs."

"What signs?" asked John. He was beginning to be mildly interested.

The little Chinaman laughed in a shrill voice, which was subdued by the vibration of the plane flying through the darkness.

"I will give you one sign—it is not secret, it is very public: for two years now Japanese agents have been in the United States buying up scrap iron. They have bought scrap iron in every city of the United States, and in every small town. Many ships are loaded with it from many American ports. It is fine for Big Business! It is very good for shipping! But it will not be so good for the mothers of American sons when those boys get this scrap iron back in their bellies as machine-gun bullets. It will not be so good for the American Navy when Japanese warships, built and armed out of scrap iron, fire off long-range guns made from the same material!

"It will not be good for the American people when the Nipponese raise the cry of Asia for the Asiatics, and attack, perhaps without a declaration of war, the Philippines and other American islands in the Pacific. One day that will happen. One day soon. They are nearly ready, those Japs. My father has friends in Tokyo who tell him these things; who keep him posted. But no one believes it. No one takes precautions. Americans despise the Japanese and underestimate their strength. I write letters to the *New York Times*. They do not print them. I write letters to Members of Congress. They do not read them. I speak in debate with my friends in the University of Washington. They laugh very much. They think this little damn Chink is very funny!"

"Tell me some more," said John.

The little Chinaman was telling him a lot more when they flew nearer to San Francisco—near enough to see below them the long sweep of that city along the Pacific coast traced out in lights which shone like precious jewels, all glowing with the brilliance of the Kohinoor.

"Gosh!" exclaimed John Barton. "That's very beautiful. That's the most beautiful thing I have seen this trip!"

"Yes, it is very beautiful," said the Chinaman. "It's like a dream in the mind of a great poet. It's a vision of the Eternal City of God—but it may not be so beautiful if the Japs send their dive bombers over it on a dawn, not far away, when all its people are asleep. They are asleep now! The whole population of the United States is fast asleep. How funny it will be when they are awakened by gunfire from Japanese ships. I shall laugh, because it will be so funny—their shock of surprise—and I shall weep, because I am a good American, and my family grows fruit outside San Francisco, and there is a pretty girl I love in Hollywood. She is a Chinese girl. She acts for Twentieth-Century Fox Films. I love her very much."

"Glad to have had this talk," said John when their aircraft made a perfect landing and the passengers found themselves at Journey's End.

The little Chinaman laughed with his shrill giggle.

"You do not believe me," he said. "You are like the others."

"One day we shall know," said John. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee."

He shook hands with the little yellow man.

THE airdrome at San Francisco was brilliantly illuminated by floodlights and electric lamps, which made the grass around the buildings vividly green and gave strange, unearthly colours to flowering plants in green tubs. It was an hour before dawn, but the air was warm and fragrant.

"Mr. John Barton?" said a voice, as John went towards the restaurant for his cup of coffee.

"How do you do," said John, realizing that he was being met by the promoters of his lecture.

"I'm Judge Stirling," said a tall, lantern-jawed man with white hair gleaming in the electric light; and he took off his hat and grasped John's hand. "I'm very happy to meet you, Mr. Barton. We are looking forward greatly to your talk tomorrow night. This is my friend and fellow organizer, Bill Wanamaker, editor of the *Pacific Herald*, which has given you some fine advance publicity."

"I'm proud to meet you, Mr. Barton," said a youngish-looking man with red hair and blue eyes. "We newspapermen think you've been doing a mighty fine job over in Europe. We think you're the Prince of Special Correspondents and radio commentators. Now I hope you're not too tired to face the cameramen for a few seconds?"

"That's all right with me," said John good-naturedly. "But I can't help thinking they're wasting their plates."

There was a laugh from a group of cameramen who levelled their machines at him and took him a dozen times by flashlight until Judge Stirling waved one hand and said: "That'll do, boys!"

"This ought to mean something to you as a standard of success," he said, turning to John with a laugh. "These camera boys don't turn out before the dawn unless they're going to meet somebody of high distinction and universal fame."

"Well! They've met the wrong man this time," said John with a self-conscious laugh. "I'm just an ordinary newspaper guy like themselves."

"We want to ask you a few questions," said a young fellow with a soft felt hat on his head. "Can you stand for it at this hour of the morning?"

Four or five other men gathered round him and produced notebooks.

"Now don't you go trespassing too much on the lecture he's going to give us tomorrow night!" said Judge Stirling, chewing the end of a half-smoked cigar. "As one of the organizers of the Town Hall Forum, I have to safeguard the interests of six thousand subscribers."

“Oh, we won’t poach on his lecture!” said the young man in the felt hat. “We just want to get the low-down on the way the war is going. And, first of all, we’d like to know John Barton’s reactions to San Francisco.”

John Barton had arrived on the edge of San Francisco only a few minutes ago. It was physically and mentally impossible for him to have any reactions regarding that city. But he described his impression of its beauty when seen from an airplane at night.

“Say! That’s great stuff!” said one of the reporters. “Most people who come here by plane can’t put their reactions into words.”

It was twenty minutes later when Judge Stirling and Bill Wanamaker rescued him from this third-degree interrogation and took him to breakfast in the restaurant of the airdrome.

“You’re looking a trifle tired, if I may say so, Mr. Barton,” remarked Judge Stirling, when he had ordered John’s food and drink. “I should say you’re just working on your nerves, and not on any physical reserve.”

“Not surprising, either,” said Mr. Wanamaker of the *Pacific Herald*. “Our distinguished visitor has just flown over from hell-fire in England. It would be surprising if he looked like a fellow who has been having a good time in Florida.”

“I’ll say that’s so,” agreed the judge. “But I’d like Mr. Barton to have all the rest possible while he’s in San Francisco. I’d like to rescue him from all the ladies who want to lionize him, and from all the men who want a speech from him on the side at the Rotary Club, and the Bohemian Club, and the San Francisco Ben Lions.”

Mr. Wanamaker nodded.

“Fine idea, but not easy. I must plead guilty to having arranged a little dinner in Barton’s honour, from the newspapermen of the Pacific coast. I hope he’s going to accept?”

“Thanks a lot,” said John, delivering himself up to the inevitable.

He liked these two people. They meant to be kind. The judge was a man of dry humour and good nature. He was solicitous for John’s health and comfort. The youngish-looking editor was somewhat overwhelmed in his admiration of John’s radio talks.

Towards the end of breakfast, after he had answered many questions about the state of things in England, he turned the tables on them by asking a few questions of his own. They were suggested by the talk he had had with the little Chinese traveller.

“How does California regard the Japanese menace?”

Judge Stirling and Wanamaker joined each other in a quiet laugh.

“California isn’t worrying,” answered Wanamaker. “They don’t believe there is a Japanese menace.”

“They used to,” said John. “It’s within my memory as an American journalist that the Pacific coast quaked in its shoes at any mention of the Yellow Peril. Wasn’t it a kind of obsession? Weren’t they darned nervous about it?”

“They were,” said Judge Stirling. “But times have changed. The Japs have exhausted themselves in China; and they’re in pretty bad shape at home. They’re just

rotten from top to bottom.”

“Isn’t their navy at top form?” asked John.

It was Wanamaker who answered.

“I have a bunch of friends in the American Navy. The opinion in our Pacific Fleet is that the Japs would commit hara-kiri if they challenged Uncle Sam. It would be no more than a question of three or four weeks before we sent them to the bottom.”

“I hope you’re right,” said John, drawing in a gulp of smoke from his cigarette and letting it out of his nose.

“That’s right,” said Judge Stirling. “Our Intelligence Service has got the Japs taped. They’re watching every move they make. They’re just playing a game of bluff with Cordell Hull.”

“The President is sending some pretty stiff notes,” said John. “Supposing it comes to a showdown?”

“In my judgment,” said Judge Stirling, “Mr. Roosevelt is asking for a showdown. He wants to put these Nipponese in their right place and teach them a thing or two about the power of the United States. In the end they’ll take it lying down.”

“We’re sure of our own strength now,” said Wanamaker, lighting a match for John’s next cigarette.

“That’s right,” said the judge. “The people have confidence in the Administration. If California scans the horizon, it fails to see any shadow across the Pacific. As a matter of fact, we sleep easy in our beds and don’t give a damn for that little island of yellow men who have been letting off a lot of hot air lately, to divert attention from the mess they have made in China.”

“That, I’m told, is the view of Mr. Cordell Hull.”

“He ought to know,” answered John dryly.

He remembered some words spoken to him by the President of the United States. They were off the record.

The dawn was beginning to glimmer through the windows of this restaurant overlooking the airdrome in San Francisco. The floodlights had been turned out. There was a lovely flush in the sky, and a few wisps of cloud were turned into rose-red feathers above a bar of pale gold. It would be night in England, John remembered. They would have finished another day of war. The midnight news would have told another day’s tale of the R.A.F., and of more ships sunk, and of the desperate fighting on the way to Moscow. Judy would be asleep—or perhaps not asleep, but thinking of a man who was missing as a prisoner of war.

“By the way,” said Judge Stirling, “Valentine Turner is here.”

“That so?” asked John, knowing that Valentine Turner was number one isolationist in the United States.

“He’s taken a ticket for your lecture,” said Wanamaker.

“He may make a spot of trouble,” said the judge.

“That’s all right with me,” remarked John carelessly.

The judge laughed a trifle uneasily.

“Glad you feel that way. He’s a dangerous fellow. He hired the air the other night and gave a broadcast talk. The pure—or impure—gospel of isolationism. I sure wanted to choke him. It got my goat!”

“I hate his guts,” agreed Mr. Wanamaker; “but I will say he puts the isolationist case with considerable ability.”

“Oh, he’s able!” said Judge Stirling. “Devilish clever, in fact. That’s what makes him dangerous. He instils his poison into many minds, especially along the Pacific coast and in the Middle West—geographically distant from the war in Europe. Some of the fellows at the Bohemian Club were telling me . . .”

“He’s using this isolationist racket,” said Wanamaker, “merely as a weapon against Mr. Roosevelt. That’s his inspiration—a blind and passionate hatred of the President.”

“I’d like to meet him,” said John. “I’d like to cross swords with him.”

Judge Stirling laughed.

“Maybe the opportunity will present itself. I have a shrewd idea that Mr. Val D. Turner will do a bit of heckling at your talk tomorrow night. It doesn’t make you nervous?”

Barton shrugged his shoulders.

“Nervous? Why?”

“I wouldn’t care to cross swords with him myself,” admitted the judge. “He’s mighty quick in repartee, and he’s pretty ruthless when he gets going. I think he hates England almost as much as he hates Mr. Roosevelt.”

“England doesn’t worry,” answered John, and having answered he yawned behind his hand.

“Sorry, Judge, but I want some sleep! I’m beginning to feel the need of it.”

“You’re going to get it, young fellow,” answered the judge. “I’ll drive you to your hotel. You can put in four hours’ sleep before you’re down for the first engagement of the day.”

“There’s a little party of women want to meet you at the headquarters of Bundles for Britain. They’ve been doing good work for that cause. My wife is one of them. Do you mind?”

“That’s fine,” said John gallantly.

According to his physical health perhaps, or his degree of mental tiredness, or some temporary revival of passionate advocacy, John Barton stepped on to his platform in varying moods. Sometimes he was dejected, and had to goad himself to act his part and give the audience his best or second best. Sometimes he was inclined to be harsh and satirical. Sometimes he was carried outside self-consciousness by intensity of emotion which at other times was lacking. Often his mind seemed to be in two layers. While he was talking one thing, he was thinking out another. Describing the London shelters and the characteristics of the crowd down there, he was wondering what had happened to Judy’s husband, or whether the Langdons were all right, or whether it was nice weather at Spurfold Green. Once he began to think of Anne and his honeymoon trip with her

across the Atlantic. This memory took so much possession of his mind that he lost the thread of his discourse and stopped for several seconds, during which the audience waited silently. He had to appeal to them.

“What was I saying?”

Some of them laughed, but a woman’s clear voice came to his rescue.

“You were telling us about the Café de Paris.”

Tonight, in San Francisco, he was at his best, though unaware of that. He was extremely tired and felt strangely disembodied. But his brain was working like a dynamo, and for some reason he abandoned a good deal of his ordinary narrative and devoted more of his speech to an analysis of the English—the common folk of England—and the impulses of tradition and inheritance which enabled them to carry on in times of terrible ordeal.

He had a big audience, something like six thousand, he had been told by Judge Stirling. Standing before the microphone, they were mostly blurred to his vision. Only those in the front before him were visible as human beings. He noticed how the lights gleamed on the pates of bald-headed men, or touched the shirt fronts of those in tuxedos. Now and again he was startled by their clapping at unexpected times. He got a laugh every now and then. Sometimes they were all so silent that he thought they must have gone to sleep, and was quite relieved when he heard a kind of sigh, like a little wind, pass through the audience and reach his ears. It was when he was telling them of one of the nights of blitz in London with some tragic detail.

He looked at his wrist watch presently; he had been five minutes longer than usual.

“Well, that’s all,” he said abruptly. “I hope I haven’t bored you?”

They all rose for some reason, and when six thousand people rise to their feet in a hall it has the sound of a wave on a rocky shore. They were all clapping; this noise of applause was sharp and staccato. There was warmth behind it, and it went on longer than he had yet known at the end of one of his talks.

Judge Stirling, who was his chairman, rose and shook him by the hand.

“Great stuff,” he said. “Wonderful, Barton. Congratulations.”

“I thought I had bored ’em,” said John. “May I light a cigarette?”

He lit a cigarette without waiting for the judge’s permission. The judge was in front of the microphone saying something about the magnificent address it had been their privilege to hear; saying something about the agony of England in time of bombardment; saying something about the necessity of keeping an open mind and hearing both sides of a question.

John was inhaling nicotine. He sat down on a chair feeling weak in the knees. He leaned forward with his head drooping slightly.

This sort of thing, he thought, needs the strength of a gladiator, and I’m not a gladiator.

The judge was announcing that Mr. John Barton, their distinguished speaker, was ready to answer any questions which might be put to him.

Oh my God! cried John inside himself.

The questions were not difficult at first. A woman wanted to know exactly the amount of British rations. John was able to tell her. A young man asked if Middle Temple Hall had been utterly destroyed. An elderly man, upon whose pate the lights gleamed, asked if Mr. Barton would kindly tell him whether the morale of the Italians had been lowered by the campaign in Abyssinia.

"It was never very high," answered Barton, raising a laugh.

"Mr. Barton," cried a woman's voice, "are the English people grateful for the aid coming to them from the United States?"

"They are," answered John. "They are very thankful for Bundles for Britain."

"What about Ireland?" asked another voice.

"A tricky question that, with Irish people in the audience!" he answered frankly, saying that English people were angry with Ireland because they kept a German ambassador in Dublin.

He waited for somebody to say: What about Japan? He was on the Pacific coast. Surely someone in his audience would raise the question of the Japanese menace. No one raised it.

"May I ask Mr. Barton," shouted a voice from the centre of the hall, "whether, in his opinion, Great Britain can win this war without the aid of American man power?"

"I'm afraid not," said John, knowing that his answer would fall upon his audience like a wet blanket. "It's a question of man power."

He told them about England's inability to build up a great army on the continental scale because of the necessity of heavy recruiting for the R.A.F., and the Navy, and the Mercantile Marine; at the same time keeping her factories at full speed ahead. The answer took some time.

"Any more questions?" asked Judge Stirling.

There was a moment's silence, and then a man rose up from the centre of the front line of seats. He was a tall, middle-aged man, with powerful shoulders and a heavy frame. He had white hair but a youngish-looking face, with dark eyes which seemed very much alive. Barton knew this face; he had seen its photograph many times, and he had looked down upon it from the press gallery in Washington. It was Val D. Turner, on the Republican side of Congress, now the leader of isolationism in the United States.

As he rose there was a sound in the hall of escaping gas. He was being hissed by part of the audience. But little groups of people clapped mildly.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, in a loud, clear voice—the voice of a man who has learned the first thing in the art of public speaking, which is to be heard.

"Mr. Chairman, I wish to ask Mr. Barton one or two questions. May I do so?"

The judge rose.

"This is an open forum, Mr. Turner. You have as much right as anyone else in this audience to put a question to the speaker. But it must be a question, and not a speech."

The last sentence raised a laugh which passed through the audience, followed by applause.

Mr. Val D. Turner's resonant voice rang out again.

"I have no wish or intention to make a speech. I have other opportunities for that. I will ask my question."

He paused, and the audience was alert to know what question he would ask. Most of them had recognized him. They had whispered his name to others.

"Mr. Barton," he said, "have you come here as an English propagandist, with the authority of the British Government?"

Again there was that curious noise of escaping gas. Part of the audience did not like that question.

"I have come here as an American correspondent," said John, "to tell the truth as far as I have seen it."

"May I suggest to you, Mr. Barton, that you have not seen the truth very far?"

The noise of hissing was mingled with some laughter.

"You may suggest that," agreed John carelessly. "I have seen a good deal."

Mr. Val D. Turner spoke again. He had a fine carrying voice.

"May I ask you, sir, whether you have seen British rule in India?"

"No," said John.

"Or in Egypt?"

"No."

"Or in Africa?"

"No."

"Or in Ireland?"

"No."

Mr. Val D. Turner raised his hands as though expressing his astonishment.

"And yet," he said, turning a little sideways, so that the audience might have the full benefit of his words, "you stand there as a propagandist for England without knowing at first-hand the greed, despotism, and exploitation of the British Empire, for whose power and financial interests we are being asked to shed the blood of our sons!"

John Barton laughed harshly, and strode nearer to the edge of the platform. This oratorical nonsense, as he thought it, had made him angry; but before he could answer the chairman interposed.

"Mr. Turner, you are making a speech, and not asking questions. That is against the rules of this Town Hall Forum."

These words were received with applause by part of the audience.

Mr. Val D. Turner bowed to the chairman.

"I am sorry, sir, if you object to a passing comment. But I will ask the speaker a straight question which may be answered by a 'yes' or 'no.' Have I your permission, Mr. Chairman?"

"Go ahead," said the chairman gruffly.

“Mr. Barton, sir,” said Mr. Val D. Turner, “will you meet me here on this platform in open debate tomorrow night at eight o’clock? I may say I have hired the hall.”

John gave the matter a moment’s thought. When and where was his next engagement? Fort Worth, Texas, three nights hence. Yes, he would have time.

“Certainly,” he said.

There was a round of applause. The audience was excited by the thought of this duel between isolationist number one and John Barton, newspaperman and radio reporter.

“Fine!” said Mr. Val D. Turner. “I look forward to our debate.”

He raised his hand in salute to John and strode down the gangway towards the exit from the hall.

The meeting was at an end. Groups of people lingered to get a word or two with Barton. The chairman laughed and shook hands again.

“You did fine, Mr. Barton. That fellow is like one of the Seven Plagues of Egypt. But I’m glad you were ready to meet him. I must say it didn’t take you long to accept the challenge.”

That point was stressed by members of the audience who crowded round John when he stepped down from the platform.

“Say! That was fine of you, Mr. Barton. You certainly rang out like a pistol shot!”

“Oh, Mr. Barton! I will say I admire your courage! That man ought to be put in a concentration camp. He’s a menace to these United States.”

“Well, now, Mr. Barton, we thought a lot of you before, but tonight we’re just crazy about you!”

“You gave us a terrible thrill, Mr. Barton. Your speech was beautiful, but the way you stood up to that man was real heroism.”

The groups which had remained behind to greet Barton were one hundred per cent on his side.

“I was going to a symphony concert,” said one of the white-haired ladies, “but I’m going to cut that. Yes sir! I wouldn’t miss tomorrow night’s debate between you and that dreadful man, not for all the music in the world!”

From the boxoffice point of view it was going to be a great success, that debate between John Barton and Val D. Turner. The San Francisco press played it up in big headlines in the morning papers.

NOTE—RADIO COMMENTATOR ACCEPTS CHALLENGE. THRILLING DUEL EXPECTED TONIGHT. JOHN BARTON IN GLADIATOR MOOD. VAL D. TURNER FEELS UP FOR THE FRAY.

JOHN received a visit from his opponent at ten o'clock on the morning following his lecture. His card was brought up while John was still in his dressing gown, reading his letters after breakfast. An English mail had been forwarded to him, bringing letters from his mother and Judy. Poor Judy was still suffering anguish because Robin was missing.

"I'll come down," said John to the bellboy.

He was not too pleased by this visit. Val D. Turner was a type of man he detested. He was glib-tongued, plausible, and dangerous. He was just playing a political game, John thought, and using isolationism to get into the limelight, first of all; and, secondly, to undercut the President by playing on the selfish interests of the American people, and preaching hatred and intolerance of England, not because he disliked England, but because it was an easy game for raising his own importance. So John read the man who had heckled him last night.

Down in the hall he stood waiting, with his hat over one eye—a square-shouldered fellow and powerful-looking, with big, restless hands. One of those hands was held out to John.

"Morning, John Barton! No harm in having a few friendly words about our debate tonight. I will say it was sporting of you to accept my challenge."

"It seemed necessary," answered John coldly.

Val D. Turner laughed.

"The idea came to me on the spur of the moment. A bit of a brain wave, don't you think?"

"How?" asked John, still very coldly.

"It'll do a bit of good to both of us," answered Turner. "The press will give us a good show. What we both want, I guess, is as much publicity as possible for our respective slants on this business. You're a newspaperman. You know better than me, that one can't cut ice without publicity. That's why you're lecturing, and I'm stumping the country for the isolationists."

"Why do you want to see me?" asked John, ignoring that tribute to publicity.

Mr. Turner laughed in his deep-toned voice.

"We shall have to put our heads together a bit. It's no use going on to the platform tonight without knowing what the other fellow is going to say!"

John shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"I think I know exactly what you're going to say. You're going to rake up all the old libels against England, and you're going to say that Hitler's war is no concern of the

United States.”

“Right,” answered Turner. “But I’m going to say a hell of a lot more than that, and it’s the order of the debate which has to be considered a bit. Now, would you like to lead off, or shall I? Just as you like, Barton. I guess the opener ought to have fifteen minutes on his own, and then be followed by the other fellow for another fifteen. Then in the second round there ought to be twenty minutes each. That’ll just about fill the bill. The audience will expect as much as that for their money. By the way, I’m quite ready to share proceeds. The labourer is worthy of his hire.”

“No, thanks,” said John. “I’m not your hired man.”

“No offence meant,” said Turner, sweeping such an idea away. “That’s a quotation from Shakespeare, ain’t it? Anyhow, I make a fair offer in a friendly spirit.”

“I won’t take any money,” said John icily.

“Fine,” said Turner carelessly. “But I could do with a drink now. A late night always gives me the hell of a thirst in the morning.”

John ordered him an old-fashioned, which made him loquacious.

“These Californians,” he said, “think a mighty lot of themselves. They’re great boosters for their climate, their scenery, their women, and their superiority to all other Americans. It makes me laugh!”

He laughed then, in a hoarse, hearty voice.

John was relieved when he rose from his chair and held out his big hand.

“Glad to have had this talk, Barton. We shall set about each other tonight, but it will be a clean fight without malice afterwards. I ain’t a dirty fighter!”

He gave John’s hand a hard grip, and then departed with his hat cocked over one eye.

John had a busy day. Newspapermen came to interview him about the coming debate. They were playing it up. Photographers took flashlight shots of him at all angles. A deputation of college girls tapped at his bedroom door as he sat on the edge of his bed and questioned him about the qualities necessary for the journalistic life. A lunch was arranged for him in his honour at the Bohemian Club, where, inevitably, he was called upon for a speech. He took tea at the Women’s Club, where his hostess asked him to say a few words on international affairs. He gave a broadcast talk at five o’clock, and was interrogated by a lady who, for some odd reason, had got it into her head that he was a famous dramatic critic.

His engagements for the day were not at an end before the evening debate. The sponsors of his lecture the previous evening were driving him out to see the Pacific coast, and the two new bridges, and the Golden Gate, and other beauties of San Francisco. A big car came to fetch him from the hotel. It was driven by Judge William Schumacher, who had brought his wife and daughter.

“Keeping you busy?” asked the judge cheerily. “We try to kill our distinguished visitors. The more distinguished they are, the more we try to murder them.”

“I must be very undistinguished,” answered John. “So far, I have not tasted poison nor powdered glass!”

“We’re all looking forward to the debate tonight,” said Miss Schumacher, who was a pretty blonde, conscious of her charms.

“I’m looking forward to it with horror,” said John sincerely.

He forgot that coming ordeal when he stepped down from the car later on and looked across the golden waters of the Pacific.

“Over there is Japan,” he said to Judge Schumacher.

“Quite a long way,” answered the judge. “We’re not feeling nervous about those little yellow men.”

“The President sent them a stiff note yesterday,” said John thoughtfully.

The judge nodded.

“He’s asking for a showdown. Tokyo’s playing a game of bluff, and Uncle Sam says ‘I’ll see you.’ ”

“I’m a bit uneasy,” John confessed, remembering a certain conversation with the President of the United States.

Judge Schumacher laughed carelessly.

“No need for uneasiness, Barton. Those little worms don’t count a dollar bill. They’re bogged in China. Their finance is a joke. Their fleet is tin pot. They’d be crazy if they challenged the United States.”

“I hope you’re right, William,” said Mrs. Schumacher. “Sometimes I wonder if we’re underestimating the Japs. They’re very artful little men, aren’t they?”

“One of my boy friends is a naval lieutenant,” said Miss Schumacher. “He tells me that the American Navy is just yearning for a chance to come to close quarters with the Jap fleet. It will be a picnic with fireworks, he says.”

For a few minutes John broke away from his guides. He walked along the coast line for a few hundred yards and stood there alone gazing over the glittering ocean. It was hazy, with a golden mist which limited visibility; but his mind went through the haze, and in imagination he saw the Far East on the other side of this ocean. India. Burma. The Malayas. The Philippines. All that world was outside his range of experience, but not beyond the reach of his mind in which there lurked old tales of romance and odd scraps of historical knowledge.

He took off his hat and let the sea breeze stir his hair.

What am I doing here? he asked himself. It’s darned queer to be staring across the Pacific—and it’s as beautiful as a dream. But I’m a lonely guy with a bleeding heart. Where’s Anne? Why doesn’t she give me any sign? And how soon can I break away from this damn-fool lecture tour into which I got trapped? I can’t even get time to think!

He heard a “coo-ee” from the Schumacher girl.

They thought he had gone crazy, straying away from them like that, and standing like a statue on the Californian coast for quite three minutes.

It was unfortunate and sad for John Barton that a tragic cable from England reached him just before he went on the platform at the Town Forum in San Francisco for his debate with Val D. Turner. It was from his English friend, Langdon, the man whom he regarded as his best friend in England; wise, sympathetic, and always kind. It was a brief message.

PAUL WAS KILLED YESTERDAY

John's heart gave a lurch when he read those words. He had known this boy Paul and had loved him for his gaiety, and his good looks, and his fine character. Although John was so much older than he, they had established a real intimacy of friendship like comrades of the same age. But John's grief at that moment was not so much for Paul as for his father and mother, who would be utterly stricken by this boy's death. Peter Langdon, the novelist, who had laboured with his whole soul for peace since the last war, had been horrified by the advent of this new war, not a little because of his son, Paul, with whom he classed all other boys. Now Paul was taken from him by this war in the air. But Paul's mother would have a sword in her heart. All her courage and faith and beautiful spirit would be put to the test now. John had a great love for Katherine Langdon. He had gone to her always with his troubles and griefs. She had helped him when Anne was killed. He had wept upon her breast like a wounded boy. Now he could not comfort her in this hour of tragic loss.

Oh God! Oh God! cried Barton in his soul.

"Bad news, Barton?" asked Val Turner, who was standing in the waiting room with him behind the stage. He had been pacing up and down nervously, chewing the wet stump of a cigar.

"Yes," said John gruffly.

"Sorry," said Turner. "Don't let it put you off your stride. We've only a minute to go."

"Curse that!" said John.

He tore a page out of his notebook and wrote out a cable to Chelsea, England:

I AM STRICKEN BY YOUR NEWS STOP MY HEART BLEEDS FOR YOU BOTH STOP JOHN.

"Can you get that on the wires?" said John to the man who had been arranging the microphone on the platform.

"I sure will, Mr. Barton," answered the man.

"Here are five bucks," said John, taking some notes out of his pocketbook.

“That’s quite all right, Mr. Barton.”

Val Turner’s chairman, who was the editor of a San Francisco paper, returned from a survey of the audience through a peep-hole in the curtain.

“You gentlemen had better go on,” he said. “There’s a big crowd in front. Full house, I guess.”

“Ready, Barton?” asked Turner, glancing at him uneasily.

“That’s O.K.,” answered John.

The three men strode on to the platform and heard a noise of clapping. The chairman and Val Turner made their bows and put on their best smiles. Barton stood on one side and did not glance at all those people in front. His mind was in an old Queen Anne house in Chelsea, where two friends of his would be weeping for a dead boy.

“Better sit down, Barton,” whispered the chairman. “I shan’t be long in my opening speech.”

Barton didn’t hear a word of that opening speech. His body was on a platform in San Francisco, but his mind was over in England. He was thinking of young Paul Langdon. They had discussed the war together. The boy had had a premonition that he would be killed. He wasn’t afraid of death, he said, but was sorry for his father and mother.

I shall have many pals on the other side, he said.

On the other side. Was there another side? If only one could draw the curtain for one moment and know. If only one could get absolute proof. No sign had come from Anne. None of those flying boys came back to tell. They had entered the Great Silence.

The chairman ended his introduction, and Val Turner went to the microphone. It was with an effort of will power that Barton jerked himself back from England to listen to this protagonist of American isolation.

He was a clever speaker with all the tricks of the professional orator. Frequently he raised a clenched fist like a sledge hammer and brought it down into the palm of his other hand. He raised his powerful voice, so that it rang through the hall like a trumpet, and then lowered it for some passage of dread warning. He became scornful now and then, and laughed harshly, and raised a laugh in his audience at some jibe against England and the English. There was a sob in his throat when he addressed the mothers of American sons. He worked himself up into a rage when he spoke of the President, who, he said, was pushing the American people into war, going step by step towards the fiery furnace, without their consent, and against their will. He called himself a Democrat, but he violated the spirit of democracy, and acted as a dictator, no less than Hitler or Mussolini. He ignored the American Constitution. He was crafty and sly in his intentions, which were fixed on war, and nothing but war. He plays the part of a swindling Messiah, said Val D. Turner. He is swindling us out of our liberties. He is swindling us in the pose of a peace lover, when his deliberate policy is to create a situation when war becomes inescapable by the people, who have a sacred right to declare their will for peace.

How can one resist that man? he asked. How can the people prevent their own doom which he is arranging for them? How can it save their sons from a massacre of

youth which he is planning already in a room at the White House? They cannot revise his notes to foreign powers. They cannot interrupt his radio speeches. They cannot alter, by one comma, his secret agreements with the British Prime Minister. There is only one way in which they may take control of their own fate. It is by a tidal wave of indignation overwhelming the White House, reaching the ears of that man by its loud and righteous clamour, frightening him by the knowledge that he cannot betray his country's liberties with impunity, and that he cannot drive them like sheep to the shambles of war.

There was a tense silence in the hall. Six thousand people were listening without a sign of approval or disapproval. Only now and then came a thin sound of applause from scattered groups.

These people, thought John, are willing to hear the case for American isolation, but they're not convinced. All this poppycock fails to stir their enthusiasm.

Val Turner had something to say about England and the British Empire. He took the line that England was responsible for the war by her policy of appeasement under Chamberlain, and that her people entered the war only when they believed that their own interests and possessions were threatened. Throughout history, he said, England had been self-seeking and aggressive. They boasted of their love for liberty, but kept subject peoples under an iron rule and in abject misery as slave states like India and her other dominions ruled from Whitehall. England used her empire for exploitation of backward races whom they kept backward with selfish malignancy.

That war in Europe was a war on both sides for power, wealth, and greed. Why should American boys be killed for such a cause? To bolster up the decadence of the British Empire? To be caught in the feuds and fury of the European jungle? Had not millions of American citizens and their forefathers come to the United States for the purpose of escaping from that jungle law of fang and claw? Was that man at the White House to be allowed to plunge them back into its ancient savagery? What was that man's motive? What was his justification? Cutting through his solemn-sounding phrases, his highfalutin oratory, his sham pose of the prophet and the oracle, what single reason could he give for American participation in the war between Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler? How preposterous it was to think that the United States were menaced in their liberties, or in their lives! Was it not the traditional wisdom of American leadership, from Alexander Hamilton onwards, to keep the United States out of foreign embroilments, and to build up American civilization in self-sufficiency? What had altered the wisdom of that policy? The vast resources of the United States, the efficiency of the people, the setup of American life, were still able to maintain the highest standard in the world with ever-increasing prosperity. It was the American privilege. It was the American destiny. Only a crazy mind twisted by megalomania, the lust for self-glory, and morbid egotism, which would fling all this away by entrapping the American people into a war which was none of their concern.

Mr. Val Turner altered his tone of voice. He put the necessary sob into it. It was warm and rich in appeal and human sympathy.

Dear women of America! Dear mothers of American boys! I am trying to save your sons from bloody death. I am a voice crying in the wilderness. I cry to you out of the

depths of my heart, to make your will known to the President, who is sworn to obey it. Let your tears wash up to the very doors of the White House. Let your voices cry at the windows. We will not send our sons into the furnace fires. We will not let them die. We will not let them be caught in the net set against their feet by the crafty propagandists of England. Let the jungle folk die, so long as America may live and prosper and breed her noble men in liberty and peace, carrying on the torch of civilization in the surrounding darkness of this warring world!

He seemed to be overcome by the emotion of his own oratory. He turned aside to hide the tears which may have been in his eyes. For a moment his head was bowed.

Blast that man! thought John Barton. Curse his glib tongue and his false sentiment!

Val D. Turner was rewarded by rounds of applause from something like half his audience. He had reduced some of the American mothers to tears. They had fallen under the spell of his eloquence. He had voiced their own fears for their sons.

"Mr. John Barton, the distinguished writer and radio reporter, will now take part in this open debate," said the chairman.

John rose from his chair. He had a touch of cramp in his right leg, and it made him limp a little as he went to the front of the platform. His face had a tragic look which some of the audience noticed. The death of that boy Paul had been a great shock to him. His voice at first was harsh and husky.

"We have heard the case for American isolationism," he began, speaking slowly. "And what a poverty-stricken, mean, and miserable case it is! You must see, if you have any intelligence, how utterly illogical it is. You folk in this hall are a cross-section of American life, therefore you have the usual share of knowledge and judgment, not easily blanketed up by false facts, false emotion, or false argument. Mr. Val D. Turner, my opponent tonight, has cloaked his main appeal to you under a mass of verbiage. Strip it of that cloak, and what do you find? A naked and ugly selfishness, a stark ignorance of the world in which he lives, a crude appeal to hatred of England, and a denial of anything higher in the American mind and soul than the hugging of its own materialism and low-grade egotism. Let all other peoples go to hell, he says in effect, and almost in those words, so long as we are safe and prosperous. But it is we who will go to hell if we adopt that policy. For we shall not secure even our own safety or prosperity, and by such a policy we shall lose our souls—as well as our shekels——

"He talks about those European peoples as though they were jungle beasts, and as though the United States alone had any claim to civilization. That is a damned and foolish libel. What civilization we have here has its origin in European thought and genius. Does France belong to the jungle folk—France, which was the treasure house of learning, wit, and culture? Is Poland one of the jungle folk—Poland, which is now enslaved and tortured by Hitler? Was Paderewski one of the wild beasts? Mr. Turner has poured venom and hatred upon England, raking up our old national life and accusing England of imaginary crimes, reckless of truth. Does not everyone in this hall know that American laws and liberties are based upon those for which England fought and struggled throughout her history? If England were to go down in this war unhelpt by us, there would be darkness in the world reaching out to us. For now England is

defending the last bulwarks of liberty, including our own. If these go there will be a return to the Dark Ages, and all the lamps will go out.

“By God!” said John Barton harshly, “that speech to which I had to listen has made me darned angry. It just gets my goat.”

Those words, spoken fiercely, raised a laugh here and there, but there was also a sudden warmth of applause from more than half the audience.

Barton took up Turner’s argument bit by bit. He analyzed it and tore it to shreds, bit by bit, with scorn and straight sincerity. There was not one word of truth in it, he said. It was reeking with falsity. It was a mask of sham sentiment and sham emotion.

He had said that the United States could be self-supporting in a world of ruin. Hadn’t they learned the falsity of that since the last war?

Hadn’t they been through the great depression caused by lack of markets and the breakdown of international finance? And did people in the United States really believe, for one moment, that they could live safely in a world dominated by Hitler? The British Navy stood between them and the German plans for world mastery. Already German agents were busy in Latin America. Already the wolf packs of the sea were sinking American ships. What would happen if Britain went down and the Atlantic lay open? The American coast line was very vulnerable.

Barton turned to his opponent’s attack on the British Empire.

“It is just untrue to say that the British Dominions are ruled from Whitehall. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are independent nations, self-governing and linked only to England by allegiance to the same king and by loyalty to the same tradition. There is, in fact, no British Empire. It is now the British Commonwealth of Nations, in free association.

“I have not been to India,” said John, “and I guess Mr. Val D. Turner has not been there either, but we can read. We can find the facts. My study of the Indian problem tells me that Britain has done a mighty good job over there.”

Those words astonished Barton’s audience. They seemed to give a gasp at this defence of British rule in India. It was contrary to all they had been told by Indian agitators lecturing in the States, and by other newspapermen who had made brief dashes to India before they wrote books about it.

“British officials in the Indian Civil Service,” said Barton, “have devoted their lives to the good administration of the Indian states. They have fought heroically against famine and plague. They have carried out great works of irrigation, thrusting back the desert, and making barren soil fertile. They have kept peace and order between races and creeds. On the whole they have, I believe, ruled with justice and fair play. The Indian Government raises its own taxation for its own revenue, which never finds its way to England. This tale of exploitation and oppression is based on old misdeeds in the time of Clive and Warren Hastings. God forbid that we should be judged by our old mistakes and crimes, such as our treatment of the Red Indians in this country—who do not even yet get a fair deal.”

John Barton thrust his fingers through his hair, which he disordered unconsciously.

“What gets my goat most of all,” he said, “is Mr. Turner’s attempt to throw scorn and contempt upon British courage and honour in the war. He says that the Englishman is prepared to leave it to the Russians, and to get his fighting done by Australians and Canadians. I happen to know otherwise. I happen to have seen British courage. I have known many boys in the R.A.F. I have been in the North Sea with their merchant seamen. I have talked with officers and men who came back wounded from the Libyan Desert. I have been with the English people in the bombardment of London and other cities. I will tell you something about them.”

That was the best part of his speech—at least in emotion and graphic description. Not a man or woman in the audience stirred when he told them brief stories of heroism by the young boys of the R.A.F.

“There was a boy called Paul Langdon. He was a friend of mine and was killed yesterday. I will tell you one anecdote about him. It was the story of how that boy Paul had brought his bomber back after it had been shot up by German machine guns. His steady nerve had saved the lives of the crew.

“Boys like that,” said John, “were the knights-errant of the air, heavily outnumbered during the Battle of Britain, but victorious over the German air power. Theirs was the victory which saved the world. It was a victory which saved civilization and all our liberties.

“On this platform tonight stands a man who is a propagandist for American isolation. It is propaganda for the spirit of evil. It is an appeal—cleverly made, and very plausible—to the selfish instincts of our nation, to its meanest qualities, and to its materialism. He whispers into your ears, or shouts into them with the voice of the tempter. Let us not care a damn, he says, for all the ideals we have mouthed, or for the agonies of other peoples, or for the destruction of ancient beauties and liberties. Let us get on with our own interests, and to hell with humanity outside the United States! That doesn’t seem to me a noble attitude for a great people like ourselves. To me it seems to be disgusting.”

He stopped abruptly and stalked back to his chair. Val D. Turner, at whose face he glanced, had an angry scowl. He rose as John came near him, and spoke in a low voice.

“It’s a fight with the gloves off, eh? That’s all right with me, Barton!”

It was his turn to speak, but he had to stand dumb because of the applause which Barton had aroused. It lasted quite a long time and came from all parts of the hall.

“You certainly interested them,” said the chairman, leaning sideways to John. “You certainly moved them. Yes sir!”

“God knows why!” said John gloomily.

Val Turner had ignored the chairman in his haste to answer Barton. But he had to wait while the editor of the San Francisco *Star* spoke a few words.

“No one can say that this debate is dull,” he said. “This is a real duel of ideas. It will help us all to formulate our own convictions more clearly on great issues with which our own destiny is concerned. These two gentlemen have spoken with great sincerity and great force. They have not spared each other’s feelings. It is challenge and counterchallenge, and we have had few debates in this hall so enthralling and so

inspired by intellectual passion. Whatever we may think of Mr. John Barton's plea for intervention in the European war on the side of Great Britain—and that is a viewpoint which arouses doubts and difficulties in all American minds—we must certainly admit that he has presented his case with high ability and wonderful eloquence based upon sincerity and deep emotion. I now call upon Mr. Val D. Turner to answer his intellectual antagonist."

Mr. Val D. Turner answered.

He was hot under the collar. His voice rang out more harshly. His clenched fist was raised as though to smite his enemy. He laughed now and again scornfully, but there was no mirth in his voice. He was bitter, contemptuous, and insulting.

"You have listened," he said, "to a newspaperman who has stepped out of a newsroom in London, England, to defend that country, and to urge his own people to come to the rescue, for the second time, of its people and empire. What thanks did we get last time? They hated us when we won the war for them. They repudiated their debt to us, and called us Uncle Shylock. This newspaper correspondent—who writes better than he speaks—is one of those Americans who has lost touch with the spirit of his own people, and has become Anglicized and unpatriated. He married an English girl of the old aristocracy—according to the reference books——"

"Leave that out!" said John harshly.

Mr. Val Turner declined to leave it out.

"Doubtless it is from her and her noble family that our newspaper friend has learned his simple love for English rule in India, his beautiful faith in English courage, and his contempt for democratic traditions and American civilization. I've never listened to more naked propaganda, inspired, if not paid for, by the British Government and its propaganda machine."

"Shame!" shouted out a voice from the audience. It was a woman's voice.

Mr. Val D. Turner was not ashamed.

"My opponent tonight," he said, "accused me of being a liar, a hypocrite, and a low, mean fellow. Such terms are not used generally in an American debate. I have a right to retaliate. I accuse him of being an agent, paid or unpaid, of a government which is trying by every means of craft and duplicity to drag this country into a murderous war, to bribe the President of the United States——"

The chairman rose and interrupted.

"I cannot allow expressions of that kind, Mr. Turner. Keep to the rules of debate."

"My chairman tells me to keep to the rules of debate!" shouted Turner. "But he allowed John Barton to proceed with his foul attacks on my integrity and honour. This is a country in which we uphold the rights of free speech. Asserting those rights, I repeat my accusation of the man who accepted my challenge to come here tonight. He is a self-confessed traitor to his own country."

"No, no!" shouted voices in the audience.

"He is an advocate of the wholesale murder of American youth."

"Sit down!" shouted a voice. "We don't want to hear you."

“He is a convert to English snobdom and a renegade American who has been earning money in England by abusing the American constitution and American ideals.”

“That’s a lie! You know it!” shouted a voice from one of the galleries.

The chairman rose again and spoke sternly.

“Mr. Turner, I must call you to order. I cannot allow this personal abuse of a gentleman whom you invited to meet you in open debate.”

“He abused me!” shouted Turner. “I’m a fellow who hits back!”

“Sit down!” “Shut up!” cried many voices.

“He’s right!” shouted another voice. “The English are no darned good!”

“Take that back!” shouted a man in the front row. “I’m a born Englishman!”

“Well, then, go back to England! We don’t want you here!”

A woman stood up and began to sing “God Save the King” in a shrill, quavering voice.

“We believe in free speech, don’t we?”

The audience had started an argument among themselves. People were standing up and shouting at each other. There seemed to be a scuffle going on in the gallery. In the front row a bald-headed old gentleman was making a speech of his own to which nobody listened. After several minutes the chairman rose and tried to address the audience.

“Ladies and gentlemen! I deplore this disorder! I declare this debate at an end.”

His words did not carry, but he walked off the platform. John Barton followed him.

“Most unfortunate,” said the chairman.

John Barton laughed.

“I suppose I asked for it!” he said.

It was a long journey from San Francisco to Fort Worth, Texas, and Barton would have found it intolerably tedious if he had not made acquaintance with a fellow passenger whose conversation was entertaining and thought-provoking. He was a young man of about twenty-five or -six, named Rex Easterman, who had an engineering job in Fort Worth. He had been in the audience during Barton's debate with Val D. Turner, and on the strength of that introduced himself to John.

"All very amusing," he said. "The isolationist guy looked murderous before you were through with him. Most of the crowd was on your side."

"Glad to hear it," said John. "I'm afraid I lost my temper."

"Yes, you looked pretty mad," said the young man. "I confess I was against both of you."

John smiled and raised his eyebrows.

"I don't see how that's possible. You must be on one side or the other."

"I keep outside this quarrel," said the young man. "It all seems to me so childish and primitive. I utterly decline to go back to the Stone Age and to renounce the development of human thought which differentiates a few men here and there from their apelike ancestors. I am higher than the apes. I refuse to be dragged back to their low-grade mentality."

He had an attractive smile, and announced this point of view without arrogance.

"That goes with me," agreed Barton, with a laugh.

"I can't be disloyal to my own intelligence," said young Easterman. "I won't sin against the light with which my soul is illumined."

"Perhaps you have reached a higher stage of intellectual development than poor guys like myself," suggested John good-humouredly.

"What baffles me," answered the young man, "is just this. I guess that I'm not the only guy that has read a few books by H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Sinclair Lewis, and Aldous Huxley. But I find that fellows like yourself, for instance, who have read more books than I have time for, speak, think, and behave as though they were still scratching fleas out of their fur in a primeval jungle. This seems to me darned funny."

"Did I jabber like an ape during that debate the other night?" asked John. "I think it's quite likely I did, but I was unaware of it."

Young Easterman grinned at him, and then became serious.

"Now I want to tell you. I listened to you two fellows the other night, with my mind as well as my ears. That guy, Val D. Turner, took the view that we Americans ought to keep out of this war, because he wants to keep us safe for our low grade of so-called

civilization. He preached a gospel of dirty selfishness and hatred of the English. All that left me stone cold.”

“Well then?” said John.

“Well, if I may say so,” said the young man, “you were darned eloquent about equally primitive ideas, and want to get this country into the war on the side of England, and hammer hell out of Hitler by bombing airplanes and all the weapons of destruction now being made in American factories.”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked John. “Isn’t that the only way to save civilized ideas and prevent the world from slipping back to the Dark Ages again?”

Rex Easterman didn’t agree.

“That seems to me dead wrong. One can’t save civilized ideas by bombing cities and massacring one’s fellow men—to say nothing of women and children. You can’t save civilized ideas by uncivilized ideas. You can’t raise humanity from an apelike mentality by teaching masses of men to act like apes—scientific apes, armed with the latest gadgets of murder-making.”

“I can understand the pacifist point of view,” said John, “though I don’t agree with it.”

“I’m not talking as a Christian pacifist,” said young Easterman. “I’m not a Christian. I’m talking as an intelligent human being who has read a few books and has done a bit of thinking in quiet places.”

“I can’t follow you,” said John. “There’s no logic in your argument. And perhaps you’re not quite so intelligent as you think you are.”

He spoke without ill-humour, and the young man took his words with a good grace.

“I’m not putting myself on any high intellectual pedestal. That’s my whole point. I’m a man of average education. High school and college, with just a smattering of knowledge, but higher than the ape. Therefore I stand aloof and contemptuous to all this appeal to the savage in human nature, by this call to arms, turning masses of men into destructive robots, by this taking sides with murder gangs and methods of devils and demons, who kill women and babies, and wipe out ancient beauties and historic shrines by tons of high explosives. How can we take sides? You, John Barton, and I, Rex Easterman? How can we give our allegiance to either group of thugs in a conflict which is dragging down humanity into the nethermost hell?”

He spoke with a kind of inner passion, half concealed by a smile.

“What are you going to do about it?” asked John. “Are you going to remain beautifully aloof, while the world is set on fire by demons?”

“In my mind, yes,” said the young man. “I disapprove of war. I dislike military discipline which destroys the minds of men. I detest murder in the name of patriotism. I hate and despise all politicians and national leaders who ought to have learned something from the last war, but so conducted their affairs that they have produced this World War II. I’m intellectually intolerant of all these little old men who have made a darned mess of everything and sentenced a new generation of youth to the shambles and the blood bath.”

“That’s all right,” answered John tolerantly. This young man, he thought, was very young. “They made that mess all right, but if we don’t clear it up civilization goes west.”

“To hell with all the half-wits,” said young Easterman. “To hell with Hitler, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Val D. Turner, and John L. Lewis.”

Barton laughed quietly in the club car of this streamline train and beckoned the coloured waiter to bring a drink.

“What’s your quarrel with Roosevelt?” he asked.

Young Easterman had a private grudge against him, and against most other leaders of the nations.

“I have a young wife,” he said. “She’s darned beautiful. She’s going to have a baby. We have a good little home in Fort Worth. I’m keen on the violin, and she plays my accompaniments. We read a bit of poetry now and then. We worship beauty and life because we’ve made a little paradise. Why in hell should this be smudged out because the thugs of the world have gone in for mass murder?”

That was the key to this young man’s philosophy. This was the clue to his passionate indignation. His little private paradise might be rudely disturbed. John’s paradise had been smashed by Hitler, and it was this thought that made him tolerant of a young man’s disgust of both sides in a world conflict.

“I envy you your little paradise,” he said.

“Come and have a look at it,” said young Easterman. “My wife would love to meet you—and she’s worth meeting as a darned nice girl.”

They talked for hours while the streamline train plunged through space. In the club car a group of men and women had gotten together over cocktails and highballs. They were singing the old songs with gusts of laughter. One fellow was already drunk and making a nuisance of himself.

“Apes and half-wits!” said young Easterman, glancing at his fellow passengers.

John Barton was more tolerant.

“They’re having a good time,” he said. “There’s nothing wrong with them. They’ve not yet heard the hoofs of the Four Horsemen.”

IN FORT WORTH, TEXAS, JOHN became heavily involved with social engagements. The hospitality of Texas is proverbial, and he could not escape it, nor did he want to. He found the people of this city and state very pleasant and attractive. There was some quality about them which they had retained perhaps from their pioneer ancestors—free, and frank, and hearty, and homely. He dined with several families who made him feel very much at home after the first formalities, which were a little old-fashioned. Many of the young women were remarkably good-looking, and their men were frank and humorous. They were still in touch with life on ranches. Some of the people he met in the city owned their own ranches, and drove him out to them, exhibiting their cattle and horses and sheep and pigs, very knowledgeable about the pedigrees of their beasts. There was one little lady who owned thousands of acres and showed off her prize bulls with a fearlessness which was not shared by John, who was a trifle nervous of these animals, being a town-bred man. It was all rather refreshing and unusual. Texas had a character of its own, and a fine one, he thought.

But he was glad to have a quiet hour with a friend—she had become a friend—who invited him to her room in the hotel. She sent a note to him on the third evening of his stay in Fort Worth, where he had to mark time before resuming his tour.

Here I am again. Can you spare me ten minutes away from all the Texan beauties? SHEILA O'CONNOR.

He went to her room on the fourteenth floor and found her door already open. From it into the corridor came a faint perfume of flowers.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Thanks for coming," she answered. She stood at the door smiling at him, and once again he thought her rather beautiful and very charming. It was the glow of colour below her skin and the golden glint in her hair which made her rather striking, and there was always a friendly smile in her eyes and a kind of comradeship in her manner.

"We two strolling players meet again," she said, giving him her hand.

"I feel like the Wandering Jew," answered John. "But I am very glad to meet you again. Somehow I feel as though you and I have been friends for a long time. How do you account for that?"

"I'm glad you feel like that," she answered with laughing eyes. "I account for it quite easily. Friendship does not need years to acquire. Five minutes is enough if two human souls are sympathetic to each other. You are looking tired, John Barton."

"I'm feeling tired," he confessed. "This lecture tour will be the death of me. I don't expect to survive beyond Omaha or Kansas City."

She looked at him gravely for a moment, as though wondering whether he was talking seriously, and then smiled again.

“You will,” she assured him. “You’re made of finely tempered steel. You won’t break down. Now I’m going to give you a cup of tea in the English style. I’ll telephone down for it.”

While she was telephoning he looked around her sitting room. It was filled with flowers as usual, and there was her harp, mute but magical.

“It must be equally tiring for you,” he said presently, “and I don’t think it’s quite right for you to travel alone all the time. Surely you ought to have a companion, or a secretary, or someone to look after you.”

She was amused by that remark.

“How eighteenth-century—or, perhaps, how English you are! Do you think I need a chaperon?”

“No,” said John, “a companion. It’s so darned lonely on these long journeys, unless one talks to one’s fellow passengers.”

Her eyes laughed at him again.

“I do talk to my fellow passengers or, rather, they insist on talking to me. Besides, I don’t travel alone. My pianist comes with me—Myra Rosenbaum—without whom I should be lost.”

John raised his eyebrows.

“Where do you park her?”

Sheila O’Connor saw him glance at the bedroom door and shook her head.

“She’s not in there. I don’t hide her in the bathroom. She economizes and goes to a small hotel, having to keep a refugee father and four brothers and sisters. The poor dear doesn’t even eat enough, because she wants to save another fifty cents on lunch or dinner.”

“Oh Lord!” said John, with a half groan of pity.

Tea was brought in and John sat silent for a minute or two. This teapot and those teacups reminded him of Anne and England. He had learned to like tea as the best meal of the day, especially in the winter with toasted crumpets and a fire burning in an open hearth.

Sheila O’Connor was watching him.

“You always look sad, John Barton,” she told him. “There is always a tragic look in your eyes. Can’t you forget the sorrows you have seen?”

“No,” said John. “At least—I don’t want to. I have a dead wife in the ruins of London.”

She was silent for a moment, and then answered in a low voice.

“Yes, I know. David Ede told me about his sister, your wife. I ought not to have said what I did about your sadness. For a moment I forgot. Forgive me. It was clumsy of me.”

“No,” said John. “I’m glad you did. I want to speak about Anne now and then, and there are few over here to whom I would mention her.”

“She was very beautiful, wasn’t she?” asked Sheila.

“I thought so,” said John. “She was all that one imagines of English beauty. Tall, and fair, and slim. A Romney portrait.”

“I think of her as being a little proud,” said Sheila. “I don’t know why—because of her name perhaps, Lady Anne Ede.”

“She wasn’t really proud,” said John. “She wasn’t arrogant, though I thought her so at first. It was just the English manner, and a touch of family pride perhaps. She was very simple and very straight, and made friends easily with working folk. She was just the same with a dustman as she would be with a duke. Utterly without snobbishness, as we think the English are snobbish.”

“You thought I must be lonely,” said Sheila. “But you must feel terribly lonely sometimes—in your mind, I mean, in these crowds.”

“Yes,” said John, “that’s how I feel sometimes. A man is a lonely animal without his mate. Most men need a woman for comfort and human sympathy. We can’t get that from men, somehow.”

“I think I understand that,” said Sheila. “Most men want a little mothering, don’t they?”

“They want everything a woman can give in tenderness,” said John, “especially in this surrounding cruelty of life. I miss Anne terribly. Is that selfishness or weakness?”

“It’s just natural,” said Sheila. “But you mustn’t let grief for Anne haunt you and spoil your life. You have a long vista ahead. Life has still much to give you.”

“I’m afraid of disloyalty,” said John. “If I fell in love with any other woman, I should feel a traitor to Anne’s love. I should hate myself for treachery.”

Sheila O’Connor gave her mind to this thought.

“I’m not sure,” she said presently. “If I married a man and died before he did, I should like to believe that he would never love another woman. I should like to believe that he would come to me again as I left him, and that our love would be eternal. But don’t you think that would be a selfishness belonging to this world and this flesh of ours? In the spiritual world, human love may seem necessary to life and not limited to one being. The Church permits a man to marry again.”

John smiled.

“How you Catholics always refer these things to Holy Mother Church! You surrender your own judgment to the Pope and his College of Cardinals.”

Sheila smiled at this attack upon “Holy Mother Church,” implied by his voice rather than by his words.

“Only in matters of faith,” she said. “But we needn’t drag in the Pope, or get hot over the authority of the Church. I’m speaking to you as a human friendly soul, very sorry for your sadness.”

“It’s kind of you,” said John. “I didn’t mean to drench you in my woe.”

Sheila O'Connor touched his hand for a moment on the table.

"If you are my friend, you will know that the best of friendship is sympathy and understanding. I would like to have a friend to whom I could call for help when I'm in deep trouble, or desperate for rescue."

"I'd like you to be sure of me in that way," said John.

"Let's make it a pledge between us," said Sheila. "I will send you an S O S in danger's hour, if you will do the same to me when you're in need of womanly aid. A bargain? A solemn promise between John Barton and Sheila O'Connor."

"I'll shake hands on it," said John, with a laugh.

They shook hands on it half jestingly, and yet with a sense of having pledged themselves to something beyond a jest.

"Touch those harp strings for a moment or two," said John presently.

She excused herself from that.

"Somehow, I'm not in the mood. I want to talk. I want to go on talking."

"Tell me something good," said John.

She told him something surprising.

"An odd thing has happened to me," she told him. "It's the offer of a great adventure. I don't know that I have the courage to accept."

"It sounds rather thrilling," said John. "Any clue?"

"You'd never guess," she answered. "I've had a letter from England. An American friend of mine—Susan Lavington, the pianist—must have been pulling wires for me. It was a letter from the British Broadcasting Company. They offer me a six months' contract in England, with passage paid both ways, on the Pan American Clipper."

"Good God!" exclaimed John, much startled by this news.

"Maybe God has something to do with it," said Sheila, with a laugh. "Anyhow, I hope it's not a temptation of the devil."

"When do they want you?" asked John.

"In two months from now. What do you think about it?"

John thought a lot about it.

"It would be a great adventure for you. You would see England in wartime. The English people would fall in love with you. I shouldn't refuse the offer if I were you. I'd like to be coming with you. I'd like to take you home to my mother and my sister Judy. And I'd like to see you playing your harp for all my English friends to hear you."

Sheila's eyes sparkled.

"You make it sound very attractive. I'm rather tempted. But I don't know what my mother will say about it."

"England," said John, as though England in wartime were Paradise. "Gosh! I wish I were back there."

"Come with me," suggested Sheila. "Book a berth on the Clipper. Be my guide to England and the English."

She spoke laughingly, as though suggesting the impossible.

“I’m inclined to do it, anyhow,” said John. “I’m fed up with this frightful talking tour, and I’m making no headway. The American mind is dead set against throwing their man power into this war. They’re terribly sorry for little old England, but they intend to leave it at that.”

“Do you think I shall get bombed?” asked Sheila, as though she had decided to go. “I don’t believe I’m very brave. I don’t want to be killed just yet, and I’d hate to think my harp might lose its strings in a London blitz.”

John shook his head.

“I don’t think there will be much more bombing. Hitler knows the growing strength of the R.A.F., and he’s kept busy in Russia. He’s fairly caught in the hug of the bear!”

“Oh well! I shall have to think about it,” said Sheila. “My Irish blood tempts me when adventure calls. But I’m not sure—I can’t make up my mind. I am still on the isolationist side and cannot get rid of my anti-English prejudices except when I hear you talking about England.”

Before John left for another engagement Sheila reminded him of their pact about the S O S.

“I’m glad we’ve made friends with each other,” she said. “Sure you’re a good comrade, John. It’s just written on your face.”

“I need a woman’s friendship,” said John. “Thanks for yours, Sheila O’Connor.”

He raised her hand to his lips when he said good-bye.

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY. . . . KANSAS CITY. . . . OMAHA. . . . Oklahoma. . . . Grand Rapids. . . . Springfield, Ohio. . . . Long railway journeys. . . . Broken nights. . . . Early-morning arrivals. . . . Newspapermen. . . . Photographers with flashlights. . . . Radio interviews. . . . New people to meet. . . . New names to remember. . . . Crowded audiences. . . . The same laugh coming at the same point in the same speech. . . . The same questions. . . . What is the truth about Rudolf Hess? . . . Why doesn't Great Britain give self-government to India? . . . Why don't they open a second front? . . . Why are the Dominion troops doing all the fighting? . . . Can England take care of the war without American man power? . . . What do they think of the Duke of Windsor? . . . Colds in the head from draughty stations. . . . Stomach trouble. . . . Feeling like death before striding on to a platform and facing two thousand people. A lost tie twenty minutes before being fetched to the lecture hall—under the bed? In the bathroom? In a drawer? Oh hell! The inanimate objects are hostile—they hide themselves. A silly game of hide-and-seek in a hotel bedroom, with the clock ticking off the minutes. . . . New faces. . . . New names. . . . Mrs. Hammerstein. . . . Miss Wainwright. . . . Mrs. Pilsudski. . . . Mr. Hourmousios. . . . The Rev. Peter Pickering. . . . Olga Markovina. . . . Women's clubs, with hundreds of women. . . . Men's clubs with hundreds of men. . . . Tree planting in Cleveland with a golden shovel weak at the handle and tied up with a silk bow. . . . Night walks in crowded cities with blinking lights, winking lights, floodlit skyscrapers, neon signs. . . . Shadows passing in the dark. . . . Queer snatches of conversation. . . . I wish she were dead. . . . She's been intellectually married for some time. . . . Fifty bucks would help me out of this mess. . . . She's just crazy. . . . I've just done a stretch in the hoosegow. . . . God is merciful. . . . Jeepers creepers! . . . Telephone calls. . . . Is that Mr. John Barton? . . . Two high school girls would much like a little talk with you. . . . Is that Mr. John Barton? . . . A bunch of newspapermen—O.K. with you, Mr. Barton? . . . Is that Mr. John Barton? . . . This is Judge Schulz. I'd be glad if you could spare me ten minutes. . . . Is that Mr. John Barton? . . . Say, Johnny Barton, do you remember Phil Bates? A thousand years ago? Well, not as much as that! . . . Curse that telephone! Always ringing, ringing, ringing. . . . Say, is that the telephone operator? I want to get a bit of sleep. Yes, SLEEP! S-L-E-E-P. Ever hear of it? . . . Surging crowds in hotels like railway stations. Always coming through the swing doors. Always going through the swing doors. Elderly women. White-haired women. Always talking. Always laughing. Always going into elevators. Masses of them. All looking exactly like each other. . . . Floor ladies, cheerful, smiling, helpful. Come again! Pleased to have met you, Mr. Barton. . . . Cocktail parties with regular guys. . . . Mint-julep parties with Kentucky colonels. . . . Earnest conversations with anxious-minded men and sentimental women. . . . Shaking hands after getting down from platform. . . . Old women. . . . Young women. Fat men, thin men. . . . That was a

fine address you gave us, Mr. Barton. . . . I'm sure proud to meet you, Mr. Barton. . . . Well, now, you've given us much to think about, Mr. Barton. . . .

To John Barton, journalist, this lecture tour became something like mental torture, and he was deeply convinced that all his effort was time-wasting and futile. He was not reaching out to the millions who made up American public opinion. These millions remained indifferent to the European war. They were absorbed in the petty interests of their own lives. Even in his audiences, made up from an intelligent minority, he found the same rigid line drawn between aid to Britain and an extreme reluctance to enlist American man power for the fight against Hitler. He was not breaking that down. He was getting nowhere, in spite of all the fatigue of mind and body.

Then one day a bolt from the blue struck the United States and changed everything. It was a blow which had at first a stunning effect upon every American mind, and then stirred them to an anger and a grim resolve to obtain vengeance at any cost of blood and sacrifice. Overnight the mood and mind of the United States turned over. There was no more indifference to that war which had seemed so remote—as far away as another planet. There was no more reluctance to follow the lead of a President who had been steering the Ship of State towards the danger zones. American isolationists had nothing more to say. They were stricken dumb. Their policy was killed stone dead. There would be no more trouble for John Barton from Val D. Turner and his crowd. That bolt from the blue caused a kind of shudder throughout the nation, as though the earth had quaked. It was a shock which struck their souls. Nothing was the same in their minds after its first stunning effect. It was as though they had been asleep in a pleasant dream of life and now had awakened to terrible realities. They had seemed so safe. Now America was in danger. They had seemed so unassailable. Now they were attacked. They had loathed the idea of getting into the war. Now they were in it.

It was the news of Pearl Harbour.

John Barton, who had been calling for greater aid to Britain, knew that his job was done. It had been done for him by the Japanese. He need make no more speeches from public platforms. The guns had spoken.

He had just come back to New York for a few days when this news broke. By an odd coincidence he had travelled from Baltimore with an American general who had fallen into conversation with him, and had exchanged cards before the journey's end. He was a tall, good-looking man, in a well-cut suit of brown cloth, not giving him away as a regular soldier, though John had made a guess at it before he saw his card. The conversation had drifted to the war in China, and then to the exchange of notes with Japan. A Japanese envoy was at the White House making friendly overtures, while the President and Mr. Cordell Hull were in communication with Tokyo and defining American policy in the Far East.

"The President seems to have sent a stiff note to Japan," said John.

The general nodded.

"He's calling their bluff. The Japs are only trying to save face."

"You don't think they're out for trouble?"

The general gave a short, dry laugh.

“They’ve as much trouble as they want already. They’ve made a mess of things in China.”

“You don’t think we need be anxious?” asked John.

“I guess we needn’t worry. Those little men in Tokyo aren’t mad enough to challenge the United States. Our Navy would blow them out of the Pacific in double-quick time. They know that all right. They have their spies and agents everywhere. War with the United States? No sir! Japan is not likely to sign its own death warrant.”

This man knows, thought John. I’m getting the opinion of one of the higher-ups, and he’s a thoughtful-looking guy. There’s a brain behind those brown eyes. A fine type.

It was early on the day of December 7th, before the news of Pearl Harbour had broken.

In New York, John took a cab to Park Avenue. He had sent a night letter to his relatives saying he would be home to lunch. They were waiting for him, and he was glad to have their welcome.

Mrs. Staunton kissed him and said: "Still alive, John? You must be tired, my dear!"

His cousin Delia presented her cheek.

"It's nice to have you back," she said, "but I must say you look worn and haggard since last we met. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Doing with himself?" exclaimed Staunton, in his hearty, noisy way. "Jeepers creepers! A London blitz is child's play to an American lecture tour. Think of all those women swarming round him! Think of all the damn-fool questions he had to answer! Think of all the telephone calls put through to his hotel bedrooms! My God! I would rather face a firing squad in a German concentration camp!"

"How's Edward?" asked John.

"Very bored with himself," said Staunton.

"He thinks all this army training utterly futile. He wants to know what it's for. But as we expect him some time this afternoon for seven days' leave, he will probably tell you all that himself, with the cynicism of youth and the gloom of a frustrated soul."

"Have a drink, old boy," said Staunton. "You look, and I feel, in need of one. I haven't been on a lecture tour, thank God, but this crazy world is getting me down. The half-wits and morons are in command of human destiny. Man's feeble attempts at civilization are thwarted. Humanity is both doomed and damned."

"Now, Daddy!" cried Delia. "Don't start so early in the day. Keep all that for this evening."

"Don't you be impertinent, young woman," said her father, "or I'll give you a clump on the ear."

After lunch John sat in Staunton's study. The room reeked with cigar smoke, but John found it pleasant to sit there in a deep armchair, with his legs outstretched, while Staunton denounced all the people he hated and despised—most of them seemed to be congressmen and senators—while Mrs. Staunton smiled at him over some knitting, and Delia jeered at him from time to time.

Staunton spoke of John's lecture tour again after this general denunciation.

"I warned you, my boy," he said. "I gave you a full picture of its horrors. What beats me is why you stuck it out so long. What good do you think you were doing?"

“None,” said John gloomily.

Staunton laughed loudly.

“Didn’t I tell you? What did you expect? To persuade all those American mothers to send their dear little lads to Europe to fight Hitler on the side of England? You were pleading for a hopeless cause, old boy. Our fellow citizens in these United States don’t care a curse for England, and they want to be left alone to enjoy their own idea of life, which is of low-grade quality devoid of intelligence.”

“I found them darned intelligent,” said John. “I must say I’ve been impressed by the high average.”

“Then you’re wrong,” said Staunton. “Good God, man, do you mean to say——?”

That sentence was never finished. It was interrupted by the arrival of young Edward.

“Hullo, Edward!” cried Delia.

“Hullo, son!” said Staunton.

Young Edward did not answer. He had a queer, dazed look, as though something had hit him between the eyes. He was quite pale as he strode into the room, and then stood speechless.

“Seen this?” asked Edward.

He had a newspaper scrunched up in his hand. He passed it over to his father, who stared at the front page and then went pale with the pallor of his son.

“Good God!” he said. . . . “Good God! . . . Good God!”

“What has happened?” asked Mrs. Staunton.

“Daddy!” cried Delia; “what is it?”

“Has Hitler invaded England?” asked John. He, too, turned pale. He knew by Staunton’s face that something terrible had happened.

“The Japanese have attacked us,” said Staunton, in a harsh voice. “Those little swine have bombed Pearl Harbour and sunk a number of our battleships without a declaration of war. We seem to have been caught napping. Our losses seem to be heavy.”

“Good God!” said John in a low voice.

“Good heavens!” said Mrs. Staunton.

“Gosh!” cried Delia.

Staunton stood up from his chair. He raised both clenched fists.

“Those little bastards!” he shouted. “Those little swine of hell!”

“I guess my army training may be of some use after all,” said Edward.

John Barton’s face flushed. He felt the beat of his own heart. There was a queer light in his eyes. His lips were twisted to an odd smile.

“We’re in the war with England,” he said. “England won’t be alone any more. We’re all in together! It was always our war, really, that’s what I tried to tell them.”

“Those yellow frogs!” shouted Staunton. “Those little pop-eyed bastards! We shall have to wipe them off the earth!”

DESPITE a sense of exile from England, in some ways John was glad to be with his own people at that time. It was one of the great chapters of American history. It linked them up with the destiny of all mankind, and they suddenly became aware—as though by a flash of lightning—that their own lives and liberties were at stake in this struggle between those who stood for some kind of decent freedom and those who would put the human mind into a cage and the human soul in chains. That is how he saw it, anyhow, and that was how the American people saw it.

They had been stunned by Pearl Harbour, but quickly afterwards they were humiliated and bewildered by the lack of precautions which had allowed it to happen.

“Those guys had been warned,” said Staunton when the report came out. “The fault didn’t lie this time in Washington. They just took no notice of it and didn’t think it worth while to be on the alert. Did you ever hear anything like it? The Japs just flew over our battleships and played hell with impunity. And God knows how many ships they sank and damaged! It may lose us the Pacific. Then what about our long-unguarded coast line?”

The American people in the mass received a series of shocks after Pearl Harbour even more bewildering to their shrewd but simple minds. The Japanese were striking out far and quickly. American Marines, holding Wake Island and other outposts, fought to the death and then were overwhelmed, without being relieved or reinforced.

There were enemy landings in the Philippines where General MacArthur struck back at them and then behaved in the heroic way of American tradition, so that he became idolized. But all else they thought was not in the American tradition. Those Japanese victories, those American reverses, didn’t seem in line with schoolbook history. Japanese submarines were sinking American ships. They were lurking off the California coast. Hadn’t something gone wrong? Hadn’t the world turned upside down?

John Barton, observer and interpreter, watched the effect of Pearl Harbour and the events which followed it upon the minds of his fellow citizens. On the whole, he thought, the people took it well. He was proud of them—he was proud to be one of them. There was no ballyhoo, as there had been, he was told, when America came into the war the last time. There was no boasting nor hysteria. There was no shouting nor flag-wagging. They took it quietly, and they took it grimly.

“This war is going to last a long time,” said a New York taxi driver in whose cab John was sitting. “First we’ve got to get an army ready. Then we’ve got to train and equip it. Can’t do that in a couple of weeks. Can’t do it in less than a couple of years. Not properly. We’ve all got to work harder, I guess. We’ve got to put little luxuries on to the scrap heap. We’ve got to live plain and live hard, and give up near everything unless it helps on the war. But when we’re ready—men and machines—it’ll be a

mighty big thing that's ready. We must finish off Hitler first. Then it will be the turn for the little yellow men. Remember Pearl Harbour—— Yes sir! That won't be forgotten."

This man, who spoke gravely and simply as he swung round a little from the wheel of his taxi, was typical of many other men of the people with whom John spoke during the weeks that followed Pearl Harbour. They were garage hands, railway porters, mill hands, clerks, and small shopkeepers. It was they, or their sons, who would be called upon to fight in far fields before the end came. They knew that and did not shirk the thought, but were facing it without false heroics.

"The President calls on us for sacrifice," said one man from whom John was buying a newspaper at a street corner. "That's O.K. with me. This war isn't going to be a walkover. The American people don't yet know how much sacrifice will be needed. Lots of life. Lots of dough. All we have, I guess! But Mr. Roosevelt won't be able to call on us for too much. We're ready to give everything. We've sure got to win this war!"

A darky redcap in Grand Central Station spoke sombrely as he carried John's bag.

"This is goin' to be a terrible war, Cap'n. But I'se sure de good God wants Uncle Sam to win, 'cause we's standin' for right and justice, and de Christian ways of life. We coloured folk think that maybe we's not had full justice that we was promised by de American Constitution; it ain't fulfilled, but we coloured folk sure knows that this terrible war is for Christ against antichrist. We coloured folk is goin' on de side of Christ!"

In those weeks after Pearl Harbour something which had seemed to spoil the old tradition of American character was shed like an ill-fitting garment. There was no sign of that degeneracy into a comfortable materialism which American critics had denounced. Certainly one heard no whining nor whimpering because small luxuries would be lost for the duration of the war and life would be made uncomfortable and stark. The American mood was wanting to be hurt by sacrifice, rather than to be spared. There was a rush for service. Despite the remote chance of being bombed by enemy aircraft over American cities, a complete system of A.R.P. on the English model was adopted in many states like Massachusetts with a vulnerable coast line. There were trial black-outs in scores of cities and small towns, which enrolled the air-raid wardens, stretcher bearers, and ambulance drivers. Millions of women and young girls attended classes for first-aid and anti-gas drill. Elaborate plans were made for the evacuation of children from the coastal towns, as in the first year of England's war.

John Barton had seen all this before—it all seemed a bit unreal in the United States, with their enemies far away across the Pacific and Atlantic, and this unreality was felt keenly by those ardent women who were longing to show their courage and efficiency.

It was his cousin Delia who gave most forcible expression one day to this desire.

"A night raid over New York or Boston would fill me with joy, Cousin John."

John laughed dryly.

"Then you must be a bloodthirsty creature," he told her. "Do you want to see women with their heads blown off, and disembowelled children?"

“Well, I wouldn’t go so far as that,” she answered; “but a few bombs would be very stimulating to the war effort. We’re all going to sleep after Pearl Harbour. A good air-raid would wake us all up again.”

“I don’t see any signs of somnolence,” said John. “Anyhow, you talk like a child, my dear. I don’t want to see one of our skyscrapers crashing across New York City. It would make a terrible mess!”

“It would give us something real to do,” answered his cousin. “What’s the use of learning first-aid if there are no casualties? Besides, there are a lot of people in New York whom we could spare very easily. They would be much better dead, don’t you think?”

“You’re a monster of cruelty!” said John. “You’re like one of those Roman women who laughed at the tortures of the early Christians in the arena!”

“I would gladly see Hitler make a juicy meal for a lion,” said this American girl, brought up in one of the most select schools in Massachusetts, with the very highest ideals.

John grinned at her. She was not to be taken seriously.

Her brother had to be taken more seriously, and John had a serious conversation with him one evening in his father’s library, when he was home again for forty-eight hours.

“I suppose I shall end my young life in a pestilential jungle on the other side of the Pacific,” he said in a casual way, while he chalked the end of his cue for a game of billiards.

“I hope not,” said John. “Never say die, my lad!”

“Oh! The thought doesn’t worry me,” said Edward. “But it amuses me to be standing here in a civilian room, with every home comfort, and to know that the higher-ups are arranging for my body to be the prey of insects in some foul swamp, where I shall be in company with other lads of my age, very dirty and verminous, lacking water, and wounded in the guts by Japanese mortars. It’s the paradox which I find amusing. All my little struggles to learn Greek and Latin, and the English poets, and the manners of a gentleman are now utterly useless in a war which reduces its fighting men to primitive savagery below that of the Red Indian.”

He made a break of fifteen on the billiard table, having a good eye and a steady hand.

“Good shooting,” said John, watching his skill.

The boy stood on one side and lit a cigarette, while John made a lucky fluke and scored seven.

“It’s going to be hard on the girls, this war,” said Edward, whose thoughts seemed to be running on the war that evening. “There’s a girl I know . . .” He stopped and gave a quiet laugh.

“Do I know her?” asked John.

Edward didn’t think so. Her name was Julia Slasenger, one of his sister’s college friends.

“She and I are quite amused by each other. I may say I’m rather attracted by her.”

He laughed again, and a slight colour crept under his skin.

“That’s fine!” said John.

He felt a pang of pity for this boy who might be killed in some insect-infested jungle before he had had time to fulfil his love.

“We had an idea of getting married,” said Edward. “But I suppose that would be unfair now, wouldn’t it? In a few months I may be sent overseas.”

John pondered about this while he made a few more strokes.

“I don’t think it would be unfair,” he said. “One can cram a lot of happiness into a few weeks.”

“I’m thinking of the girl,” said Edward.

“So am I,” said John. “She would have those weeks of happiness too. Besides, not every soldier is killed, old boy. A lot come back again as they did last time.”

“I don’t believe I shall,” answered Edward quietly. “I have a fixed idea that I shall be killed.”

“Put that out of your head,” said John sharply. “It’s a damn-fool idea!”

“Quite between ourselves,” said Edward, with sudden anxiety. “All this is off the record—for God’s sake don’t tell my father or my mother!”

“Put your mind easy about that,” said John, reassuring him.

“Right!” said Edward lightly. “Let’s get on with this game.”

BARTON was one of those who was thrilled by the arrival of Winston Churchill at the White House. He had been in England when, after the surrender of France, this man had said to the British people, "We have the honour to be alone," and had called to the old heroic reserves of that nation. Time after time, in days of tragic crises, he had spoken again with a style of oratory which had in its quality something of Chaucer and something of Shakespeare, because it was profound without being pompous, and rich with humour while reaching a real height of eloquence, stirring to the hearts of the people. Like many critics, John Barton, American observer of English life, had mistrusted this man, while acknowledging his brilliance. He had seemed too impetuous to be a great leader in time of danger. Now that mistrust had given way to a belief that Churchill had been ordained by Destiny to lead the British people through their darkest hours of history, and to rally their spirit and ancient tradition to the utmost heights of heroism. He spoke with the voice of the people. Their spirit was his spirit. His humour was theirs. In the time when England lay open to invasion, with few men and few arms after Dunkirk, they answered his trumpet call and stood steadfast. During the Battle of Britain his words on the heroic victory of the R.A.F. went round the world and lit it up because of the glory of those boys. Whatever mistakes he might have made and might still make—had he been born under an unlucky star?—his place in history was assured. He would be in the portrait gallery of the nation with its heroes and great leaders.

Now, there he was in the White House, smiling to a bunch of American newspapermen, smoking the stump end of a cigar, looking strangely happy and confident and untired for a man carrying such terrific responsibilities, which were no less than the life and death of his own countrymen and the defence of world liberty. So it seemed to John Barton, who was not cynical of this man like some of his own critics.

It was Christmas time. American cities and small towns were decorated as usual with a prodigal display of Christmas trees and fairy lights in all their avenues and squares. Santa Claus in his scarlet cloak drove his reindeer above the steps of town halls. The State houses and public buildings were floodlit, and snow had fallen throughout New England and in other States, to maintain the old tradition. Bells were ringing, Christmas carols were being sung by groups of young people carrying lanterns. Churchill, speaking in the garden of the White House, told the American people to take this Christmas happily, and to let the children be happy. But he added grave words, reminding them that this war would demand from them great sacrifices and suffering for the defence of their liberties.

Churchill's presence in the United States gave pleasure to the American people. They thought it was gallant of him to come, and it made them feel more warmly towards England as their closest ally. Mr. Roosevelt was happy in having him. To a

group of newspapermen, among whom was John Barton, he spoke good words about his visitor.

“Mr. Churchill and I get on grandly with each other,” he said. “We understand each other. He’s a great man, and I’m privileged in having him as my guest.”

But the effect of this visit wore off, and was followed by criticism and doubt about the fighting qualities of the British Army. John Barton was sharply aware of that in his audiences, and in conversation with many people. The disaster in the Libyan Desert, when Rommel and his armoured forces had swept back and taken Tobruk with 25,000 prisoners, and forced the British Army to retreat into Egypt, almost to the gates of Alexandria, was a shock to American opinion, but that was as nothing compared to their stupefaction when Singapore fell to the Japanese.

John Barton shared that sense of stupefaction. Singapore was the strongest bastion in the Pacific. Upon its defence depended the life of the Dutch East Indies and all the islands of the Pacific. For years the British had been strengthening its fortifications. Since the beginning of the war they had reinforced its garrison. But strange and sinister stories had been leaking through. The guns were facing a wrong way for a land attack; there was something wrong in the command. Debauchery and demoralization were lowering the morale of its defenders. Barton had heard such stories in England, but did not believe them.

He heard them again from American newspapermen and tried not to believe them. But now the fall of Singapore came as a shattering blow. It would affect the whole future of the war—not only for Great Britain, but for the United States and the Dutch East Indies. The Pacific lay open to the Japanese, and with stupendous rapidity they took advantage of this supreme opportunity. Malaya was theirs with all its rubber and all its wealth. The Dutch East Indies fell after heroic fighting. Australia was menaced, and in grave danger.

“How do you account for the fall of Singapore?” was a question asked of John Barton, when, in his remaining lectures now only three to go, he stood alone on big platforms. He was known as the friend of England. He was advertised as the best interpreter of England to the United States. Well, then, what defence had he to make of his English friends and their fighting qualities? He put up the best defence possible, but without conviction because of his own doubts and bewilderment.

“The Vichy Government,” he said, “is responsible for the fall of Singapore. When, with black treachery and cowardice, they handed over French Indo-China, they opened the front gate to Singapore. Its defence became untenable by the forces at the command of the British. But there is another reason, equally important. It is the reason of geography. Great Britain cannot alter the map of the world to suit her convenience. It takes three months for a British ship to reach Singapore. It is only two months since we were attacked at Pearl Harbour. The British were defeated by this handicap of time and space.”

It was a pretty good answer. It was true as far as it went. But it did not satisfy American public opinion or his own closest friends.

“Now look here, John, my boy,” said his mother’s cousin, “you’ve been spilling the praise of the English all over the United States, but what in hell is the matter with their

fighting men? Have they gone soft? Why do they surrender like sheep?"

He was standing in front of the electric fire in his library and billiard room. Outside, in the streets of New York, the temperature was four below zero, and a blizzard of snow was driving against the skyscrapers.

John answered impatiently.

"That's damn-fool talk, if I may say so!"

Staunton laughed good-naturedly.

"You can say so, kid, but it's no answer to my questions!"

"Before we criticize England," said John, "let us prove our own superiority first. We haven't done much yet!"

"MacArthur's doing it," said his relative. "Putting up a hell of a good show in the Philippines. Our doughboys aren't surrendering at the first sight of a Jap."

John noticed with secret amusement that this violent critic of the war, and of all its generals, and of almost everybody, was following the mob in his hero worship of MacArthur.

"We shall have to lose the Philippines," he said, "just as the British have lost Singapore—and for precisely the same reason. We can't get reinforcements there in time."

"I admire your loyalty to England and the English," said Staunton; "but I keep on being surprised by your simplicity of mind. For an American newspaperman you're the most gullible guy and the most pitiful sentimentalist I've ever met. That windbag, Winston Churchill, fills you with admiration and awe. That political charlatan, Franklin D. Roosevelt, brings a soft light into your eyes. You think this war is being fought for liberty and Christian ideals, when we all ought to know that it's being fought to save our skins, and that before the end comes there will not be a dime's worth of liberty in the United States, and not as much Christian idealism as you could put on a nickel when the bag's handed round."

"You can't reduce life to a cynicism," answered John. "It doesn't work out like that."

"It's a lousy world," said Staunton. "Have a drink, old boy."

They had a drink.

JOHN finished his lecture tour in Boston, and when he stepped off the platform for the last time he felt a sense of profound relief. He had done his job according to contract. He had done something, perhaps, to interpret England to his own people. Great numbers of letters had reached him, assuring him that he had made a deep impression on many minds in many places. At the best, he could hope that he had done something to sweeten relations between his own and Anne's people. His fellow journalists had given him a great show everywhere, reporting his speeches and giving them friendly comments in their editorials. Over the microphone in many cities he had broadcast to greater audiences than any hall could hold. Perhaps his tour, after all, had not been wholly futile. In spite of all fatigues, and vexation of spirit, and ravelled nerves, there had been compensations. He had met many friendly souls. He had entered deeply into the mind of his own folk in many states. He had had innumerable conversations with intelligent men and women of good will. They had given him more than his fair share of sympathy and admiration and generous praise for his poor oratory. He had acquired a new respect for his fellow citizens, despite much to criticize in their setup of civilization, so noisy and so gregarious compared with that of England, though more democratic and more dynamic.

His last audience had cheered after his peroration in which he proclaimed his certainty of final victory, now that the United States and Great Britain stood together with united resources and united spirit.

"Together," said John, "we cannot be beaten."

He gave the victory sign, and the audience in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Statler where he was staying stood up and cheered.

It was with that good noise in his ears that he stepped down from the platform, and after the usual handshakings and congratulations, and emotional words from elderly women, he went up to his own room on the nineteenth floor. A bellhop was waiting at the desk of the floor lady with a telegram for him.

"Just arrived, Mr. Barton," said the floor lady, in the usual bright voice of her species.

John read the message and said: "Thanks."

It was a brief message, and quite pleasant.

I want to talk to you, John.

It was signed "Sheila O'Connor. Ritz-Carlton."

He rang up the Ritz-Carlton from his bedroom, and she answered him.

"It's nice to hear your voice, John. It doesn't sound husky after that talk of yours, which lured my audience away."

"When can I see you?" he asked.

"Just as soon as it takes you to walk from the Hotel Statler."

"Walk?" exclaimed John. "What's the matter with a cab?"

She laughed and said: "A walk would do you good, John."

She was waiting for him in her room. There were the usual bouquets of flowers there, and he would never think of her without the scent and beauty of flowers.

"They like you in Boston," he told her. "They like you in San Francisco, and Fort Worth, and Lexington, Kentucky, and all the other big cities of this big country. You're a famous lady, and much beloved."

"I like to be loved," said Sheila O'Connor. "But this afternoon you stole my audience away!"

"No," he said; "I can't believe that. Not in Boston, where they love music. Not anywhere in the world where they have heard your harp."

"I believed you've kissed the Blarney stone!" she told him, but she liked his disbelief.

"John Barton," she said presently, "I have exciting news to tell. So exciting that I don't even believe it myself."

"Good news or bad news?" he asked.

She wasn't quite sure. It might be good, or it might be bad, but it was terribly exciting, and she could hardly sleep at nights for thinking of it.

"So you've decided to go to England?" said John, guessing it at once.

"It's all fixed," she told him. "I've signed a contract with the B.B.C. They've arranged priority for me on the Clipper. I'm flying in a week's time."

John's heart gave a lurch.

"Gosh!" he said. "I'd like to be going with you."

Sheila's excitement was in her eyes, which were alight and shining.

"Come with me," she said. "I'd feel less afraid. That is my S O S to you. Do you remember?"

He gave a groan.

"Not in a week's time. I have to see the President again, and I've just promised to visit some of the war factories and do some broadcast talks about them."

"Cut all that out," demanded Sheila. "Abandon the President. Turn your back on the war factories. Can the broadcast talks. I'm in a blue funk about that flight across the Atlantic. I need your courage. I need your company."

She did not look in a "blue funk"—she looked ready for any adventure.

"I'd like to," answered John. "I've a good mind to take your advice. To hell with everything, except the flight to England!"

“Are you serious?”

When he put it like that she changed her mind.

“Not quite serious, John. I’d love you to come with me, but I’m not one of those women who lure men away from their jobs and their duty. You’ll have to see the President. You’ll have to visit those war factories.”

“I’ll follow on quick,” said John. “And meanwhile I’ll get my sister Judy to meet you. And you’ll have to stay with my mother. And I’ll tell the boys in London to give you a royal welcome.”

“I’d like to meet Judy and your mother,” she said. “Poor Judy! It’s terrible not having a word from her husband.”

John had told her about that. Not a word had been heard from Judy’s Robin since his disappearance from a German prison camp.

“How are they going to take over your harp?” asked John. “Isn’t it too big for the Clipper?”

She would have to leave her beloved harp behind. The B.B.C. would provide another one. For her own use, she might buy one in London.

“John,” she said after a while, “tell me more about the English. Won’t they be hostile to me because I’m Irish?”

John laughed at this fear.

“They love the Irish,” he told her. “That’s the absurdity of the ancient feud. The English people go soft over Irish songs, and Irish girls, and the Irish brogue. They’ll all make love to you at first sight.”

“But, John,” she said anxiously, “aren’t they very cold and supercilious? And do they care anything at all for music? I mean the sort of things I play?”

John smiled again at her misapprehensions.

“Dealing with the first part of your question,” he said judicially, “the English of certain classes seem a little cold at first to us Americans. And we get scared by the English accent, and we’ve been told so many times that they’re arrogant and supercilious that we misinterpret them hopelessly until we find them out. They’re warm-hearted and kind, even if they’re a little frosty at first. An English friend is a friend for life. They have a sense of loyalty in friendship. Get into an English home and you become one of the family.”

“Then I’ve been lied to all my life!” exclaimed Sheila. “If what you say is true, we Americans have been terribly deceived.”

“As for music,” continued John, “I should say that next to the Germans the English are the most musical race on earth.”

“Go on wid ye!” cried Sheila O’Connor. “Sure and you can’t stuff me up with all them tarradiddles!”

“It’s the truth I’m telling you,” answered John, imitating her Irish accent.

“Well, I shall see for myself,” said Sheila. “But how can I believe that I shall be in England in a week’s time? It’s a fairy tale. I’m dreaming it. It can’t be true, like your

stories of the English.”

“One can believe anything nowadays,” John assured her. “If I suddenly found myself in the Libyan Desert, racing along the Burma Road, or lying in a jungle in Malaya, I wouldn’t be surprised.

“After the things that have happened in this war nothing startles one. Did I ever think that I should walk in the ruins of London and see St. Paul’s Cathedral rising above the fires?”

Sheila hoped there would not be another blitz while she was in England. She didn’t pretend to be one of life’s heroines.

“Not this winter,” said John. “Hitler is too busy in Russia.” In any case, he was certain that Sheila would be brave.

There was a question in her eyes, which smiled at him.

“What makes you so certain?” she asked curiously.

“You’re a Catholic,” said John. “Those with your faith have more courage than skeptics like myself. Isn’t that so?”

Sheila answered doubtfully.

“It ought to be true. But I’m a little coward in my heart. I’m afraid of death, John—or I think I’m afraid!”

“Death is very scaring,” he agreed.

“I wish you were a Catholic, John,” she said presently. “I believe it would help you. You’re so lonely, aren’t you? If you felt that God was near to you——”

“I shall be more lonely when you go,” he told her.

She touched his hand for a moment.

“We’ll meet again in England. I shall count the days until you come. I shall be lonely, too, over there. Tell me more about England. Tell me all you know. I’m greedy for knowledge.”

He talked about England. That night, when he left her, she raised her face to his, and he knew that she wanted him to kiss her.

For a moment he hesitated. He liked her friendship. He liked the grace and charm of her. But Anne had been his wife.

He was loyal to Anne. She was still in his heart and always would be.

“Good luck,” he said, kissing her lightly.

“Be quick in coming to England,” she told him.

Her face flushed with colour when he kissed her.

BARTON was obliged to stay in his own country longer than he had expected or hoped, but three months passed with incredible rapidity owing to hard work and crowded experience. He saw the transition of a great nation from peace conditions to the general mobilization for war. He saw the calling up of its man power and the forging of a war machine terrific in its potentiality, almost beyond imagination, in its mass production of destructive weapons. He saw the spirit of a people change from lethargy and indifference to the war in Europe—before Pearl Harbour—to dynamic activity spurred on by unceasing propaganda, and the demands of its leaders, who called for further effort and more sacrifice. He saw a social revolution very swift and silent, changing all the ways of American life. The rubber shortage due to the loss of Malaya was the cause of a radical and major alteration in the very basis of American ways. Social life and industry had been based on the automobile. Working men and women had been able to live twenty or thirty miles away from their jobs. Parents had taken their children to schools twenty miles from home. Housewives had done their shopping in towns beyond walking distance, and supremacy of the automobile and its mass production had put the local railways out of action, and many of their rails had been torn up. Now, suddenly, the rationing of oil and rubber put all private and unessential motoring out of action, and for the first time within living memory traffic departed from the roads outside the great cities, and a strange quietude descended upon the countryside. In a hundred ways like that things which had seemed essential to the American standard of life were now rationed and restricted.

All that was interesting to an observer like John Barton, especially as he could compare it with what had happened under his own eyes in England. Its comparison was not unfavourable to his own people. They had switched over more rapidly. They had gone all-out for man power and production without the gradualness of the English mind and methods.

Barton visited many of the plants laid out or turned over for war production. He lived in long-distance trains again as during his lecture tour, and made many flights between far-distant cities. At journey's end there were new revelations of a stupendous energy harnessed to the mass production of tanks, guns, airplanes, and all other types of weapons. American dockyards, long silent, had sprung to life again. Ships were being laid down. Armies of riveters and welders were at work for the winning of the war. Toil and sweat. The strain of long hours. Muscle, and brain, and nerves at full stretch. The men behind the men behind the guns. It was up to them to win the war by providing weapons for the fighting men. Bodies wet with sweat in steel foundries and shipyards. Men who worked with tightened lips, millions of them. Millions of women in war factories doing men's work. Young girls handling machines, filling shell cases, bending over benches. The whirr of wheels, the beat of pistons, the thunder of hammers. Most

impressive of all the silence of vast sheds and workshops—the cathedrals of industry—where mighty engines worked without noise, tended by men who touched a few buttons now and then, and watched, while terrific power was generated at a touch.

In the Ford Works at Detroit, John saw the plant turned over to the production of tanks and guns. He stood watching a stream of molten metal flowing into vast tubs. He watched it through a darkened mirror.

“Better stand back a yard,” said his guide, standing with him on a steel bridge. “The sparks fly high when the alloys are flung in.”

The sparks flew high and fell within three yards of him, like shooting stars, bright and burning. Steel for guns. Steel for tanks. Flowing in molten metal, cooling and hardening. Rolled out into strip steel of endless length. John’s guide turned to him with a laugh.

“All that stuff used to make Ford cars. We reached our twenty-ninth million at the end of last year. Now it’s all going to make tanks and guns to smash the Germans and the Japanese. It will be some smash when the time comes!”

John dodged a shower of sparks, and turned away from the blinding light from that river of molten metal gushing out of the furnaces.

“The raw material of victory,” he said. “No nation on earth will be able to stand up against this war production when it reaches its peak. The sky will be black with bombing airplanes, from what I’ve seen lately. The battlefields will be crawling with tanks. There will be enough guns for a ten million army.”

The man who was taking John around was a young, keen-eyed fellow with a look of alertness and energy. One would have sized him up as a hard-boiled type. But he spoke now some words which surprised his visitor.

“It’s really a crime against human intelligence and all man’s efforts to reach forward to some decent standard of civilization. Don’t you agree?”

John groaned a little, and then laughed.

“My God, yes! But men who have the civilized idea in their minds have to defend it against the demons who want to make a hell on earth.”

The young man nodded.

“That’s true. We’ve got to destroy. But it’s a competition in making hell on earth. We’re all guilty to a certain degree, don’t you think? It ought never to have happened. If we hadn’t cut the throat of the League of Nations by turning down Wilson, it might not have happened. The last war ought to have taught us something. Now this one is widening the areas of ruin and destruction, and before the end comes another generation of youth will be scythed down by Old Man Death. What then? Another war, with deadlier weapons in another quarter century? Humanity is destroying itself. Civilization is committing suicide. I can’t see any sense in it.”

It was an odd conversation in the Ford Works, standing on a steel bridge above a river of molten steel on its way to the production of Uncle Sam’s war machine.

“There’s no sense in it,” agreed John Barton. “But it’s forced on us by thugs and the gangster minds who have seized power in the world today. We can’t let them get away

with it. They've taken advantage of our follies and our weakness. It ought never to have happened. But it has happened, and it's a fight to the death."

John's friendly guide laughed again.

"Yes! I guess we have to fight evil by its own weapons. It's an infernal paradox from which we can't escape. Mr. Ford was a pacifist. Do you remember how he went to Europe with a peace ship to stop the last war? Now he's turned over his works to this business of forging the mightiest war machine on earth. Funny, isn't it?"

He laughed at the humour of it, but there was a tragic irony in his mirth. Perhaps he, too, had been a pacifist and sung hymns of peace in Mr. Ford's private chapel?

Barton had once backed the policy of appeasement with some hesitation and some doubt when Chamberlain went to Munich. In his secret hours he, too, groaned at the thought of this hell which massacres, mutilates, cripples, blinds, and shell-shocks millions of young men. But there could be no peace nor any armistice with those who had attacked the peace-loving peoples and put them to this torture.

They would be defeated and destroyed. Surely that was certain? He had that certainty in his mind when he returned to New York after his tour of workshops and factories and building yards. He had that faith in victory more strongly based and newly inspired when he had another interview with the President of the United States—that astonishing man, that radiant personality, that victor over a physical handicap which would have vanquished the spirit of most men.

He was very cordial when he invited John to take a seat by his side in that room in the White House where, as John had noticed, there was an odd collection of comic animals on a side table by his chair. Most of the conversation was off the record again, but in the course of it he alluded to the progress of production.

"My critics jeered at me," he said, "when I stated the figures of production which I expected to attain. Fantastic! they said. Utterly impossible! Well—we're doing it. We're going beyond schedule. American industry is beating all records."

There was only one moment when a little devil of doubt seemed to get between him and his optimism.

"Our chief snag is the bottleneck of shipping. It's no use producing weapons unless we can ship them to our Allies and carry them to our fighting fronts. We want ships, and more ships, and more still.

"You've done fine work," he said to Barton. "I've followed you; before and after Pearl Harbour. You've done much to mould American public opinion."

It was very high praise from a very generous man, and John felt as if he had received a knighthood for service in the field. It was a reward for all his fatigue and for all his torture.

"And now what are your plans?" asked the great man.

He gave John a new commission as interpreter. This time there would be need of men like Barton to interpret the American soldiers to the English people and English ways of life to American soldiers.

“There’ll be a lot of them before long,” he said. “Many little difficulties will arise, many causes of misunderstanding. A fellow like you can do a lot to smooth ’em out.”

“I will do my best, Mr. President,” said John. “But one poor guy can do very little.”

The President laughed and held out his hand.

“Good luck,” he said. “Give my love to England. If you see Churchill, tell him that we’re beginning to win in the race against time. My figures of production were not fantastic. No sir!”

John Barton walked down the drive of the White House under the spell of that amazing man who had a strange boyishness of spirit, and the gift of laughter in a world war, in which the fate of humanity and the direction of human progress would be decided for good or evil—for life or death. To a great extent, perhaps, in the most decisive way, the outcome of the war and its chances of victory or defeat were in the control of this man alone. His plans, his decisions, his personal hold over the American people would turn the balance one way or the other. And yet he had time to talk to a newspaperman, and there seemed to be no shadow of doubt in his mind, no secret gloom behind his smile. That radiance of his touched anyone within its reach.

“I’m for England,” said John aloud to himself as he passed the porter’s lodge. “I shall see an English spring again. I shall hear the thrushes singing in the Spurfold woods. My mother and Judy are waiting for me.”

Anne would not be waiting for him. That thought gave him a pain in his heart. He had not forgotten her.

THERE were urgent reasons for going back to England, and John fretted at the incessant delays, as they seemed, which held him back. There was all the business of getting an exit permit, filling up income-tax papers, and pulling wires for a seat in the Clipper. The urgent reasons were of a personal nature. Letters from his mother told him that Judy was ill with anxiety because of Robin. He had certainly escaped from his prison camp, but whether he had been recaptured could not be known. The Red Cross and St. John's had made every effort to obtain information, but without success. Some of his fellow prisoners believed he had been shot in trying to escape, as had happened in other cases, but those were only rumours. They were suffering anguish. His great friend, Peter Langdon, was among them. His letters were tragic. The death of his son Paul had left him stricken. He wrote in one of his letters:

I try to bear it with fortitude, but all the philosophy I have, all the wisdom and stoicism of the ancients which I have picked up in a lifetime of reading, does not help me now. I blame myself for this weakness. Other fathers of sons killed in action are more courageous. They accept it with a resignation which I cannot find. Paul was everything to me, apart from Katherine. I suppose he meant too much to me. Really, a form of egotism perhaps. Anyhow, now that he has gone, I feel that I have no more purpose in life. As far as my pen went I tried to stop this war, but now its horrors are in full tide upon us, and nothing that I can write will make any difference. I cannot save any of Paul's contemporaries. I cannot help to defeat Hitler; nor can I write a word about anything in fiction form. My light has gone out. Novel writing seems silly in the face of this world war with its earth-shaking incidents, its daily supply of piled-up tragedy, its heroism, its cruelties, tortures, and great sum of death. So I feel, though I ought not to feel like that, as well I know! If my pen and my brain were working with any inspiration, with vital passion, with any touch of genius—I never reached as high as that—I might write a book which would tell about this war as it is fought in the souls of men and women. I might reveal the depths illimitable of its tragedy, which pursue our common humanity in this fearful conflict. I might show what light is still shining, here and there, through the darkness. By my own anguish for the loss of Paul I might write something which would make its readers weep with tears of blood, and by those tears reach some deeper understanding of this mystery of man's martyrdom. I might even get more wisdom and resignation myself if in some new book I could get close, or closer, to the meaning behind all this. Never, as now, did we need so much interpretation and revelation of the history through which we are now passing without understanding. But I am not the man who will write such a book. I can't put two words together, my

dear John. I am devitalized, and thrust deep into despair; not only because of Paul, but because of the atrocious degradation of human hopes and ideals. The only grain of comfort I can get out of this misery is the thought that Paul and all these boys are dying in defence of their country against an enemy which, if it won, would assuredly destroy all that we have of liberty and beauty, as they have destroyed all the countries they have captured with merciless oppression. Yes! Germany must be beaten if there is to be any hope for future civilization. I see that, though I see also that our own follies, and our own political immoralities, helped to produce Hitler and his ruffians. So my mind goes round like a rat in a trap, gnawing at the bars of this trap in which we find ourselves.

Katherine is wonderful in her courage and faith. She puts me to shame by her spiritual outlook and her refusal to despair. She is a very beautiful woman—I mean beautiful in mind and character; and I am deeply grateful for our long comradeship. And that reminds me, my dear friend—though I needed no reminder—that your loss has been greater than mine, and that I am a selfish hound in bemoaning my own sorrow, when you and so many others have suffered more. Forgive me! To you I reveal all that is in my mind, knowing your friendship; to others I hide all this weakness that is in me. I look forward to your next letter by air mail. I look forward still more to your return to England.

John read this letter with emotion, touched by this outpouring from a stricken soul in a stricken world. Here was another reason for a quick return to England. But the year had lengthened into early summer before he was notified from Washington that a seat was reserved for him on a flying boat.

Much history had been made in the passing of those months. American power had been mobilized. A nation which had refused to envisage another expeditionary force was sending expeditionary forces to many fronts. There was already a strong contingent of American troops in northern Ireland. English newspapers had announced in shouting headlines: "THE YANKS ARE COMING." Headquarter staffs were already there, and the first transports were on the way.

By an extraordinary chance of luck, as John thought, young Edward would be in England before long. His regiment was ordered to stand by for foreign service, and somehow the secret of their destination had leaked out, as Edward himself announced when he came home on embarkation leave.

"I'm for England," he said to his parents one evening when John was there.

He blurted it out with a laugh, trying to conceal his inward excitement. "At least rumour has it that way. The general told his A.D.C.—the A.D.C. drank three old-fashioneds and told the staff captain—the staff captain told the regimental sergeant major—the regimental sergeant major told the quartermaster sergeant—that is to say, everyone knows it. I expect to see the white cliffs of Dover in about three weeks from now."

"Gosh!" cried his sister. "Why do men have all the luck?"

“Do you think it luck?” asked Edward, trying to pretend that he hated the idea.

“Don’t you, little brother?” asked his sister.

“It depends how you look at it, and what follows,” answered Edward. “I guess that a second front in France is our ultimate destination. That won’t be a walkover, or a quiet stroll in Normandy!”

“Edward!” cried his mother. “Don’t terrify me. I can’t bear the thought of your going.”

She came towards him with her hands outstretched, and then burst into tears as he put his arms round her.

“Don’t you worry, Mother,” he said soothingly. “I was only kidding about that second front. There ain’t going to be no second front. I’ve heard that on the highest authority.”

He looked at John across his mother’s shoulder, and winked at him.

His father had something to say on the subject, and he spoke with his usual violence.

“Somebody ought to be shot the next time he uses those words ‘second front.’ Haven’t we made about fifteen other fronts? Mr. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill won’t be happy until they have sent packets of troops to every uninhabited island on the navigation charts! They’re scattering ’em like pepper out of a pot and call it United Strategy. The Greeks had a name for it.”

“And I bet you don’t know what that name is, Father!” said his ironical daughter.

John was there in his cousin’s house when the boy said good-bye to his family. In thousands of American homes these family farewells were being said. They said it bravely.

“Best of luck, Edward!” said his sister. “I expect you’ll fall in love with a haughty English girl. Don’t come back with an English accent.”

“God bless you, old boy!” said his father. “I’m against this war, but I wish I were thirty years younger and going with you.”

Edward grinned.

“Hardly possible, Dad. I shouldn’t be there!”

He was careful to conceal any emotion at this parting, but the mask fell from him for a second when he took his mother in his arms.

“Thanks a lot, Mother,” he said in a low voice, “for everything.”

“Come back safely,” she said. “I shall pray for you all the time.”

“Fine!” said Edward. “That’ll keep me safe all right. In any case, I don’t suppose I’ll ever hear a shot fired in anger. I expect I shall sit down for the duration in a rat-infested, ghost-haunted manor house, doing crossword puzzles to pass the time.”

He looked good there in uniform—so tall, and trim, and finely built, like the figure of a typical young officer on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

“See you in little Old England,” he said to John when they clasped hands.

It was only when he went that his family broke down a little. His sister suddenly burst into tears and left the room hurriedly. Edward's mother wept, and her husband went over to her and took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"Courage, old lady!" he said huskily. "To hell with Hitler and the little yellow men!"

A week later John said his own farewell.

At the airport, John met his fellow passengers at half-past ten in the morning. They were a queer-looking bunch of guys, he thought, though there were three perfectly good American generals with a number of staff officers. But they were all disguised as civilians, and it was a pretty poor disguise and very comical. John heard the reason for this play-acting. They were going to drop down in southern Ireland, and if they went ashore, as they wished to do, they were technically liable to be interned by the government of Eire, which remained strictly neutral.

In riding breeches and top boots and civilian mackintoshes and cloth caps bought in a New York store, they looked pretty tough, and not at all like innocent American citizens, ignorant of parade grounds and military drill. They would have been spotted as soldiers in one second by any sharp-eyed fellow.

John happened to know one of the generals, having visited his unit and having been entertained in his headquarters mess. It was General Grant White.

"Hullo, General!" said John. "You look like a Kentucky colonel on his horse-breeding farm!"

"I feel like a Hollywood hero," answered the general with a friendly grin. "I'm afraid it's all a lot of nonsense, but we've had some fun out of it. Glad to have you as a fellow traveller."

He introduced John to some of the other officers, and spoke generous words.

"This is John Barton, whom you all know over the radio as our best American reporter."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Barton," said a staff major, shaking his hand warmly.

"Say! I'm pleased to meet John Barton," said one of the other officers named Colonel Schirmer. "He's a household word in my family, and my family is darned critical of most others on the microphone. Now didn't my wife hear you speak in Detroit, not very long ago?"

"I was there," answered John.

"Sure you were there! My wife came home just crazy about you. 'I've been to hear John Barton,' she told me. 'He's just too wonderful for words. After hearing him, I'm going to work overtime at Bundles for Britain!'"

John laughed and gave his thanks for this tribute.

"Since Pearl Harbour," he said, "I guess Bundles for Britain will fall away. Our doughboys will have first call on all the knitted goods and the ear warmers."

"Let's get a cup of coffee," said Colonel Schirmer. "We're going to wait here for hours while those guys behind the desk inquire into the virtue of our grandmothers and

the payment of our income tax. This war has already multiplied red tape and officialdom a hundred per cent. That's going to make it a long war. You see it at its worst in Washington. It's just incredible."

"Tell me something about England," said General Grant White, who joined them for a cup of coffee at the bar of the airport. "I've never been there, I'm ashamed to say. Are they as frigid as we're taught to believe? My wife gave me a copy of the *White Cliffs*, and told me I ought to read it as a textbook. I couldn't find much in it, but it confirmed my worst suspicions."

"You'll soon know," answered John with a laugh. "The first three months they may be a trial to you. It's mostly a question of accent and national reserve."

"Why in hell do they call themselves a democracy?" asked the general. "I'm not keen on all their king stuff. It seems to me an anachronism."

"The king is chief democrat," answered John.

There was a laugh from several officers at this aphorism.

"What fills me with apprehension," said one of them who spoke with a Southern softness, "is the lack of central heating in their country houses. I don't want to freeze to death!"

"I'm afraid you will, unless you get acclimatized," answered John—regarded as the expert on English life by this group of fellow travellers. "It's no use denying that the English are a hardy race, who warm the front part of their bodies at open fireplaces while their backs are exposed to wintry blasts. But I can assure you that one gets used to it after a year or two."

"A year or two!" exclaimed Colonel Schirmer with a laugh. "How long, then, do you think this war is going to last?"

The general intervened on that question.

"Two years for the United States to get ready. Two more while we learn by our mistakes. Then two years wearing down the enemy to the point of surrender! That's not my original thought, gentlemen. I was told that by a state official in Washington, who seemed to know a hell of a lot!"

He smiled sideways at John Barton.

"If you talk like that, General," said one of the younger officers, "I shall burst into tears. I've just left a young wife who is going to have her first baby."

So they chatted for a couple of hours, while one by one they passed the weighing machine, the passport control, the income-tax officials, and other desk clerks who desired information and documents. They were off at last, and the plane flew to an airport in Canada in time for luncheon.

"Good-bye, United States!" said Colonel Schirmer, looking at his wrist watch, when, by this time, they should be crossing the frontier. "When shall we get home again?"

He was sitting next to John Barton, who only smiled at this unanswerable question.

He himself wanted to be silent with his own thoughts for a while. The American adventure, now behind him, had been in its way a great experience, and had made him

think well of his own people. They were taking this war seriously and soberly. They were not only ready for self-sacrifice, but asking for it. The man in the street and in the long-distance train was analyzing the war news intelligently and without false optimism. The man in the factory was dripping with the sweat of his toil “for the men behind the men behind the guns,” as the new song had it.

As far as energy goes, thought John, we’re a mighty big people, and in the average intelligence we’re on a pretty high grade, though maybe we haven’t the traditional culture of Europe.

His thoughts travelled faster than a quick-flying airplane.

I did my best for England, he thought. I’m darned glad of that. Perhaps in some minds here and there I left a better understanding of the English spirit and broke down time-old prejudice. That was all I could do!

And now—what?

He would be deeply glad to see his mother and Judy again, and all his English friends. And there would be an American girl in England whom he hoped to meet again. It was Sheila O’Connor, with whom he had made a pact of friendship. She was very charming and attractive.

Maybe he ought to be a little on his guard against his sense of loneliness, his desire for sympathy, his natural instincts for feminine endearment—very much needed, that! The warmth of life. The womanly touch. Love. But it was not for him. He belonged to Anne. He would be loyal to her this side of eternity and afterwards—if there were such a thing.

“You think a hell of a lot, Barton,” said Colonel Schirmer. “You’re one of the world’s thinkers, judging from this prolonged silence.”

“Let’s talk,” said Barton.

“I’m wondering how American troops will get on with the English,” said the colonel. “There’s a lot of prejudice to break down. I guess it’s partly due to the theatre where the damn-fool Englishman is still put on the stage.”

“Also the history books,” said John. “England was the enemy. Our heroes fought the English. Our historical tradition is based on enmity to the British Government. Kenneth Roberts is the only American writer to show the other side of the picture. Have you read *Oliver Wiswell*?”

“Yes,” said the colonel. “Darned interesting, but very shocking to my early education, which left all that out.”

The aircraft began to bank steeply, and there was a sensation of losing height rapidly.

“Puts a bit of pressure on the ears,” said the colonel.

They came down beautifully, thanks to their skilful pilot. The American generals and their staff left the plane, glad to stretch their legs and tread the solid earth of Canada—solid, but ankle deep in mud. The scene around them was desolate, grim, and grey. This airport had been planted on a spot which looked on the Back of Beyond. Only a few houses were in sight, and they were mostly wooden shacks.

“We can get a bite of food here, gentlemen,” said one of the pilots cheerily. “It’s not a bad little pub.”

He pointed to one of the buildings beyond the muddy track. There was a friendly welcome waiting for them from a Canadian family, who must have led lonely lives until, suddenly, this desolate spot had become one of the stages for transatlantic flight, bringing to their wooden shanty many famous and distinguished men who came to sit at their tables for an hour or two. Two youngish women seemed to run the place, helped out by two or three girls and a husky lad. They were chatty and sociable after serving a meal, and brought an autograph book for the signatures of these new arrivals.

“We’re getting quite a collection of famous names,” said one of them. “It’s queer to think a year ago we were off the map and never saw a soul from the outside world. Just buried alive!”

It was a pleasant interlude on the long flight, and there was time enough for John Barton to walk half a mile through the mud after his meal, to breathe Canadian air, and to be alone with his thoughts again. He was in a great loneliness, he thought. Dark forests stretched away as though interminable. Around him, and beyond, there was a deep, unbroken silence. Nature, he thought, had this part of the world to itself. Beyond the small inn and the wooden shacks there was no sign of human life.

No sign at all of human life, until a big military car swished past him, and then slowed down and stopped, while a man put his head out of the window and shouted: “Hullo, Barton!”

It was a young Englishman with whom he had lunched several times at the Savoy in London, with Anne and her brother David.

He got out of the car with two other officers and came back to meet John.

“Glad to see you again,” he said, as though it were the most natural thing in the world to meet a friend in this scene of desolation.

John laughed at this encounter.

“Do people like you live here?” he asked. “What on earth are you doing in this vast wilderness?”

Young Bartlett grinned.

“Oh, this is quite an important place now. Lots of work for intelligence officers.” He introduced his two friends, Colonel Sandford and Major Brown.

“You’ve been doing great work for us in the United States,” said Colonel Sandford amiably. “We know all about you. Give our love to London when you get there.”

“There must be many odd meetings in this war,” said John. “This is one of them.”

He looked at his wrist watch. Time to be getting back to the plane.

“Cheerio!” said young Bartlett. “Happy landings!”

He gave the victory sign and then sent a message.

“If you can remember Kensington 3304, you might ring up my wife and give her my love! Do you mind?”

“I’d be glad to do it,” said John.

“Tell her that I’m overeating, and trying not to overdrink!”

“I certainly will,” said John.

He strode back to the airport, where his fellow passengers were getting into the plane again.

“Next stop Ireland,” said Colonel Schirmer. “The Emerald Isle, and I should say it’s a happy hunting ground for German spies. Why the English don’t take over the Irish ports and clear out the German Embassy in Dublin is one of those mysteries which keeps me guessing.”

They flew through the night. The American generals and their staff officers snuggled down under blankets and mostly slept. John had no blanket under which to snuggle—there seemed to be one short—and kept awake with a strong belief that he would freeze to death before reaching Ireland. Above the vibration of the aircraft he heard resonant snores from one of the officers. Only a little blue light showed the sleeping figures.

We take all this for granted, thought John. We’ve already lost the sense of its incredible miracle. Here we are, flying across the Atlantic as though it were a train journey from New York to Boston. We’re flying from one dream to another—perhaps life itself is an illusion and a dream? This war makes everything fantastic. It increases the fantasy of life—like lunching with young Bartlett in the Savoy Grill Room and hearing him say: “Hullo, Barton,” in the Back of Beyond.

One day I may meet Anne again, just like that! Round the corner of another dream. She would say: “Hullo, John,” as if it were the most natural thing. . . . If only one could know!

His head dropped and he slept for a while, dreamlessly, unless in sleep his spirit went wandering into another dream world.

They came down upon the water which washed the shores of southern Ireland. It was shortly after dawn, and the early sun shone upon the water and the shore with a glamorous light, through a thin veil of mist which quickly lifted.

A small pinnacle came alongside the plane. There were Customs officers aboard examining papers and talking to the skipper of the aircraft. There was some quiet argument going forward. Through the pale blue of the sky came a great white bird, which presently swooped down upon the water. It was a Pan American Clipper.

“What’s the trouble?” asked Colonel Schirmer. “I guess those Irish officials don’t like the look of us.”

“I don’t blame them,” said General Grant White. “I must say we look a nasty bunch of bandits.”

A young officer gave the latest news.

“No going ashore, I’m afraid.”

“Say, that’s too bad,” said one of the American officers. “And after all the trouble we’ve taken to disguise ourselves.”

“I’m getting apprehensive about breakfast,” said the general. “Ireland—or Eire—I want my breakfast!”

Breakfast was served in the plane. It was sketchy, but the coffee was hot.

No American officer was allowed to step ashore. Mr. de Valera desired to maintain strict neutrality in a war which he disliked. In this war against antichrist and all Christian culture he stood for strict neutrality, and maintained friendly relations with the ambassadors and government of the Crooked Cross!

The plane resumed its journey over the glittering waters. Its pilot steered straight for a little harbour on the south coast of England. He alighted there like a seagull.

“So this is England!” observed General Grant White when he stepped ashore with smiling eyes.

John was silent. For some reason his eyes were moist.

He had come back. He felt emotional about it. He was a lover of England. He had shared its ordeal of war. He had stood among its dead in nights of terror. He had left Anne here.

HE had sent a telegram to his mother and Judy from the little harbour beyond the landing stage, and Judy was waiting for him by the booking office at Waterloo when he arrived there in time to catch the six forty-five to Guildford. She flung her arms around him, and laughed a little, and wept a little, to have him back again.

“You’re looking swell,” she told him, after her first scrutiny.

“I’m feeling swell,” he told her. “Waterloo station and the way to Surrey! The English crowd again in time of war. How good to be back.”

He gazed round at the crowd to get the picture into his mind. Young soldiers, heavily laden with their packs and rifles, and steel hats and gas masks, shoved their way through groups of civilians, airmen, khaki-clad girls, and sailors on leave. A woman’s voice intoned through a loud-speaker:

“The six forty-five will leave platform seven for Woking—Haslemere—Havant—and Portsmouth.”

Same old scene, thought John. Maybe it’s a bit more crowded. But it all seems miniature again after life on the other side. Tiny engines, toy trains, little stations, rows of dolls’ houses.

“How’s Mother?”

“Quietly excited at the thought of seeing you again.”

“And how’s the infant Hercules?”

“Fine and dandy!”

“And how’s yourself?”

He turned to look at her under one of the station lights.

“Chin well up,” answered Judy.

He didn’t like the look of her from the health point of view. She had thinned down considerably since he had last seen her many months ago. She looked worn and wan, except for the sparkle in her eyes.

He tucked her arm under his, holding his bag in his other hand.

“Dear old Judy,” he said, “you look half starved! How are rations in this beleaguered isle?”

“Quite good, considering all things,” she said. “We’re not starving yet.”

He did not mention the name of Robin. It was too painful. Had she given up hope, he wondered?

She seemed to read his thoughts.

"Some of us feed on hope," she said. "It's not very nourishing after a bit."

"I know," he said. "I'm darned sorry, old girl."

"Oh, I haven't given up," she told him quickly. "It's my daily diet, and I won't abandon it—not if this war goes on for years. I know he's safe somewhere."

"Yes," said John. "I'll bet he is."

In his own mind he thought Robin's chance of being safe somewhere was very slim. Judy must have heard something after all this time, if he had made a successful getaway from Germany—in itself a miracle.

The train was crowded on its way to Guildford, but John and Judy squeezed into a smoking carriage, and a young soldier stood up and offered his seat.

"Thanks a lot!" said Judy brightly. "But thy need is greater than mine, Mr. Corporal!"

The soldier grinned.

"I shouldn't feel comfortable if I sat while you had to stand. I was brought up that way by old-fashioned parents."

He spoke with what the Americans call the "Oxford accent," of which John was newly conscious after months at home.

"Well, if you take it like that," said Judy, "I suppose I'll have to be selfish."

John stood in the corridor with the young corporal and offered him a Lucky Strike.

"Can you risk smoking an American cigarette?"

"Why not? I can smoke anything! American, aren't you?"

"Just back today," answered John.

The young man raised his eyebrows.

"Did you fly back?"

John nodded.

"Pretty marvellous," said the corporal with the Oxford accent.

He hesitated for a moment, and then asked a question with a smile in his eyes.

"Any chance of an American army over here?"

"They're on their way," answered John.

The corporal looked pleased with this bit of news.

"That's grand. I hope we shall be able to start a second front this year and draw the Germans off the Ruskies."

In further conversation John found that this young man had been on several commando raids and that he was the son of the old parson at the little church in Spurfold with whom John had had a talk now and then.

He spoke of the war quietly and with a kind of reasoned optimism.

"Pearl Harbour was a bit of luck for us," he said. "It brought your people on to our side. We're all in together now, and England feels less lonely. I have a hunch that we shall win this war in the long run."

John was glad to have this conversation with a young English soldier, and as they stood together in the corridor looking out of the window he was happy to see English fields, and trees, and little roofs, and the spires of village churches.

England is like a garden, he thought. I guess there's no country in the world so beautiful as this. Every little house has its lawn and flower beds. In spite of all the air raids and the agony of war the little man in England still mows his grass and weeds the garden path.

He was glad to be back, but he had a new pang of pity when he took a glance at Judy sitting in the smoking carriage, tightly wedged between the other passengers. Her face in repose looked rather tragic. There were new little lines about her eyes and mouth. Her cheekbones were sharper. It was more than a year since she had heard from her husband Robin—that gay, whimsical, laughter-loving man, whom she had loved with adoration.

As John watched her she seemed to feel his gaze and instantly, when she looked at him, her eyes lighted up and she gave him a quick smile. She was not one of those who let their own woes cast a gloom upon other people.

The sun was beginning to sink behind the Surrey hills when John and Judy climbed the winding path and stood outside the gate of Dawn Cottage, with its tall chimneys and brown-tiled roof. The hollyhocks had grown tall again—as tall as the King of Prussia's Grenadiers—as when he had left them nearly a year ago now. The rambler roses were climbing between the leaded windows. A border of lavender along the path was a lovely smudge of blue.

Six thousand miles away John had had this picture in his mind. It had come once or twice into restless dreams on long-distance trains. When he had spoken to big audiences of the English countryside in time of war it was this cottage and the village below of which he thought. In the surging city of Chicago he had had a sudden nostalgia for this old dwelling place on an open heath looking out to the Sussex Downs.

"Back again—thank God!" he said.

A woman with white hair came out to the gate carrying a small boy in her arms.

"Welcome back, my dear," she said.

It was his mother with Judy's boy.

He put his arms round both of them in one embrace.

It was pleasant picking up the threads of his English life again though pain shot through it here and there. London called to him and he went up most days, returning to the cottage in the evenings. They had tidied up London, he noticed. Most of its ruins had been cleared away, and the spaces where they had been were very neat and ready for the time of reconstruction. It was amazing really how much remained after so much had been destroyed in the worst areas. A stranger coming to London would hardly be aware of any track of ruin left by the air raids, unless he went around St. Paul's, or down by the East India Docks.

On his first day in town John lunched with that eccentric personality, Michael Dewhurst, the leading article writer for one of the great dailies. He was, as usual, at the corner table in the Cheval Blanc. With him again were Brigadier General Sir Champion Cowdray of the War Office and Captain Coker of Naval Intelligence.

John pushed open the swing door of this Soho restaurant and glanced round with a smile. It was all exactly as he had left it, as though only a week had gone by. The same little French waiter was rushing about in this understaffed eating house. The patron was making a salad at a side table. Three French officers on De Gaulle's staff were lingering over their coffee. Two young airmen were there with their girls. A group of Poles in uniform were celebrating some national day, judging from the bottles of wine on their table.

John approached Dewhurst's table. That cynic and humorist was addressing his remarks to General Cowdray.

"But, my dear idiot, do you imagine that the United States Army will be ready for action before two years from now? Don't you know that this immense rabble of drugstore clerks, shoeshine boys, bellhops, and garage hands must be trained and equipped before they are flung into those future battles in which their generals will make every possible mistake, and the doughboys will be massacred like sheep? No! I don't suppose you do know! These elementary facts do not reach the desks of our heroic soldiers in Whitehall."

Brigadier Cowdray laughed good-naturedly.

"Your sarcasm, old boy, is getting a bit stale. It leaves me entirely unruffled. But I still maintain that the potential strength of the United States will vastly outweigh the future resources of men and material on the Axis side."

"You're wrong," said Dewhurst. "Hitler has all Europe for his workshop, and will be able to move his men and matériel much faster in any given direction than the so-called United Nations. As for the United States——"

“Good morning, Dewhurst,” said John quietly. “With what withering contempt are you going to blast my unfortunate country?”

Dewhurst was taken by surprise, and slightly disconcerted.

“Strike me pink!” he said, recalling his schoolboy slang of forty years back. “If it isn’t that Anglicized American, John Barton!”

He held out his hand and grabbed John’s.

“Glad to see you again in this Soho rattrap. Rumour about you has reached us now and again from the other side of the Atlantic. I must say I was considerably amused by the report of your debate with Val D. Turner. It was played up here by the New York man on one of our Sunday rags—I forget which. You set about him in great style, Barton. Sit down and have some of this foul food.”

“Thanks for all you did to interpret England and our effort,” said the brigadier generously. “We’ve had glowing reports about you.”

“I did just nothing at all,” said John. “The Japs did it for me.”

Captain Coker of Naval Intelligence disagreed.

“You did much for friendship, Barton. I heard all about you from our naval attaché at Washington. I should make you blush if I quoted what he wrote.”

“I should like to blush,” answered John, with a slightly self-conscious laugh.

It was pleasant to hear these things in the Cheval Blanc. Even Dewhurst admitted grudgingly that John had done some useful work as ambassador of good will and understanding.

“Not that it’s any use,” he added with his usual irony. “There will never be real good will between us, because there will never be understanding. In fact, the more we understand each other the more we dislike each other. Don’t you agree, Barton?”

“I don’t,” said Barton squarely. “I found nothing but good will to England almost everywhere.”

There were the usual verbal fireworks from Dewhurst—that man who masked a profound melancholy under a grim humour, and whose critical mind was so impatient of false optimism that he talked like a defeatist. But his words were sincere and warm when John left his table.

“It’s nice having you back, Barton. We missed you.”

That afternoon John went round to the Langdons’ in St. Leonard’s Terrace. That was painful, because of Paul’s death, but they were glad to see him and hid their sadness. John was rather shocked by the appearance of Peter Langdon. He looked broken and ill, though he said he was feeling very well physically. Katherine kissed John on the cheek, as she had done when he went away, and she had not changed, he thought, in spite of her secret wound. She was the most beautiful woman he knew, not because of outward beauty—though she was beautiful in his eyes—but because of that inner grace and loveliness which gave her a kind of radiance.

“We followed you as closely as possible,” she told him. “There were bits of news about you in the papers now and then, and American friends of ours wrote in your praise after hearing one of your talks. You made a great impression over there.”

He had tea with them and made them laugh over some of his experiences, and was glad to hear their laughter. No word was said about Paul, though he knew that he was always in their thoughts.

It was only when he was leaving that Katherine spoke about her son. She made an excuse to have a few private words with him.

"Don't come into the hall, Peter. There's an awful draught when the door's open. I'll see that John gets his hat."

Langdon may have guessed that she wanted those private words.

"Just as you like," he answered with a smile.

She closed the door when she left the room and picked up John's American-looking hat.

"I'm a bit worried about Peter," she said in a low voice. "He tries to be brave about it—he is brave—but his heart is bleeding all the time. It affects his health. He doesn't sleep very well."

"I'm terribly sorry," said John. "You know that my heart goes out to you both?"

"We know," said Katherine. "We know your friendship, John."

"How is your health?" he asked. "I marvel at your courage."

"I'm all right," she told him. "As for my courage, I feel no need for it now. I am so sure that Paul is very close to me. I feel his presence. I am sure he comes to me. He is happy, and does not want me to be miserable. I seem to know that with a queer certainty. I know it!"

"That's good," said John. "I have never felt that about Anne. She has just gone."

He kissed her hand before going down the steps of the old house in St. Leonard's Terrace, where he had spent some of his happiest hours with these friends.

It was only a few steps to the little iron gate which led to the crazy paving in front of his own house. It looked very desolate. Weeds had grown up in the flower beds. The windows were still covered with bits of wood after they had been broken by shell blast on that night of terror.

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for his latchkey, which he had taken from a little drawer in his dressing table that morning.

I'm a bit of a coward, he said to himself. I hardly dare go in. It's like visiting a tomb.

But he went into the hall and into the dining room, where once he had sat at table with Anne. It had a damp smell which chilled him. There were the bits of furniture which Judy and he had picked up in old shops down the King's Road.

"It's as dead at Tutankhamen's tomb," he said aloud, startled by the sound of his own voice.

He went up to the drawing room and switched on the light. A spider ran across the floor, disturbed by this intruder.

The rosewood piano was shut. Anne had played it now and then. There was the little chair on which she used to sit on chilly nights, warming her knees at the open fire.

Her hands had once touched everything in this room—the flower vases, the silver candlesticks, the cushions, the reading lamp. “Anne,” said John quietly, “where are you?”

There was no answer. He did not expect an answer. She had gone forever. He did not feel her presence near him. She was dead—he was alone.

He did not stay long. He went out and shut the front door again, and was glad to feel the warmth of the sunshine.

I hate loneliness! he said to himself. I hate being alone!

PERHAPS it was because he hated being alone that he persuaded Sheila O'Connor to stay in the neighbourhood of Dawn Cottage at Spurfold Green. He heard her playing for the B.B.C. one evening, when he switched on the radio after supper.

"That must be Sheila O'Connor," said Judy. "I'm crazy about her. She plays the harp like an angel."

"Somebody else said that," answered John, who had been listening to this music. She was playing some of the things he had heard when she played for him alone in the United States. "It was David Ede who introduced me to her in Washington."

"It's wonderful what magic she gets out of those strings," said Judy. "You were lucky to meet her. Is she nice?"

"I became rather friendly with her," answered John. "We crossed each other's path several times on tour. She's quite attractive."

"I don't like the Irish," remarked John's mother, glancing up from her patience cards with which she was playing at a little table near the window.

"You'd like Sheila," said John with a smile at this sweeping intolerance.

Judy raised her eyebrows and laughed with a little surprise.

"Have you got as far as calling her Sheila?"

"Oh, I came to know her fairly well," said John carelessly.

He called on her next day at a hotel in Russell Square where he knew she was staying, because he had had a letter from her.

"How are you getting on?" he asked, when she came down from her room into the hotel lounge. "You're looking wonderful."

In a summer frock with bare arms she looked very young, and fresh, and charming, he thought.

"I'm feeling wonderful," she told him. "I've fallen in love with England."

"I expect England has fallen in love with you," he answered, smiling at her.

"Everybody is very kind," she said. "The people at the B.B.C. treat me as though I were a fairy princess."

"That's as it should be," said John.

Not only had the B.B.C. been kind, but everybody she had met, including the London bobbies, of whom she asked the way when she was thoroughly lost, and the taxicab men, and the shop assistants, and the people she talked to in the railway trains and hotels. She had only just come back to London. She had been playing mostly in the West Country, where the B.B.C. organized their musical programmes.

“Now I’m at a loose end for a little while,” she told John. “My first contract has run out, but they want me to sign on again for the early autumn. So I shall have three months’ holiday, apart from some concerts which are being arranged for me in Manchester and Liverpool and other provincial cities.”

“How are you going to put in those three months?” asked John. “London is not quite the right place for the summer months.”

She agreed with that.

“No. I love the English countryside best. It’s just too wonderful. Its beauty is almost unreal, with its little old villages and its flower gardens, and its old trees and little cosy hills. But I’d be lonely if I had to stay all by myself in an English village.”

It was then that John had his brain wave of asking her down to Spurfold. She would cheer up Judy, who needed cheering up, and it would be pleasant to have her in the neighbourhood. He put the idea to her. He couldn’t ask her to stay in his own cottage for lack of bedroom space, but there was a little guesthouse near the Green where she would be very comfortable and she could see a lot of his mother and Judy and other friends to whom she would be taken.

“They’re pleasant people in Spurfold Green,” he told her. “We’re a friendly community, and not without intelligence. I think you might like it. Anyhow, you wouldn’t be lonely. Loneliness is the very devil!”

“It sounds so cheerful,” said Sheila. “But shouldn’t I be in the way? I don’t want to thrust myself on your mother and sister.”

“They’d just love to have you,” answered John, with complete confidence. “I don’t suppose I shall be there much myself. I’m doing another series of broadcast talks, and I have to get in touch with American units over here.”

“Well, if you’re not there, it won’t be so good,” said Sheila.

John laughed, not displeased by this desire for his company.

“I shall be there off and on, and you will always have Judy and her baby. They will keep you amused.”

“Sure, now, and ’tis you’re the kind and thoughtful man, John,” said Sheila, giving the sound of her words an Irish flavour. “I’ll love to come and see your little English home, and I believe I’ll adore your sister Judy—poor darling! It’s awful about her husband.”

She arrived at Spurfold Green a week later with bag and baggage, including a golden harp lent by the B.B.C. John and Judy were down at the guesthouse to meet her and were pleased with her enthusiasm for her new abode and its surroundings.

“This is just marvellous. It’s all like a fairy tale. I never thought I should stay in an Elizabethan manor house, with old beams overhead, and a fireplace large enough to roast an ox, and outside its little windows the green hills of England and a garden full of Shakespeare’s flowers.”

John laughed at her description of this guesthouse which had never been an ancient manor, but was a converted barn with bedrooms built on a few years ago. But it was all

very well done, and its black old beams and plastered walls were accompanied by every modern convenience.

“No rats and no ghosts,” he assured her.

“So you’re Judy,” said Sheila.

“Yes, I’m Judy—plain Judy. Has John given me a good character?”

“So good that I could hardly believe him. But now I do. I’m terribly glad to meet you, Judy. And it’s terribly kind of you to let me come and invade your village.”

They seemed to like each other, these two, at first sight, and John thought he had done a good turn to both of them. He had an idea also that he had done a good turn for himself. Sheila O’Connor was a pretty thing in an English garden where presently they took tea. She had merry Irish eyes and a soft voice. There was a kind of grace in her, and she was vital, and fresh, and unspoiled.

“What do you think of her?” he asked Judy when they walked back to Dawn Cottage, leaving Sheila to unpack her bags before John came to fetch her later on, so that she might meet his mother and spend the evening with them.

“I like her,” said Judy. “She hasn’t been touched yet by the cruelty of life. She’s young and gay, like a child. But I guess she can be serious too. She must have worked hard to play that harp so well, and there must be something beautiful in her mind. Music can’t come from a silly soul.”

That was high praise from Judy. She did not often speak like that of any woman or any man.

Sheila made a good impression also on John’s mother that evening when she spoke of falling in love with England and the English, in spite of her Irish prejudices. Englishwomen, she thought, were very heroic in this time of war. They were untouched, or at least unbroken, by the terrible ordeal through which they had passed and were passing. Sometimes her heart seemed to bleed when she heard English mothers and fathers talking over the radio to their children in Canada and the United States. And most for the younger women with whom she had been talking, who were separated from their husbands or sweethearts.

“They all have such unshaken faith in the future victory,” she said. “Germany keeps on winning— isn’t the news frightful?—but these English people are certain that in the end the enemy will be destroyed.”

“So he will,” said Judy, who had the same faith. “Now that we two peoples are together, Hitler’s doom is sealed, and the Japs will be put into their own place again.”

Sheila found Dawn Cottage enchanting. She loved its diamond-shaped windowpanes, and its old beams, and its tiny chintz curtains, and its Queen Anne furniture, and the oven in the old fireplace, and the little bedroom where she bent over a cot and smiled at a sleeping baby. And she loved the view across the countryside, looking away to the Sussex Downs, over woods and valleys. There was heavy gunning going on along the coast, and before darkness fell there was a roar of engines in the sky, as a heavy force of bombers flew on their way to Germany or northern France.

"It's all terribly thrilling," said Sheila, as she stood by John's side looking up into the sky. "I suppose they're not German bombers by any chance? If so, I shall get scared."

"They're English, all right," said John.

Sheila was silent for a little while. All this was new to her. She felt its drama and its menace.

"It's strange to be here," she said presently, "in this besieged island. I haven't been scared yet, but I'm always conscious that death may come out of the blue at any moment. Somehow, it makes one feel closer to God and the next life."

She shivered a little, not from fear, but because the dew was falling.

"I'm glad I came," she told John before they went into the cottage again. "All my life I shall remember this."

John took her back to the guesthouse, where no chink of light gleamed after black-out time.

That night something happened to Judy, something rather odd. John was asleep when she tapped on his door and called his name softly but urgently.

"John! . . . John! . . ."

He woke up and switched on the light.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

Judy came into his room. She had put on a light dressing gown and stood there, very pale.

"Oh, John!" she said. "I'm scared!"

"What is it?" he asked. "What's the matter, Judy?"

"It wasn't a dream," she told him. "I was wide awake, but suddenly I had an idea that Robin was calling to me, and wanted to say something. It was very extraordinary. It could not have been a dream. Oh, John! Do you think Robin is dead? They say that in the moment of death——"

She began to weep, and he got out of bed and put his arms round her.

"Don't cry," he said. "For God's sake, don't cry, old girl!"

It was some time before she calmed down. He could feel her body trembling in his arms.

"Sorry!" she said presently. "I'm sorry I made such a fool of myself, John."

"Sure you're all right?" he asked.

She nodded and slipped away to her own room again.

JUDY'S scare in the night left no trace on her face when she came down to breakfast next morning with her small boy. She indulged in her usual backchat with him, and then announced to her mother that she was leaving the infant prodigy in her charge while she went to do some shopping in Guildford.

John had a day at home, and after a stroll round the garden and on to the neighbouring heath retired to the small dining room to prepare one of his broadcast talks to America. He had no luck. First, there were two telephone calls from neighbours wanting Judy to go to tea. Ten minutes later there was a third call, and John uttered a mild oath.

"Damn that telephone."

He picked up the receiver and spoke grumpily.

"Hullo? . . . Hullo? . . . Yes? . . ."

"Is that John Barton speaking?" asked a voice. It was a man's voice with a rather pleasant tone to it. Somewhen and somewhere John had heard it before. It was quite familiar to him, but he couldn't place it.

"Yes. Who are you?" he answered.

"Give a guess," said the voice with a quiet laugh.

That voice and that laugh! He had heard them first on a ship crossing the Atlantic some years ago. He had heard them again in his house in St. Leonard's Terrace. No, he couldn't have done! It was utterly impossible. He must have gone crazy. He must have the jitters, or something.

"No," he said. "No . . . it can't be. . . . Good God, no! . . . Who in hell are you?"

"You've guessed all right," said the voice with another laugh. "Don't be scared. I'm not a ghost yet. How's Judy?"

"I can't believe it," said John. "These things don't happen. It's just lunacy. Tell me your name."

"It's Robin all right," said the voice. "Your eccentric and ridiculous brother-in-law. Still poverty-stricken, but still alive, thank God! I want to speak to Judy—I must speak to Judy. But I don't want to scare her by the sudden shock. Break it to her gently, old boy. Tell her that some fool of a fellow wants to speak to her—a fellow who used to call her plain Judy and kiss her behind the ear. One of the world's worst portrait painters. That may give her a clue."

"Judy's out," said John. "Good Lord, man, do you mean to say— Why, Judy is sick with grief for you. Last night she thought you were dead, because she thought she heard you calling her."

“I was calling,” said the voice which belonged to Robin Bramley, if one could believe the voice. “I tried to ring her up several times from Portsmouth, but I couldn’t get an answer. Something was wrong with your telephone.”

John remembered that he had failed to put up the receiver after calling up his office in London. He had noticed it before breakfast when it made a little crackling noise.

“If it’s really you,” said John, trying to believe the unbelievable, “where are you now?”

“Spurfold Green,” answered the voice. “I came down by the first train to Guildford. I thought I would ring up first in case it would be too much of a shock if I walked in on Judy. Where is she? How long will it be before I can see her? I’m like a starving man for the sight of her funny nose and her laughing eyes. . . . Plain Judy! . . . Plain Judy! O God in heaven!”

He gave something like a laugh which was something like a sob.

“It seems a thousand years,” he said. “I feel like Rip van Winkle. I feel like that fellow Methuselah. And I want to dance like Pan on a Surrey heath. And I want to hold Judy in my arms, and never let her go. And I want the first glimpse of my distinguished son. What’s he like, that infant? Judy says he has my eyes. That’s darned cheek of him! I wanted him to have Judy’s eyes with the laughter in them. Judy’s eyes—the eyes of little plain Judy! Why don’t you say something, Barton? Why do you let me do all the talking, curse you? Judy hasn’t gone off with another fellow, has she?”

“Nothing like that,” answered John. “I’ll meet you on the Green in two minutes. But I shan’t believe it’s you until I see you! Gosh! I’m not sure I’ll believe it then.”

The voice laughed with that pleasant tone in it which John remembered.

“I’ll prove it by the strawberry mark on my left arm,” said the voice. “Isn’t that how they did it in the old plays at the Old Vic? No! You wouldn’t know, being a perfectly good American.”

“Coming,” said John, putting down the receiver.

His mother came into the room with a bowl of roses which she had just picked, with the dew still on their petals.

“Mother,” said John.

There was something in his voice that startled her. There was something in his face that told her some terrific thing had happened. He had had astonishing news on the telephone, she thought.

“What is it?” she asked. “We haven’t lost the war, have we? . . . Hitler hasn’t shot himself, has he? Tell me.”

“Mother,” said John, “something astounding has happened. Something almost incredible.”

“Good or bad?” asked his mother. “If it’s bad, I don’t think I can bear it so early in the morning.”

“Robin has come back,” said John. “He’s on Spurfold Green waiting for me.”

"Which Robin?" asked his mother. "What Robin? No, John, I can't believe it. It's too good to be true. Judy's Robin? Judy's prisoner of war? The man that Judy weeps her heart out for, night after night?"

"Yes, there on the Green," said John. "I must rush down to him. I must get him up here before Judy comes. How are we going to let her know?"

"Good news doesn't hurt anyone," said his mother. "Judy won't die of joy. Now it might kill an old woman like me with a weak heart. John, it makes me feel queer all over. I feel as if Robin had been raised from the dead."

"I guess he has been," said John, lacing up one boot which he had left untied. "I guess it's a miracle, anyhow."

He plunged out of the cottage and ran down the hill which led to Spurfold Green. A man standing a hundred yards away raised his hand. John stopped running and strode towards him. It was a tall man wearing corduroy trousers and a brown jacket. He walked with a limp when he moved towards John. His face was very much tanned. It was a handsome, smiling face, with some inner light behind the eyes.

"Good God!" said John. "Good God! . . . Good God!"

"Exactly," said Robin Bramley. "God is good! I'm a religious-minded man, but I don't know why I had all the luck."

"I thought you were dead," said John. "I had given you up as lost a long time ago. My dear fellow! My dear Robin!"

He was pump-handling Robin Bramley's right hand, his other hand on his brother-in-law's shoulder.

"I'm alive," said Robin, as though John might still doubt it.

"It's a miracle," said John. "It's just darned wonderful."

A village postman stood and stared at them with a grin on his face. He had an idea there was drama in this meeting. Those two fellows seemed very pleased to see each other, he thought. Probably the man in corduroys had done something pretty good in the war.

"I wouldn't mind a bite of breakfast," said Robin Bramley. "I haven't had anything to eat since I left Portsmouth last night. But I want Judy more than breakfast! When's Judy coming back?"

"In a couple of hours," said John.

"That's better than a couple of years," said Robin. "I've had to wait all that time for her. It seemed like a couple of centuries."

"How did you get away?" asked John. "What have you been doing all this time?"

Robin laughed and gave a groan.

"That's a long story and very boring. I've been a Dutchman. I've been a Frenchman. And I've had a hell of a time."

They were striding up the hill from Spurfold Green. Halfway up Robin Bramley stopped and gazed over the view, where the morning sun lay upon the Surrey hills and the Sussex Downs, faintly blue in the far distance.

“England again!” he said, with a touch of emotion. “I used to dream of this kind of thing. I painted a thousand pictures of English scenery in my dreams, waking and sleeping. I was devilish homesick. That was what made me take a chance of escape from the German camp.”

They stood outside Dawn Cottage, and Robin Bramley, portrait painter—and in his dreams landscape painter—stood smiling at this old dwelling place with its tall chimneys and diamond-shaped windowpanes.

“Better than a German prison camp!” he said. “Like an English fairy tale, coming back to it like this.”

John’s mother came out and met them at the gate.

“Is it Robin?” she asked, as though still uncertain.

Bramley put his arms about her and kissed her cheek.

“It’s your very own son-in-law,” he told her. “It’s that pavement artist, Robin Bramley, formerly well known in Chelsea pubs and the purlieus of Kensington.”

“And not changed since I last saw him,” said Mrs. Barton, with a mist of tears behind her glasses. “Welcome home, my dear! Judy will go mad with joy.”

Bramley went into the cottage, stooping under the low beam of the doorway. In the sitting room he was able to stand up straight, and he looked around with a gleam of humour in his eyes.

“Sophisticated rusticity,” he remarked. “All very amusing.”

His eyes, those dark, smiling eyes, were looking at a portrait on the wall. It was a portrait of his wife, Judy.

He had painted it in a studio above a mews where she used to come.

“That’s Judy,” he said; “and it’s a good bit of painting. The fellow who did that wasn’t half bad.”

“You have a son upstairs,” said Mrs. Barton. “He’s taking his morning nap, but I daresay we could look at him without waking him up.”

They crept upstairs, and Bramley stood bending over the cot where his son slept—his unknown son. He slept with one little arm thrown over the coverlet and a warm flush on his face.

Bramley stared at this small lump of humanity and then stooped down and kissed his podgy little hand.

“Very creditable to his father,” he said in a low voice. “A chip of the old block, Judy’s masterpiece!”

Judy came home by the quarter-to-twelve bus.

John went to meet her at the gate, while Robin watched through the sitting-room window.

“Hullo, Judy!” said John.

There was something in his voice—a hint of emotion—which Judy noticed instantly.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “Has anything happened? Is baby——?”

“It’s all right,” John told her. “It’s good news, Judy.”

She stared at him with searching eyes.

“About Robin?” she asked anxiously.

“He’s alive,” said John; “we’ve heard from him.”

All the colour left Judy’s face for a moment, but a sudden look of joy leaped into her eyes.

“Robin alive? . . . Then he’s not dead!”

“He’s not far away,” said John, much stirred inside himself.

“In England?” asked Judy tremulously. “Do you mean he has reached England? Oh, John! Is this true?”

“He’s here,” said John. “He’s waiting for you.”

“Judy! Little plain Judy!” cried Robin Bramley, who could wait no longer for her. He had come out of the cottage and walked towards her.

“Robin!” she cried.

He held her tight in his arms and kissed her tears away, and made her face wet with his own.

SHEILA O'CONNOR was up at Dawn Cottage one evening when Bramley told the story of his escape. Before then he had seemed to shirk telling it, and said it was all very boring, and that he didn't want to go back on it anyhow. He wanted to forget all that, he said. But on this summer evening, when they sat in the little rose garden taking coffee after supper, he was persuaded to tell them about it.

It was Sheila O'Connor's question which set him going.

"Tell us how you escaped, Mr. Bramley."

"I'm Robin to you, lady," said Bramley, who liked listening to her harp, which John had carried up from the guesthouse for her.

He seemed to think back while he sat in a deck chair with Judy on the ground between his knees—a Judy into whose face the colour had come back and in whose eyes there was a look of joy.

"It was ridiculously easy getting out of the camp," he said. "There was no tunnelling, or any stuff like that. A barber used to come once a fortnight to cut the prisoners' hair. He was a veteran of the last war and had been wounded in the right leg so that he had a bad limp, like mine, but worse. He was about my height and wore glasses with steel rims, and, being a barber, and always shaving other people, had the savvy to grow a beard. When he left us after one of his fortnightly visits he used to walk out of the camp with a little black bag, carrying his white jacket folded over his left arm. It was my idea that one of us might impersonate this old fellow, and walk out in his stead. It seemed too simple to my fellow prisoners. They just laughed and said: 'Utterly childish, old boy! Just asking to be shot.' However, a group of them agreed finally to lend me a hand in the affair if I liked to take the chance. It all went like clockwork. But aren't I boring you people?"

"It's terribly thrilling," said Sheila O'Connor.

"I had grown a pretty good beard," said Bramley. "My pals watched its progress with interest and amusement. One of them—a nice lad in the Rifle Brigade—brought me some oil which he said would grow hair on a billiard ball. This face fungus aroused the suspicion of one of the guards, but I persuaded him in my best German that I had made a vow never to shave again until the war was over.

"It was the standing joke of the camp. Their bets as to the rate of growth per week were exciting, and young Bannerman of the Coldstream won a pool of cigarettes for getting within a millimetre. I liked to keep the lads amused. It was a good deed, even if I had got nabbed. Some of them were almost suicidal after being prisoners since Dunkirk. Well, that's how it happened. Any more coffee, Ma?"

He addressed this question to Mrs. Barton, who poured him out another cup of coffee, while he lit a cigarette.

“But you haven’t told us!” said Sheila. “We want to hear every detail.”

He told it amusingly. When his beard had grown and the day was fixed, a group of six officers arranged to deal with the unfortunate barber. So, while he was cutting the hair of one of them the other five seized him and took off his clothes and his spectacles, after putting a gag in his mouth. His eyes were very expressive. They were terrified, and then, when he found he was not being hurt, pleading and persuasive.

“I think he was warning me that I would certainly get shot,” said Bramley. “He knew that I was the fellow making the attempt to escape because I was putting on his clothes and glasses as quickly as I could. The risk was that one of our guards would look into this hut to see that things were all right. As a matter of fact, one of them did, but I had about fifteen seconds’ warning, and by the time he looked in I was in a white jacket cutting the hair of a fellow officer, with my back turned to the door. The real barber had been trussed up and was lying under one of the bunks. The guard thought everything was as it should be, but the fellow whose hair I was cutting was extremely peeved, as I had lopped off his front lock with an excess of zeal due to the excitement of the moment.”

“And then?” asked Sheila.

Then Bramley had taken his chance. He walked out of the hut with the white jacket over his arm and a little black bag in his right hand, and a pair of steel-rimmed glasses on his nose. He exaggerated his limp, and pulled down the barber’s cap as far to his nose as possible. The sentry hardly glanced at his pass, said “*Guten Tag*,” and opened the iron gate.

“I was free.”

“Oh, Robin!” cried Judy. “Oh, my dear!”

“How did you feel?” asked Sheila. “What were your reactions when you were outside the gate?”

“My reactions, as you call them, were an almost irresistible desire to burst out laughing. It was all so ridiculous. There was that prison camp heavily guarded by men with rifles and machine guns, surrounded by live wires, searched and watched at every hour of the day and night, under a stern disciplinarian—not a bad fellow really—and here was I walking out of the gate, and greeted politely by the sentry! Silly, wasn’t it?”

“The worst happened afterwards.” There was not an hour of any day for a year when Bramley was not in peril of being captured and shot. He suffered hunger and thirst, and lived like a hunted animal. He walked immense distances with a leg badly wounded at Arras, when he was taken prisoner before the retreat to Dunkirk. Now and then he was spotted as an Englishman—once by a German girl in a low eating house in the back streets of Augsburg.

“Who did you say you were?” she asked.

“I’m a Dutchman, Fräulein. I came over with those field labourers from Holland for the German harvest.”

“You’re English,” she said. “You’re an English officer.”

“What makes you think that, Fräulein?”

“I’ve been in England,” she told him. “I was kitchenmaid in a pub kept by my uncle, who’s an Englishman. My mother was English, and I know the English face. Besides, you’re a gentleman. You gave yourself away when you helped me to carry that keg of beer.”

“What happens now?” asked Robin Bramley. “Are you going to give me away, my beautiful one? Or shall we part with a friendly kiss?”

“I’m half English,” she told him, “and it’s lucky for you. I’ll have that kiss, if you’re quick about it!”

He was quick about it.

“I don’t like that kiss stuff,” said Judy jealously.

“She hadn’t washed for a week,” said Robin. “She was just a little slut, but I owe my life to her.”

Judy was reconciled.

There was another time when he was recognized as an Englishman. It was when he joined a gang of Belgian labourers working on a military road in Germany.

“Any job going?” he asked one of these men who was sitting on the side of the road eating black bread with two of his comrades. Robin hadn’t eaten anything for three days, and he eyed the bread hungrily.

“Better ask the foreman,” answered the man. “We’re under German orders—that is to say, we’re slaves of Herr Hitler. Are you German? If so, you speak French like a Parisian!”

“I’m a Frenchman of the Midi,” answered Bramley. “Where’s the foreman?”

The man jerked a hunk of bread towards a bearded man who sat by the roadside smoking a cigarette. Bramley went up to him and asked him if he could join his gang, for the sake of getting some food.

“I’m starving,” he said, quite truthfully.

The bearded man stared at him, and then spoke good-humouredly in English.

“You look a lousy animal, like one of us, but I know an Englishman when I see one! Escaped prisoner of war?”

Bramley was too exhausted to keep up a pretence, and the man looked friendly.

“That’s right. What made you think so?”

The bearded man laughed, and then lowered his voice. “We had better speak in French. There are fellows here who might give you away. They would sell their grandmothers for the price of a drink. I fought in the last war alongside the English, and passed a year in an English hospital. There’s something about the eyes of an Englishman——”

“I’m starving,” said Bramley again. “Can you give me a bit of bread?”

The man tore off a hunk of his own bread and handed it to him.

“You haven’t a chance of escape,” he said. “These Boches watch everyone.”

Bramley wolfed the hunk of bread and nodded with his mouth full.

“What you say is true,” he remarked later. “They watch everyone. But couldn’t you let me join your gang? Would they discover an extra man?”

“Without papers you would be lost,” said the bearded man, whom afterwards Bramley knew as Jean Brouwer.

He was silent for a while, then spoke again.

“One of this lot drowned himself in the canal over there—his wife in Bruges had gone off with another man. It seemed to upset him. He left his papers behind, poor swine, and I put them away in my pack. His *carte d’identité*. A photo of his wife and kids. Some letters from his mother. I had an idea of sending them back one day to his mother. They might be useful to you. His name was Armand Lebrun.”

“Not a bad name,” said Bramley. “It would suit me well. With his *carte d’identité*, and the photo of his wife and kids, and the letters from his mother, I should be able to answer any inquiries.”

“So long as the other men didn’t give you away,” answered Brouwer. “To them you would have to have another name. You would have to tell some story of being sent down here from another gang to replace the man who drowned himself.”

“That’s easy,” said Bramley.

It wasn’t easy. Some of the men were suspicious of this newcomer. They were hostile to him because he didn’t drink and swear. He had a fight with one bully among them, and was lucky in knocking him out. For three months he remained with them, eating black bread and sauerkraut, sleeping in filthy billets, and leading a beastlike life. There were, however, two or three men with whom he became good comrades. One was Jean Brouwer, kind-hearted, loyal, and intelligent; the other, a former garage hand in Brussels, who had the wit of a Parisian cabdriver and considerable talent on the mouth organ.

Those two, and a few others, were sorry when Paul Marchand, as he called himself—though his *carte d’identité* was in the name of Armand Lebrun—decided to leave them and get across the French frontier. They had been sent with eight hundred other Belgians to repair the roads on the German side of Strasbourg. It was a marvellous chance for an escape into France.

“I had the chance, and I had the luck,” said Bramley, telling this tale. “I tramped by night and hid by day. But I think I was overcautious. I looked such a sun-baked and ragged ruffian that no one would have taken notice of me. I was like any other labourer on the docks and canals.”

“How did you get on for food?” asked Sheila O’Connor, who was listening to this story as Desdemona listened to Othello.

“I ate turnips out of the fields, and apples from the orchards. I became a pretty good thief, and pinched things off the stalls in market towns.”

“Oh, Robin!” cried Judy. “And here in Dawn Cottage we were having all the food we needed, and grumbling about the rations!”

He skipped a lot of his story, though afterwards it came out in bits. He crossed the Franco-German frontier under a load of blankets for the German Army in Occupied France, in which he had hidden himself in a railway siding. He jumped from the train at night as it slowed down at a wayside halt. A German soldier fired at him, but he got away in the darkness. He was in France!

"It almost seemed like coming home," he said. "Having been an art student in Paris, my French is pretty good. Sometimes I dream in French, though I'm delirious in German. Odd that isn't it?"

He was in France for seven months—seven months of heavy toil and wanderings afoot, and queer adventures. He had torn up his Belgian identity card and the photo of Armand Lebrun's wife and children. Now he had the *carte d'identité* of Philippe Meunier, field labourer of St. Hilaire, aged thirty-nine, convict, sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for manslaughter.

"A very decent fellow, that ex-convict," said Bramley. "He had a heart of gold. He handed over his papers to me in return for ten cigarettes which had been handed to me by a priest in a village near Nancy. He told me that he could easily pinch others from one of his friends."

It's a long way from Nancy to St. Nazaire on the west coast of France, and Bramley did most of that journey on foot, in between spells of casual labour in harvest fields and farms. In St. Nazaire he worked as a dock labourer, and no one questioned his nationality. His French was good enough to let him pass as a man from the south, and the German police passed him as Philippe Meunier.

He was billeted in a filthy lodging not far from the docks. The old woman to whom he paid his few francs a week was a cross-grained hag with a slut of a daughter named Lucile. They kept a bistro, where the German soldiers used to drink at night.

"My idea in going to St. Nazaire," said Bramley, "was to get on some ship as a stowaway—some old cargo boat creeping down the coast to Spain or Portugal. But I had better luck than that."

It was a stroke of luck which nearly cost him his life.

He was in the bistro one night when the alert sounded for an English air raid. It was not the first time he had heard that. Since his arrival in St. Nazaire British planes had been over six times, dropping tons of high explosives and doing great damage in the docks used as a submarine base by the Germans. And every time they came Robin Bramley, fugitive Englishman, had felt his heart give a leap of joy because the boys of the Bomber Command were making hell over this German-controlled port.

But that night something different happened. There was the noise of naval guns as well as bombing; there was the sound of machine-gun fire in the streets.

"The English are attacking," said the old woman who kept the bistro. "We shall all be killed. Those English swine are worse than the Germans. They come and kill their own friends."

"They have no friends," said Lucile. "The English are as much our enemies as the *sales Boches*."

Bramley was down in the cellar with these two women. When the alert sounded, the German soldiers disappeared. Above-ground there was a tremendous noise of high explosives and every kind of gunfire. The German anti-aircraft batteries were flinging shells into the sky and putting up a fearful barrage.

The coastal batteries were at work. But above all that tumult of explosions Bramley could hear the firing of naval guns close to the port.

He felt drunk with excitement. British troops were making a landing. This was one of their commando raids of which there had been talk in his prison camp. Some of the German guards, veterans of the last war, had given them bits of news about that kind of stunt.

Men were running down the street. There were hoarse shouts in German. Presently, quite close, there were repeated bursts of machine-gun fire.

Bramley had been sitting on a wine cask in the cellar which was dimly lit by one guttering candle. He stood up and groped his way towards a flight of stone steps leading up to the bistro.

“Where are you going, Philippe?” asked Lucile sharply.

“Into the street,” he told her.

“You’re mad!” she cried. “You’ll be a dead man in two seconds.”

“I must see what’s happening,” said Bramley. “Good-bye, Lucile.” She rushed at him and grabbed him by the arms.

“I shan’t let you go, Philippe! I love you! If you are killed, I shall have no one to love!”

When Bramley told this part of the story he laughed.

“That poor little slut had fallen in love with me,” he said. “Can you believe it?”

“It was very natural,” said Judy. “I can believe it perfectly. Poor little creature!”

“What happened then?” asked John, who had been listening to this story with intense interest.

“It’s terribly exciting!” said Sheila O’Connor.

Bramley had to use force to free himself from Lucile’s clutching hands. He had to fling her across the cellar to escape from her. He was a bit rough, he said. He made his way into the street. There was bright moonlight that flooded the pavements like silver and gleamed on the whitewashed walls of the row of small houses, at the end of which was one of the dock gates. Where the shadows fell they were ink black.

He could hear the tramp of many feet in spite of the roar of gunfire. A small body of men came out of a side alley.

“Where the hell are we?” shouted a voice in English—a clear, ringing voice.

There were about fifty men with him. They had fixed bayonets which shone in the moonlight. Some of them were carrying machine guns.

Bramley stepped out of the shadow into the middle of the road.

“Can I help you at all?” he asked.

A young officer stared at him in surprise.

“Where’s the dock gate?” he asked sharply.

“At the end here,” said Bramley. “I will lead you to it.”

“Much obliged,” said the young officer politely.

But Bramley did not lead him very far.

When they had come within a hundred yards of the dock gate machine-gun fire opened out on them.

“Take cover!” shouted the officer.

There was a stampede for doorways and alleyways by about thirty men. The rest did not take cover. They lay very still in the roadway. They were dead.

“This is a bloody deathtrap,” said the young officer.

“Better get out of it,” advised Bramley. “A frontal attack on the gate is quite impossible.”

“My orders are to blow up the gate,” said the officer. “There’s another crowd coming along . . . unless they’ve been scuppered!”

A bugle rang out, and there was a shrill blast on a whistle.

“That’s the end of the show,” said the officer. “Can’t say I’m sorry!”

He stepped beyond the shelter of a blank wall and fell instantly. Machine-gun bullets were swishing down the street. One of them had caught him.

Bramley made a rush at him and dragged him back behind the wall, where five of his men were sheltering.

“This ain’t a picnic,” said one of them.

“Where are you wounded?” asked Bramley.

“It’s nothing,” said the boy—to Bramley, who was a veteran of the last war, he seemed just a boy.

It was a bit more than nothing. He had three machine-gun bullets in his right thigh and was bleeding a lot. He tried to walk, but would have fallen if Bramley had not grabbed him. It was Bramley who gave orders.

“I’ll look after your officer,” he said. “Lend me a hand here, Sergeant. Fall in, men! Follow my lead. Don’t start till the other lads join us.”

The young officer put his arms round the sergeant and Bramley, and they half carried him. Bramley led them down a narrow alley into another street. It was quite deserted, and there was no machine-gun fire. The young officer was getting weak from loss of blood, but he spoke a few words to Bramley.

“Who are you, by the way? One of our push?”

“No,” said Bramley, “but it doesn’t matter. My name is Robin Bramley.”

It didn’t seem to mean anything to that wounded boy. But it meant something to a colonel named Bosanquet, who stood inside a tunnel under a railway bridge with about fifty men, some of whom were wounded.

“Thank God you’ve come,” he said. “I can’t wait any longer. Put that young man on a stretcher. Who’s in command?”

“Hullo, Bosy! I’ve been lending a hand. Hope you don’t mind?”

Colonel Bosanquet stared at this unshaven ruffian and recognized him.

“Good God, Robin! What are you doing here? I thought you were a prisoner of war in Germany. Come on. Fall in there. We’ll have to make a dash for it.”

They made a dash for it, down to the harbour. At one spot they met machine-gun fire again, and several men dropped. Ten minutes later Robin Bramley found himself aboard a British destroyer under fire from coast batteries.

“You see?” he said. “I had amazing luck.”

Judy his wife put her hands up to his head and pulled it down.

“God has been very kind to us,” she said. “Dear God! Thanks a lot!”

She had wet eyes.

JOHN BARTON saw the arrival of the first American troops in England, followed quickly by other contingents, and was thrilled to see them.

“We’re not here to sit on our back ends,” he was told by one of their generals. “Most of my men have had a year’s training and they’ve been keen to learn. But I’m going to put ’em through it hard and rough for another three months in England. It gives them more sense of reality to be here in the war zone. They know now that their training is not for eyewash. At the end of three months . . .”

“What then?” asked John.

The general smiled.

“That page in the book of fate has not yet been turned,” he said cautiously.

Among those who came first was young Edward Staunton, his cousin, whose camp was less than twenty miles away from Spurfold Green, so that he was able to get over for week ends now and then, and once for a week’s leave.

He was pleased, it seemed, to find himself in England, and his account of his own reactions and those of his men was amusing and interesting to John.

“Of course,” he said one night when he was having supper in Dawn Cottage—he had made great friends with Judy, “I had some of the usual American prejudice against the English. After all, it’s the first thing one reads in children’s books about the American epic. England was enemy number one in our first struggle for independence. And I’d always been told that the English were darned arrogant, and condescending, and frigid.”

“I’m glad you’re getting away from that, Edward,” said Judy. “But we all have to go through it. John and I did!”

“I haven’t found ’em frigid,” said Edward. “On the contrary, I can’t keep pace with English hospitality. There is a bit of ice about at first, but it takes only ten minutes to break through it. I’ve met some nice families. Swell folk!”

“What about the men?” asked John, who was gathering some information about this on his own account.

“They weren’t impressed at first,” said Edward. “They didn’t like the climate. They froze in houses without central heating. They didn’t like the English accent, which seems darned affected. They resented English backchat in the pubs—what they call pulling your leg—especially about being caught napping at Pearl Harbour, and wearing different coloured pants to their tunics. There was a certain amount of jaw punching. There still is when they’ve drunk too much English beer. But I can tell from their letters which I have to censor that they’re beginning to like the English quite a bit.”

“What do they say?” asked Judy. “It must be amusing to read their letters home, poor dears!”

Edward laughed, and seemed to think back to some of those letters.

“Some of them begin: You’d be surprised. . . . You’d be surprised that these English bums ain’t so bad after all. . . . You’d be surprised that England is as pretty as a stage picture. . . . You’d be surprised that some of these English girls ain’t as cold as iced water, and, oh boy! I’ll say some of them are very easy on the eye. . . . You’d be surprised, Ma, that I’m treated as one of the family by some of the folk in this village. They’ve made me feel that I’m their long-lost son. They all know the old American songs, and I’ve just been singing ‘Old Black Joe’ with them round the piano in the sitting room. . . . You’d be surprised. . . .”

Edward laughed at his own quotation from letters which now and then required a bit of censorship, not because they gave away military secrets, but because they were overlurid in their language.

“That’s good hearing,” said John. “It bears out my own observations.”

He had been giving talks to some of the American units on English character and English history. He was still acting as interpreter of England to the Americans, and of America to the English. It seemed to be his special job in the war, though now and then he hankered after more active service. He was thinking over the idea of volunteering as war correspondent with an American expeditionary force. Why shouldn’t he go with these boys wherever they went after three months’ training, hard and rough, in England?

There was one thing which tempted him to postpone that idea. Something else had come into his mind. Someone else had come into his mind and heart. It was Sheila O’Connor. He had been seeing quite a lot of her lately, and found her friendship very charming and comforting. They had been for long walks together, and he had been amused and touched by her enthusiasm for the beauty of English woods and heaths, and wild flowers, and singing birds, and old villages, and old inns, and half-timbered cottages, and straw-haired children. She found it all a fairy tale, and very enchanting.

She was gay, and he liked her gaiety in a world war. She was young, and fresh, and vivid, and it was pleasant to walk with her up country lanes and over Surrey hills. She sang sometimes while she walked, and she sang with a sweet voice. Together now and then they lay on the grass in English meadows, or sat on the gnarled roots of ancient oak trees, with some wide view before them. Overhead came the droning of planes, or the rush of their metal wings. One could never forget the war for long. She had a good brain, he thought, as well as a charming personality. She talked well and simply about serious things. She talked with sincerity about the spiritual side of things, even about God. As a Catholic, she had a certainty about these things which made him laugh sometimes. He had no certainty. How was it possible to be certain? he asked her. Sometimes they had intellectual quarrels, but they were only for argument’s sake. Sometimes she rebuked him for being a melancholy Jacques and hugging woe.

“Life lies ahead of you,” she said one day on the slope of a hill above Spurfold. “Don’t brood too much, John, over a tragic past.”

"I don't want to forget Anne," he told her. "I want to remember her always."

"But not with gloom, or self-pity," she urged. "Anne is in Paradise. She wants you to be happy. She would not stand between you and happiness."

"I take it that you are advising me to marry again," he said, challenging her secret thoughts.

She nodded and answered frankly.

"Yes. That would be good for you. You need a wife, John dear. You are yearning for a woman's love. Isn't that true?"

"Quite true," he said. "But I can't be disloyal to Anne."

"I see no disloyalty," she told him. "Surely love—I mean spiritual love—is not limited to one person? Isn't that a narrow viewpoint? Wouldn't it be mean to look at it like that? God's love is all-embracing!"

"If there's another life," said John, "then earthly love goes on, and one has to wait in loyalty. That's how I look at it."

"It's a nice way of looking at it," agreed Sheila. "But if it's going to spoil all your future life—I mean your life here—then it's too austere, and too—well—miserable."

She was not flirting with him. She was not offering herself as the wife necessary to his happiness. He felt sure of that, looking into her eyes, and seeing their frankness and kindness.

"What about yourself?" he asked. "Don't you feel the need to marry? Why are you still unmarried? It's absurd."

She laughed at this counterchallenge.

"Oh, I have my career. That's enough for any female like me. Besides, I don't feel the mating instinct yet. I prefer friendship. I like my friendship with you, John. We can say anything to each other without suspecting ulterior motives or sex foolishness. I am prepared to give you a chaste kiss from time to time, but without getting fussed about it."

John demanded that chaste kiss before they left each other, and she gave it laughingly.

I wonder, he said to himself, as he walked up the hill to his cottage. Judy was still living there. Robin was in London, where he hoped to get a job in the War Office. Until then—and perhaps afterwards—for Judy and the baby, the cottage would be their home. Edward was coming for the week end again. Owing to crowded quarters, he would be sleeping at the guesthouse. Sheila had been invited to meet him at supper.

It was about two months later when Edward had his seven days' leave and spent it at Spurfold. He seemed quite happy with the somewhat limited amusements which could be provided for him, including games of bears with Robin's small boy. Sheila O'Connor had been giving some recitals in provincial towns, but was now resting again, and had come down to the guesthouse although the autumn leaves were falling and the countryside was losing its lure. John also had been away, having been giving some of his talks to the American units and broadcasting to the United States from provincial stations of the B.B.C.

He had been thinking a good deal on those trips, and he had come back with a resolution of great importance to his own life.

He revealed all this to Judy on the night of his return. He tapped at her bedroom door when he saw that her light was still up when he had said good night to Edward, who had departed with Sheila for the guesthouse. It had been a pleasant evening. Sheila had played her harp to them, and Edward, who was devoted to music, had persuaded her to play more than she usually did. Mrs. Barton had sat at her little table playing her usual game of patience, which would seldom come out in the right way. It was all very peaceful except for the sound of bombers flying over the chimney pots soon after black-out time.

In answer to his tap at her door Judy called: "Come in, John," and he found her in bed reading some novel with a light on the little table by her side.

"Sleepy?" asked John.

"Not a bit," she answered. "This ridiculous novel has kept me awake. As a thriller it's quite exciting."

"Shall I disturb the baby if I talk to you?" asked John.

Judy laughed.

"He's fathoms deep in sleep in the next room. He's one of the world's sleepers. Sit on my bed, brother John."

He sat on the edge of the bed and patted her hand for a moment.

"We've been good chums," he said, "ever since we came to England. That's why I want to ask your advice."

Judy gave another little laugh.

"Meaning to say, you've made up your mind about something and want me to agree with you!"

"You're wrong, lady," answered John. "I haven't made up my mind. I'm in grave doubts about it."

“What is it?” asked Judy.

John stared down at his boots as though they absorbed his interest.

“It’s like this,” he said presently. “I’m a darned lonely man, sister!”

It was Judy who took his hand now and patted it.

“I know you are, my poor John.”

“I go about alone,” said John. “I sleep in lonely rooms, mostly as cold as death, in this unwarmed England. I’m lonely in that mystical region which I am pleased to call my soul.”

He laughed a little harshly, as though those words were not to be taken seriously.

“Loneliness is terrible,” said Judy. “When I didn’t hear from Robin for such a time I knew the meaning of loneliness. But what are you leading up to, John? Of course I know, but I guess you want to tell me!”

He raised his eyebrows and looked surprised.

“You know? I’ll bet you five bucks you don’t!”

“Taken, brother,” said Judy. “You’ve been thinking of getting married again, and I hope to goodness you will.”

“You win, sister!” said John. “But I’ve come to ask your advice about it, as a woman with an honest mind and respectable character.”

He talked jestingly, but she could see that he was worried and wanted real helpfulness.

“What’s your problem?” she asked.

He hesitated for some time, and rose from her bed and paced up and down, then stopped and held on to her window curtains for a moment, before turning round and revealing himself.

“Judy,” he said, “what I’m telling you is a bit sacred. I mean I’m opening a secret door and chamber which mostly I keep shut. There’s a dead woman inside it. It’s my beautiful Anne. When she was killed, something died in me—all my hope of happiness.”

“I know,” said Judy. “I wept tears of blood for you.”

“I want to be loyal to Anne,” said John. “Her love was the most beautiful thing in my life.”

“Yes,” said Judy.

John hesitated again and stood there by the bedside staring at the little rug under his feet.

“The curse of it is,” he said, “that I’m still fairly young. I have all the make-up of a young man. I’m capable of passion and romance though Anne is dead. I want a woman’s arms round my neck now and then. I want to put my head on a woman’s breast. I want to love and be loved. Have I the right to marry again—I mean the right of any decent man who has a sense of honour?”

Judy sat up in bed. The thriller dropped to the floor.

“You have the right, John,” she told him. “It’s just exactly how you feel about it. You have been wonderfully loyal to Anne. You will always keep her in that secret chamber. You will always be loyal to her. You have a right to happiness. Sheila thinks so too. She told me so.”

“Sheila?” asked John, as though amazed. “How did you know it was Sheila?”

Judy laughed at him for this innocence.

“It was an easy guess, John. Good luck to you both!”

It was on the next afternoon that he had a chance of seeing Sheila alone. Edward had gone up to London to see some friends and was going to get back, he said, in time for tea.

Robin Bramley was down for the week end, and he and Judy were taking the baby for a run on the heath. Mrs. Barton was taking her afternoon nap. John was alone in the sitting room when he heard light footsteps on the gravel path and a gay voice calling out:

“Anybody at home?”

It was Sheila’s voice, and he opened the door to her.

“Just the guy I want to see,” she answered.

She came in and took off her Robin Hood hat and smiled at him. She looked prettier than usual, he thought, and that was saying something. Her face had a beautiful flush, as though she had been walking hard in keen air, and her eyes were shining in an odd, glamorous way, as though they had caught and held the sunlight.

“You’re looking wonderful,” he told her.

“I’m feeling wonderful,” she answered. “Where’s everybody?”

John gave her the location of the inhabitants of Dawn Cottage.

“I guess we have half an hour to endure each other’s company,” he said. “Can you stand it?”

“I can,” she told him with a laugh. “And you?”

“For a lifetime,” he said.

She did not take that seriously, though he meant it seriously.

“Gosh!” she cried, “you would get tired of my trivial conversation.”

“You always have your harp,” he said.

“Yes! That’s a conversation stopper,” she agreed. “Still, you’d get very weary of my harp.”

“Never!” he assured her.

He missed that good opening to something serious he wanted to say. Half an hour went by before he said it. He said it quite abruptly while she was playing with a kitten on her lap as she sat on the sofa by the window.

“Sheila, I’m going away tomorrow for a few days. I want to know something before I go.”

“Anything I can tell you?” she asked.

“Everything you can tell me,” he answered.

“Ask me then. I can’t guess.”

“You ought to guess,” he said. “If you could read my thoughts you ought to have known. I’m a man in search of happiness in this wicked world. Will you help me to find it? I mean could we try to find it together, you and I—like the Babes in the Wood, with devils and demons in the world around?”

Sheila had turned pale for some reason. She looked at him with a kind of pity and a kind of fear.

“Oh, John,” she said, “don’t choose me for your happiness. Choose someone else!”

“It’s you I want,” he told her. “No one in the world but you.”

She was silent for what seemed like a long time.

“I did know,” she said presently, in a low voice. “I did guess, and I wanted it to happen. But now, John—I’m terribly sorry—it’s too late. Something else has happened.”

“What?” he asked. “What is this terrible something?”

He spoke lightly, but there was a pain in his heart. His heart had given a lurch.

“It’s a wonderful something,” she said. “It took us both by surprise. It was like a flash of lightning. One thing seemed to light up everything like a revelation, like transfiguration. Oh, John, it’s going to hurt you. I’m terribly sorry about that. I don’t want to hurt you, or to spoil our friendship by any little shadow.”

“Tell me,” he said quietly, “what has happened?”

“It happened to Edward and me yesterday,” she said. “He was looking at some of my music. We were in here alone together. Our hands touched for a second on the music. It was like an electric spark. Edward looked up at me and we stared into each other’s eyes. ‘Good God!’ he said. ‘I love you! I’ve just found out I love you terribly.’ He spoke like that, and I was surprised too. I had had no idea. He took my face in his hands and kissed it, and I knew that I loved him terribly. Oh, John! It happened like that. Please forgive me!”

John walked away from her and went to the window in three steps. In those three moments of time he knew he would walk alone again along the road of life. He would be a darned lonely guy again.

He turned round and came back, and laughed quietly.

“Bad luck for me,” he said; “good luck for both you kids! The blessings of an old man upon you both!”

“Who’s calling himself an old man?” asked Edward, coming into the room breezily.

Seeing Sheila, he looked shy for a moment, and then went over to her and kissed her hand.

“Have you told Cousin John?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Sheila. “He knows.”

“Congratulations, kid,” said John.

He walked slowly out of the room and went upstairs to his own room, and sat on the edge of the bed, with his hands between his knees, and his head drooping. He remained like that for a time, unknown to himself. Downstairs, somebody tinkled the tea bell.

“I feel so darned lonely,” said John aloud, in his room.

Then, suddenly, he did not feel lonely. He felt that someone was very close to him—someone whose presence was comforting and very kind, pervading him with tenderness. He had a sense of beauty about him. He was aware of a fragrance in the room.

He stood up from his bed and called out in a low voice: “Anne . . . my beautiful Anne!”

Perhaps he was in a waking dream, or had left what is called reality for a second.

The tea bell tinkled again downstairs.

Someone called to him. It was Judy’s voice.

“Coming, John?”

“Coming,” he answered.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Interpreter* by Philip Gibbs]