

PHILIP GIBBS

Cities of Refuge

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ETC.

A novel by

PHILIP GIBBS

Cities of Refuge

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“And when he that doth flee unto one of these cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place that he may dwell among them.”

Author's Note

In choosing names for my Russian characters I had to make use of those which belonged to families of the old régime and are distinctively Russian, as Smith and Brown, or Howard and Talbot, are distinctively English; but I wish to state that apart from a few historical figures, the characters in this novel—English, Russian, Austrian, German, French and American—are entirely imaginary and have no reference to any living people.

PHILIP GIBBS.

1936

Cities of Refuge

I

THREE soldiers were talking—between long silences—behind one of the baggage wagons of an army in retreat. They were Russians. Behind them and in front were men like themselves, marching out of step, and other wagons, and guns, and ambulances, and farm carts with wounded men lying in the straw. There was the shuffle of tired feet, a jingle of harness, a creaking of wheels, the shrill squeak of unoiled axles. In the soft air of the Crimea was the sharp sour smell of thousands of unwashed bodies and sweaty horses. It was the stench of a broken army.

Said one of the men who were talking, between long silences:

“I would give a thousand roubles—if I had them—for one cigarette—if there were any cigarettes.”

Fifty yards further on the man next to him behind the wagon opened his lips and licked the dust off them.

“There’s a nail breaking through the sole of my right boot. It hurts like the devil.”

The third soldier behind this wagon was a very young soldier. His name was Count Michael Pavlovitch Markov, as he was known later—last year indeed—in an English village to which he came after many wanderings as one of the exiles in a world crowded with them. He was a boy of eighteen at that time, which was in the month of October of 1921. He did not talk much on that march. His lips had a line of pain. His face, under a mask of dust, was thin and haggard. He limped badly with his left leg.

“My family has a villa near here,” he said presently. “I must go and look for them. My mother and sisters . . .”

Nobody answered him. Every man in this beaten army was busy with his own thoughts in the desperate egotism of self-preservation and self-pity. It was a verst further along the road when the man who had wanted a cigarette spoke again.

“Life,” he said, “is a very disgusting affair, especially in Russia. It’s better not to be born, especially in Russia.”

He stumbled over a sharp stone and lurched heavily against the shoulder of young Markov, and said, “Pardon, comrade.”

From the ranks a yard or two ahead a soldier staggered away to the side of the road, and dropped his rifle, and fell face downwards. His comrades passed on.

“I dislike the idea of being hanged by those Reds,” said the man with a nail in his boot. “A machine-gun bullet is really the best way out. But it’s astonishing how one clings to life. For what reason? What has life to offer us now? Supposing, with a bit of luck, we get on to a ship at Sebastopol. What then? A life of exile and poverty, and starvation and degradation. And yet I hope to get on to a ship at Sebastopol.”

Sebastopol was six miles away. These men were among the remnants of the army of General Wrangel, that giant in a long black coat with red facings who was riding now in this retreat to the sea, where ships were waiting for them, they hoped. It was the last retreat after those nightmare years of revolution and counter-revolution, crowded with massacres and hangings, and all cruelties, and all horrors, because civil war is like that, especially in Russia. In a few hours—a day at longest—Russia from the White Sea to the Black Sea would be in the hands of the Reds, who were now very close behind this routed army. Lenin, that little slant-eyed man of destiny, would be the master of its millions. The revolutionary tribunals and their executioners would be busy for some time with any people of the old régime who had not yet fled, and with the bourgeois class whose minds were incapable of conversion to the gospel of Communism, and, later, with peasants who believed they had the right to reap their own harvests.

These thousands of men who trudged slowly along this road in the Crimea, overtaking, and followed by, a multitude of panic-stricken fugitives fleeing from the Red Terror so close behind, were on their last walk in Russia. They were to be wanderers henceforth in an army of exiles scattered among other peoples. Among them were poets, and painters, and musicians, and princes and cadets of Imperial Russia who had once washed themselves, and slept between clean sheets, and known life’s beauty and its small comforts, and even—some of them—its splendour and luxuries. Now they were dirty and verminous and beggared—the rabble of the last defeat.

That had happened at a place called Youchoun, behind them now. The Reds had had two hundred guns on a narrow front. Wrangel’s artillery was feeble and short of shells. A general attack had been made by the Bolshevik battalions, among whom were Letts and Chinese and Tartars. They had

advanced in waves with a murderous machine-gun fire. The Kornilov regiment of the White Army—mostly ex-officers of the Imperial troops—had made repeated counter attacks and suffered frightful losses. The cavalry squadrons commanded by Kalinin had charged many times and were slaughtered by the heavy fire of the Red batteries. Then Wrangel had given orders for this retreat. There was nothing now between them and the Red army but a thin screen of exhausted cavalry. There was nothing ahead but the sea.

The man next to Michael Pavlovitch Markov—his best comrade, whose name was Sacha Dolin—spoke as though thinking aloud.

“It’s the end of all dreams. We shall never see Russia again. If we get away we shall be exiles in unknown lands. If we don’t get away we shall be dead. We are treading on Russian soil for the last time.”

“My family has a villa near here,” said Michael. “They will be waiting for me.”

The road to Sebastopol was crowded with civilians driving carts until their lean horses could go no further, pushing hand-carts piled high with luggage and household goods, upon which were perched their babies and small children, wrapped in blankets. One of these hand-carts had lost a wheel and a pile of baggage lay strewn by the wayside. Two young girls were trying to do something about it while their mother wept and while the endless procession of people in flight and an army in retreat surged slowly past them. It surged like a sluggish tide past many human derelicts who had fallen by the wayside because their bodies could not move forward though flogged by the terror of their spirit.

“For the love of God and all His holy saints,” cried an old man, “give a lift to my poor wife who is ill and can go no further.”

No one answered his cry. The retreating soldiers stared ahead blindly. Their lips were parched. They had broken boots and blistered feet. There were still five miles ahead before they reached the sea. The Red Army was only a few miles behind them.

Sacha Dolin, who had been an artist before he became a soldier, spoke to young Markov.

“My wife is in Moscow. I think I told you, comrade. I shall never see her again.”

“My mother and sisters are living in a villa a mile further on,” said Michael. “It’s six months since I left home and seems like six years.”

“All this was written in the Book of Destiny,” said Dolin. “It’s easy to blame the English and French for letting us down. But Destiny has had most to do with it. We Russians have always had God’s wrath against us. It’s because of our cruelty. We are, of course, uncivilized. We’re savages. Before this War and Revolution I had no idea that human nature could be so beastlike. I believed in beauty. I worshipped beauty. That’s a very humorous thought. It makes me laugh as I think of it!”

He laughed then, with a harsh rasping note in his throat.

He was a man ten years older than young Michael by his side, and had fought in the war against the Germans before the Revolution.

Michael was keeping his eyes upon the faces of the civilian refugees. Somewhere among these people, pushing their hand-carts or driving farm carts and wagons might be his mother and sisters. Here and there between the peasant folk from villages and farmsteads were women of good class. Two girls walked in thin high-heeled shoes, and for a moment Michael thought they might be Olga and Tania, his sisters. He stared at them, but they were unknown to him. A woman in a black dress with a silk shawl over her head walked by the side of the road with her hand on the arm of a young girl. That might be his mother and Tania. But it was somebody else’s mother and sister. He heard the woman speak as he passed.

“You must leave me, Vera. I can’t go another step. Leave me. Your safety is all I pray for.”

“I shall stay with you, mother,” answered the girl firmly.

It was a mile farther along the road that Michael spoke again to Sacha, his comrade.

“It’s here that I step aside. My people’s villa is half a mile down that side road. Good-bye, Sacha. A thousand thanks for your comradeship.”

“What’s that?” asked Sacha vaguely, like a man walking in a dream. “What do you say, my dear Markov?” He looked dazed. He was breathing heavily, and lurching as he walked like a drunken man.

“I’m leaving you,” said Michael. “My villa is quite close. My mother and sisters may still be there.”

“No, no!” said Sacha. “Don’t be a fool, my child.”

He stepped from behind the wagon to follow the boy while other wagons passed on, followed by lines of infantry in dirty uniforms and broken boots.

“It’s best not to be too foolish,” said Sacha, holding on to the strap of Michael’s belt. “I should hate to think you’d been killed by the Bolsheviks. That would matter nothing to me because I have seen quite a lot of life and too much of death. But you’re only a boy. Life is in front of you. You still have time for beauty and many good things.”

“I must go to the villa,” said Michael quietly. “Life is no good to me without my mother and sisters.”

“They have gone, little comrade,” said Sacha. “Everybody has fled, and if we don’t get to the sea before tomorrow we shall hang on the nearest trees. It’s best to keep on the move.”

“I couldn’t pass the villa,” said Michael stubbornly. “Supposing my mother and sisters were there—waiting for me?”

“Then you must go alone,” said Sacha. “I hate the idea of being hanged.”

He put an arm round the boy’s shoulder and kissed his cheek.

“You are so young!” he said. “You have the face of David. You and I have been good comrades, my little one. May we meet again in the unknown future.”

“Oh, Sacha, my friend!” cried Michael, with a breaking voice.

The boy turned and went up the side road leading to the villa. Sacha Dolin, who had been a painter in Moscow, rejoined the army in retreat. He held on to the strap of a cavalry horse. The man riding it was Prince George Matchabelli, who afterwards sold scent in New York.

II

THE boy soldier in Wrangel's retreat walked up the carriage-track which led to the Villa Mimosa, half a mile from the road to Sebastopol. He had seen only six months of civil war, which seemed like six years if one counts time by experience of life and death and fatigue and misery. Yet it had not all been miserable. He had had the comradeship of older men who had been kind to him, like Sacha Dolin. He had laughed with them sometimes. He had marvelled at their gaiety, their indifference to hardship, their contempt for death. There had been good fellows in his company—intellectuals and gentle souls belonging to good families of the old régime, though they looked like ragamuffins in tattered uniforms. He had had wonderful conversations with some of them, who were great talkers about life, and art, and love, and human ideals, and the ironies of fate, though sometimes they had frozen his blood by their stories of cruelty and horror. He had found his manhood in this campaign which had ended now in this stampede to the sea. There was nothing he didn't know, he thought, about human nature at its worst and best. There was nothing he didn't know about hunger and filth and bodily discomfort.

He was verminous as he walked up this carriage-drive to his family villa. He itched all over. He hadn't washed for weeks. His feet were blistered by marching in broken boots. His right boot hurt him most and sent shooting pains up his legs. His stomach was aching for food. Not that he felt hungry. He was past that. He only felt weak and lightheaded and silly.

He was almost certain that his mother and sisters would be waiting for him in the villa. They would never leave until he had rejoined them. They would know that he was on his way back with the retreating army. They would wait until the very last moment for him.

At the turn of the drive, when he came in sight of the house which had been the paradise of his boyhood on summer holidays from St. Petersburg, he started running, or, rather, stumbling forward at a dog-trot. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and still light on this last day of October—too soon for lamps to be lit, though dusk was creeping into the garden. He noticed that there were cart-tracks across the front lawn. Some wooden packing-cases filled with parcels wrapped up in newspaper were on the gravel path below the loggia. The front door was open.

Young Markov stood still and felt his heart knocking against his ribs in a queer thumping way. He cried out in a harsh voice, unlike his own voice as he knew it:

“Mother! . . . Olga! . . . Tania! . . .”

It was very still in the garden. Not a breath of wind stirred through the palm trees or the magnolia bushes. A faint scent of flowers came to his nostrils. Years afterwards, in Berlin and Paris, and London and New York, he remembered that faint scent of flowers, the last roses of the year, as it had come to him when he stood for the last time in his mother’s garden of this villa in the Crimea which had been his paradise as a boy.

He went into the hall and shouted out again.

“Mother! . . . Miss Browne! . . . Tania! . . .”

There was no answer.

He stumbled over something outside the drawing-room door, which was wide open. It was a pair of girl’s shoes. They belonged to Tania. They were her dancing shoes.

There was a litter in the drawing-room, with open packing-cases half filled and then left with bits of straw on the carpet round them. Some of his father’s books were piled on the floor by the piano. On the piano lid—the Bechstein on which his mother had played his accompaniments when he was learning the violin—were a number of miniatures in little frames of tarnished gilt. They were the portraits of his mother’s family, his great uncles and aunts who had belonged to the Court of Vienna. She had always been so proud of them. It was a family joke—his mother’s Austrian ancestors with their powdered hair and old-fashioned costumes.

The ormolu clock had fallen from the mantelpiece and lay smashed in the fire-place. A pair of long white gloves—Olga had worn them at parties—lay on one of the rugs. They had been trampled by muddy boots.

Markov, this young soldier of a broken army, gave a hard sob and put one hand across his eyes. His family had fled. He was alone in this house. The paradise of his boyhood was now an empty shell and all its happiness had gone. He was alone in Red Russia. Never again, perhaps, would he see his mother, or Tania, or Olga, or Miss Browne.

The window-panes rattled with the tremor of distant gun-fire. The Red batteries were at work again.

The boy strode into other rooms, staring round them with searching eyes. They were all disordered with the signs of hurried packing which had been unfinished and then abandoned. He went upstairs and stood in his own

room. This was undisturbed and exactly as he had left it six months ago when he joined Wrangel's army as a young recruit. His bed was made, with the top sheet turned down from the pillow. It was six months since he had slept in a bed. The sheets looked incredibly white and clean.

The book-shelves were untouched. There were his editions of Russian and English and German novelists. Miss Browne had given him *David Copperfield* for his twelfth birthday. He had read it three times. Tania and Olga had given him *The Three Musketeers* in French.

In this room he had thought a lot and dreamed a lot, the thoughts and dreams of boyhood to whom the world was still beautiful and romantic with the lure of life's adventure, heroic and mysterious. He had had his hours of passion here. He had broken his heart—as it seemed then—because Vera Tereschenka had refused to kiss him and flirted with another boy. That was during the first years of the War, which had seemed very far away—so far away that it did not touch the spirit of youth, safe in the Crimea.

Michael Markov stood in this bedroom whose windows looked out to a dusky garden.

“All this is dead!” he said aloud to himself. “It's all dead. I'm alone. I'm very frightened.”

He was very frightened that he would never see his people again and that he would be caught in this lonely house by the Red soldiers, who would certainly kill him. It was a fear that came to him suddenly, with a panic which took the strength from his limbs, like a man on a narrow ledge above a precipice. He sat down on the edge of the bed with his hands hanging between his knees and a cold sweat on his forehead and in the palms of his hands—the sweat of fear.

The windows rattled again with the noise of gun-fire, closer now. Some living thing touched one of his legs. It was a Persian kitten, which rubbed itself about his leg and mewed. It was the only other living thing in this deserted house, and it gave him a kind of comfort for an instant.

“Poor mite!” he said. “Poor mite. You also are lonely.”

He staggered up and walked stiffly across the room. On a shelf above his writing-table was his violin in its case. He played rather well. For a time he had had a passion for music. This old fiddle was a beauty. His father had given it to him before the War. He stared at it doubtfully. In that unknown future before him he might find this thing useful. It might be worth taking. There was just a chance he might get to Sebastopol before the Reds got him. He might find his mother and sisters again. He might go on living.

Along the road to Sebastopol this boy in a ragged blouse tucked inside his belt, and broken boots which hurt his feet like red-hot irons, walked with a violin under his arm. The tide of fugitives was still surging towards the sea. He fell into step with them at a funeral pace, though there was need for hurry. The Red cavalry could not be far behind.

A girl walked by his side and talked to him now and then. Her father and mother were somewhere ahead. She had had to lag behind because her feet were bad.

“Shall we be too late to get on any boat?” she asked.

“I hope not,” said Michael. “I hope to meet my family in Sebastopol. My mother and sisters.”

“If there’s no room on the boats I shall drown myself,” said the girl. “I would rather be dead than fall into the hands of the Reds.”

“After all, they are Russians,” said Michael. “Perhaps after a while there will be peace in Russia. They will only shoot us officers and people of importance.”

“I shall drown myself,” said the girl. “They’re monsters.”

“What’s your name?” asked Michael politely. “Mine is Michael Pavlovitch Markov. We may meet again some day.”

The girl’s name was Lydia Vorochevsky. Her father was an actor in the Moscow Arts Theatre.

“I have heard of him,” said Michael.

In front of him some peasant women were walking. One of them carried a baby. Suddenly she swayed and fell face forward on the road, dropping the baby, which gave a scream.

“She is dead!” cried one of the peasant women, in a voice of anguish. The fugitives huddled together more closely in order not to step on the body of the dead girl. It was Michael who picked up the child and gave it to a woman.

“There are the lights of Sebastopol,” said Lydia Vorochevsky.

Ahead of them through the darkness there was a rosy glow in the sky.

“I’m desperate to find my mother and sisters,” said Michael. “Excuse me if I hurry on.”

He pushed his way forward, shouldering aside one of the peasant women, who cursed him with foul words. Presently he heard the rattle of carts and the creaking of wheels in the streets of the seaport. A ship’s siren hooted. In the darkness there was the noise of many voices. Somewhere

women were screaming and wailing. There was the beat of heavy feet on cobble-stones and a party of British seamen marched down towards the docks. People were sleeping on door-steps. Family groups were camped in the narrow streets.

Sebastopol was crowded to suffocation by an army of fugitives and a rabble of soldiers in terror of their lives.

III

MICHAEL searched for his family in the darkness. Afterwards, in Paris and Berlin, and New York and London, and often in an English country garden, he remembered that night and that nightmare. He stared into the pallid faces of the crowds camped in the neighbourhood of the docks. They sat huddled about their baggage—family groups with sleeping children wrapped in blankets and sheepskins; groups who had drifted together in this panic flight and slept, or failed to sleep, across each other's bodies, though they had been strangers until this night.

Most of them were of the bourgeois class—elderly men with astrachan collars to their overcoats, old ladies who had been brought down to Sebastopol in farm carts or on army wagons, young girls with shawls tied about their heads like peasant women, though they had once worn pretty frocks in St. Petersburg and Moscow and Kieff; ex-officers still wearing military boots below their civilian clothes; Cossacks in their long black coats and high fur caps, Circassians, Georgians, Jews, Tartars. They lay about on the hard stones or the bare earth, among piles of packing-cases and bundles, in the darkness illumined only by the port lights and here and there a street lamp. Men were smoking cigarettes—the eternal comfort of the Russian in hours of tragedy or despair, or indifference to fate. These little points of fire glowed about the huddled bodies of those who were lying down in exhaustion if not in sleep. From this mass of human beings there rose the stench of filthy sheepskins and damp rags and unwashed feet. In some of the groups to which a boy came with searching eyes women were weeping and wailing. But some of them were quarrelling—all their nerves on edge and fear making their voices harsh and shrill. Once, even in this nightmare, Michael heard laughter from a group of young people down by the docks. It was fantastic that they should laugh at some joke between them on this night of terror.

Away beyond the docks there were cobwebs in the velvety sky above an invisible sea—the ropes and wires of many ships. Fingers of white light felt through the darkness as though reaching for something. These searchlights touched the houses of Sebastopol with sudden illumination, making them look like stage scenery. They dipped and flooded the multitude of fugitives along the quayside with their white glare, revealing a mass of human misery and making the faces of men and women as pallid as the death from which they were in flight.

Once Michael, this searching boy, stooped over the body of a young girl lying with her head in the lap of a woman who sat propped against a packing-case.

“Is that you, Olga?” he asked sharply.

The girl opened her eyes and lifted her head a little.

“I am Anna Petlova,” she answered. “Who’s that?”

“Pardon,” said Michael. “I’m looking for my family. I thought it was my sister Olga.”

Several times he thought he saw his mother with a shawl tied round her head among these huddled women.

“Is that you, mother? I am Michael.”

It was never his mother.

He saw faces which he recognized. Among them was that of Countess Kovaleska. Her daughter was with her. They were both sitting with their backs to a heap of baggage. Their eyes stared through the darkness.

“Have you seen my mother and sisters?” asked Michael. “I am Michael Pavlovitch Markov.”

He had often kissed the hand of Countess Kovaleska when she had driven over to the Villa Mimosa. He stooped now and kissed her hand.

“I haven’t seen them, my poor boy,” said this lady. “They may be here. We are all here—the last of us—who were foolish to stay so long.”

She took Michael’s dirty hand and pressed it between both of hers.

“You look exhausted, my dear. You look in need of food.”

“I must find my mother and sisters,” he answered. “It will be terrible if I don’t find them.”

Paula Kovaleska, who was with her mother, fumbled in her lap, and held out a packet of chocolate.

“Take that, Michael,” she said. “It’s very comforting.”

“No, no!” said Michael. “You will need it, Paula.”

He had once played ‘Blind Man’s Buff’ with this girl in her house at St. Petersburg. He had played ‘Forfeits’ with her and had to kiss her before all the party. It had made him very shy as a boy of thirteen. She had been dressed as a Columbine and looked enchanting.

“Take it, please,” said Paula. “I have eaten too much of it. It makes me feel sick.”

He took the chocolate and ate some of it as he went farther in his search. It brought back a little strength to his body.

He met some of his comrades who were walking aimlessly about, searching for their own families.

“Serge! Is that you? Have you by any chance seen my mother and sisters?”

It was Serge Miliakov, who had been a neighbour of Michael’s in St. Petersburg before the War. Their families had had sleighing parties in winter-time. Serge was six years older than Michael and had married a year ago, during the Revolution.

“I am looking for my wife,” he said, in an agonized voice.

“You look hungry and ill,” said Michael.

“Yes, I’m hungry and ill,” said Miliakov. “I am also in an agony of mind. If I don’t find Nadia I shall go mad.”

“Here is some chocolate, my dear Serge,” said Michael, handing over a bit of that precious comfort. “It will give you strength to go through the night.”

“No, no!” said Serge. “I couldn’t take it from you, comrade. You are too generous.”

But while he said he couldn’t take it, he took it and put the whole piece into his mouth.

“I must leave you,” said Michael. “I must keep on looking for my mother and sisters.”

“Nadia is lost,” said Serge. “If I don’t find her I shall shoot myself. I am going mad, I think.”

He looked a little mad then, staring like a wild animal through the darkness.

“God has abandoned Russia,” he said. “Or perhaps there is no God. I have become an atheist. It’s a world of devils.”

“I still have a little hope,” said Michael. “When the dawn comes we shall see better.”

He met other friends, who knew nothing of his mother and sisters but were looking for their own families. Once he was sick at a street corner. It was perhaps the chocolate on an empty stomach which had made him sick. Several times he wept, and felt the salt tears in his mouth. He wept again when he met Elizabeth Browne.

That was when dawn had come over Sebastopol. He was wandering down by the docks again. The sleepers had awakened. Children were crying. Women were trying to clean themselves a little by rubbing their faces and hands on handkerchiefs or towels. Girls were combing their hair. One girl was changing her stockings, and it was when Michael stepped over her bare legs that he saw Miss Browne who had been governess to Olga and Tania and with his family all through the War and Revolution.

Michael saw her coming towards him. She was with a man in uniform—a young English naval officer who was talking to her. Her round English face, which Olga had once said was like an apple dumpling, was flushed with unusual colour. She said something with a laugh to the young officer at her side. She had a red handkerchief tied over her hair and under her chin like a peasant woman, though she wore a coat and skirt of grey tweed, too tight for her plump figure. Not even War and Revolution had made her thin. To Michael her face, which as Olga had said, was like an apple dumpling, seemed at that moment as beautiful as an angelic vision. Where Miss Browne was his family would not be far away. She would never desert them. She had been their friend and comrade through the dark years.

He gave a loud cry and stumbled into a run towards her, treading on people's legs.

“Miss Browne! Brownie! Oh, my dear Brownie! Where is mother? Where are Tania and Olga?”

Miss Browne was embarrassed when this boy of eighteen put his arms about her and kissed her on both cheeks and wept. But she had tears in her own grey English eyes, which had been so calm and steady and unafraid through tragic years.

“My dear boy!” she cried. “You're making my face all wet. And I don't like being kissed in public.”

“Pardon,” said Michael. “But I have suffered so much.”

“It's nice to see you alive,” said Miss Browne. “We were all very frightened about you.”

“Where's mother?” asked Michael. “Are Tania and Olga safe?”

His mother and sisters, he learned, were farther down the quayside with a heap of baggage.

“This officer is going to help us,” said Miss Browne. “Let me introduce you, Michael—except that I don't know his name yet.”

The English naval officer introduced himself.

“Oliver Alden. Supposed to be a naval officer, but not much of a one really. R.N.V.R., you know!”

“How do you do, sir,” said Michael in his best English, which he had learnt from Miss Browne. He did not know the meaning of those mystical letters.

“You must have had a hell of a time,” said Lieutenant Oliver Alden. “All you people must have had a hell of a time.” He held Michael’s hand in a strong friendly grip, smiling at him, and then became grave. “I’m afraid it’s not all over yet. Lots of these people will have to be left behind to the tender mercies of the Reds.”

“That will be awful,” said Michael. “My mother and sisters——”

He had a sudden terrible fear that they would be left behind to the tender mercies of the Reds.

“I’ll see what I can do about it,” said the English naval officer.

“Please, please!” said Michael. “I beg of you!”

“If there’s any chance,” said the English officer.

He saluted, and pushed his way through the crowd.

Michael followed Miss Browne as that young woman made her way along the quayside. His mother and sisters were sitting there like gipsies in a field.

“Mother!” cried Michael in a strangled voice.

She heard his cry and stood up, holding out her hands with a look of joy on her face, and then wept with her arms round him. Tania and Olga laughed and wept at the same time.

It was Olga, the elder of his sisters, who presently complained of his filthiness.

“How dirty you are, Michael! I believe you’re lousy. If so, please keep away from me. I’m sorry I hugged you so tight.”

“I can’t be free from lice,” said Michael, “but nothing matters now that I’ve found you all again. Don’t look so frightened, mother. We shall get away all right. There’s an English officer who promises to get us on his ship. He’s a friend of Miss Browne.”

“I’m trying not to feel frightened,” said Michael’s mother.

She put her hand through his hair and then down his cheek, her delicate hand which he loved so much and thought so beautiful. He put his arms about her again and felt the trembling of her body, and whispered to her:

“Mother, don’t be afraid. It’s all right now.”

“Not if we get left behind,” she said. “I’m so frightened about Olga and Tania and you. It would be better to kill ourselves.”

There was the sound of guns not far from Sebastopol. They were the guns of the Red Army, closing in.

IV

TERRIBLE rumours were being whispered among these fugitives in Sebastopol. Someone had told someone else that Trotsky had given his armies free right, in return for victory, to do as they would in this seaport for fourteen days of pillage and massacre. People who had escaped from towns already occupied by Red troops—one of them was General Lukomsky disguised as a peasant—came with the news that massacre had already begun under the direction of Bela Kuhn, that monster who had fled from Budapesth after many atrocities.

A placard had been pasted up on the walls and the warehouses alongside the quays. Michael stared at it, with his sister Olga trying to read it over his shoulder. It was a proclamation by General Wrangel. A group of soldiers and a crowd of men and women of the bourgeois class pressed close and elbowed each other to make out these printed words.

“What does it say, Michael?” asked Olga, clinging to his arm.

“Nothing too pleasant,” said Michael in a low voice. He read the words as one of the soldiers fell back.

The fate of the refugees is utterly unknown. No foreign nation has consented to receive them. In these conditions the Government of South Russia is obliged to advise all those who are not directly menaced by enemy reprisals to remain in the Crimea.

“That means we are to have our throats cut,” said Olga. “It means that if I don’t get my throat cut I shall have to become the plaything of a Red officer or any Red devil who likes the look of me.”

She gave a kind of laugh which was horrible to hear.

“Don’t talk like that!” said Michael harshly. “For God’s sake, Olga—I put all my hope on Miss Browne’s English officer.”

“No doubt he has already forgotten us,” answered Olga. “If Miss Browne had been more beautiful he might have remembered.”

“He is British,” said Michael.

They went back to where their mother and sister were waiting on the quayside.

“What has happened?” asked Michael’s mother. She stood up with terror in her eyes at a sudden wailing cry which rose from the multitude of refugees to whom General Wrangel’s proclamation had become known.

Hundreds of thousands of these refugees came surging down to the quayside. They had abandoned their farm carts and packing-cases. They stretched out their arms towards the sea and cried out to the silent ships lying in the harbour, already crowded by people like themselves. There were many battleships and a lot of transports. Some of them were old ships belonging formerly to the Russian Imperial Navy. Others were French and English cruisers with steam up. As rapidly as possible and as many as possible, the refugees were allowed to embark, and naval officers helped to carry the bundles and chests, and even their babies, moved to pity by all this tragedy and terror. There was a wild stampede which for a time separated Michael from his family. These panic-stricken people fought with each other to get a place on one of those boats which would take them away from Red Russia. Michael pushed and struggled among them to get back to the place where his mother had been standing. She was there now, with Olga and Tania and Miss Browne. Her face was dead white and she seemed to have grown older since he had parted from her only a few minutes ago. Her lips moved. Her face was like a Chinese mask.

“Oh, Michael!” cried Tania. “There’s no chance for us. We’re lost.”

“I’m sure Mr. Alden will come for us,” said Miss Browne quietly. “He promised. Our only chance is to wait for him here.”

A siren on one of the ships gave a long hooting blast. Several boats were moving away from the quayside after hauling up their gangways and unfastening their ropes.

“We’re left behind,” said Olga. “Brownie’s Englishman has betrayed us. They all do.”

“Not yet,” said Miss Browne, gazing towards a ship with a British flag.

Russian soldiers elbowed their way through the crowd. With them was a very tall man in the uniform of the Kornilov regiment. It was General Wrangel. His face was very white and his eyes mournful. The crowd made a lane for him, and at the end of it he turned and faced them and spoke to them in a tragic voice:

“We’re going towards the unknown. I have no idea of the fate in store for us. Prepare yourselves for the worst ordeals, for the hardest privations, and remember that the deliverance of Russia is still in your hands.”

Then he turned towards Moscow, so far away, and crossed himself and knelt down with his forehead to the earth of that country now to be abandoned to Lenin and his way of rule. With that symbolic act he rose and

strode down the quayside to a pinnacle which took him aboard the *General Kornilov*. From the crowd on the quayside there came a kind of a moan.

“We are lost!” said Michael’s mother in a voice of despair. She spoke in German, which was the language of her own people until she had become the wife of a Russian and the mother of Michael.

A naval officer stood beside them.

“Come along quick,” he said. “I have two men to carry your bags. You will have to leave your cases.”

“What, all my clothes!” cried Olga in English.

It was characteristic of Olga that she resisted this order to leave her clothes behind, even though life itself hung on a thin thread at that moment.

“Sorry!” said the naval officer, who was Oliver Alden. “Better make no fuss about it, my dear . . . Miss Browne, could you hang on to this handbag?”

“Rather!” said Miss Browne, who was already carrying two heavy bundles and some brown-paper parcels. She looked, in her coat and skirt, as though she had been shopping in Brompton Road—a very English-looking young woman of twenty-eight or so, with steady grey eyes above a somewhat inadequate nose.

Tania and Olga carried other bundles. Michael had his violin in its case, but managed to shoulder a heavy bag.

It was difficult to get through the struggling crowd. Except for the naval men it would have been impossible. There was a launch alongside the quay, overcrowded by other fugitives. Brownie’s officer stepped into it, and held out his hand to Michael’s mother and her two daughters and helped them aboard.

A frenzied cry rose from the people on the quayside.

“I can’t carry another soul,” said Lieutenant Alden. “I’m very sorry. It’s horrible, I know. But that’s how it is.”

He spoke a quiet word in English and the boat shot away from the quayside of Sebastopol. It carried the fugitives to a cruiser lying behind the *General Kornilov*. British seamen helped them up the rope ladder.

“Give me the baby, mum,” said one of them to a young Russian mother with her child. “I’ve two of my own in Limehouse.”

The Russian lady, who was the Countess Troubetskoi, did not understand this man’s Cockney English, but understood his meaning and let him take her baby.

Young Markov, called Michael, stood with his mother on the deck of an English ship. Her hand held very tight to his own.

“It’s the last of Russia,” she said, in a low voice. “Our Russian life is gone, Michael.”

Across the water the bells of Sebastopol were tolling. It was almost dark now, and presently all light faded from the sky. Suddenly it was lit by red flames, symbolical of the red fury from which these people had fled, leaving a multitude behind to be burnt in that furnace.

The offices of the American Red Cross had caught fire and its stocks were blazing. A British torpedo-boat sent a wireless message to the other ships that the first detachment of Bolsheviks was entering the city. Frightful scenes were happening on the quayside. Soldiers had flung their rifles into the sea. Screams rose from women. A shot rang out. A Russian officer had blown his brains out to save further trouble. The fleet and the transports moved out of the harbour, and the exiles looked back to Russia for the last time, and wept.

V

“THIS is my idea of Paradise,” said Michael, after three days on the island of Prinkipo.

He stood on the edge of that island, looking across the glittering waters of the Bosphorus to a dream city softly pencilled against a pale-blue sky. The domes and minarets of Stamboul were vague and insubstantial through the sunlight. The white houses of Pera were faintly visible above the dark-green foliage of their gardens.

Michael’s sister Olga, a year older than himself, was sitting on the roots of an olive tree which overhung the water, dabbling her bare feet in the tiny waves ruffled by a cool breeze. The sunlight touched her hair. She had the blonde hair and blue eyes of German ancestors, unlike Tania, who was darker, with a touch of Tartar blood according to family accusation. Tania was above them on the grass, lying at full length with her thin white legs stretched out. She was approaching her seventeenth birthday and was thoughtful for her age.

Olga answered that remark of her brother’s.

“It’s not too bad for a few days. But it’s more like a gipsy camp than Paradise, Michael. I would rather be in Constantinople, over there, having a look at life. I want to plunge into life with a capital L.”

Michael laughed quietly.

“There’s time enough for that, Olga! It’s going to be a rough business presently. We shall know what poverty means. I’m quite happy here.”

“It’s going to be a great adventure, this life,” said Olga. “Thank God I’m rather beautiful. That gives me a chance.”

Michael glanced sideways at his sister, with an indulgent smile. Yes, she was not bad-looking, he thought. And she was becoming a woman, he noticed, with soft lines and a certain plumpness.

“It’s dangerous to be beautiful,” he said. “I shall have to keep an eye on you. Besides, you’re not quite so beautiful, perhaps, as you imagine. That’s a safeguard.”

“I was looking at myself this morning before I dressed,” said Olga. “I was rather pleased with myself. One day a rich young man will fall in love with me. Then I shall restore the family fortunes. I shall let mother and

Tania share our palatial residence. I think it will be in the Avenue Victor Hugo, in Paris. It's a nice part of Paris, I've heard."

"You're talking the greatest nonsense," said Michael with a good-humoured laugh. He and Olga had always been good comrades, though as a boy and girl they had fought with each other. Once she had bitten his hand like a tiger-cat.

Tania stretched herself and jumped up, shaking down her frock. She put her hand to her eyes and gazed over the waters of the Bosphorus.

"There's a steamer coming!" she cried excitedly.

She turned and ran with her bare feet through the grass towards the villa where they had three rooms.

"She's gone to put on another frock—her other frock," said Olga. "That's because she expects the Englishman. She thinks he likes the look of her, whereas it's me that he likes, as anybody can see with half an eye. But I'm not very fond of Englishmen. They have no passion, no charm."

"We owe our lives to him," said Michael gravely. "And he's extremely kind to us."

Olga did not deny that. "He's bringing us some soap today," she said. "For that I'm willing to let him kiss my hand."

"Soap!" exclaimed Michael, as though a miracle was about to happen. "That's too wonderful. It's a year since I've seen a bit of soap."

"I shall wash all over three times," said Olga. "I shall wallow in its lather."

"Mother will weep at the sight of it," said Michael. "Poor mother!"

They had been disembarked on this island three days ago. It was, as Michael said, a little paradise—a paradise for lost souls, safe, for a time, from all danger, and relieved, for a time, from all anxiety, unless they let their thoughts wander forward to the uncertain future, or backwards to their lost past. The British Government, which had supported the White Armies and counter-revolution with men, munitions, and money—half-heartedly and ineffectively because of political opposition in England—were feeding these people on army rations of which there were surplus stores, after a World War. These fugitives of fate had found shelter in villas—as overcrowded as slum tenements—where once rich Turks and Greeks and Armenians had made their summer homes or kept their mistresses.

Most of the soldiers of the last retreat under General Wrangel, preceded by their comrades of the broken armies under Denikin, were interned at

Gallipoli, where after a few weeks of tragic demoralization they were sternly disciplined by General Koutepov, who knew that only discipline could save them from despair and disease. The Don Cossacks were interned at Tchataldja, the old line between Turkey and Bulgaria. The Cossacks of the Kuban were sent to Lemnos. They were waiting for the unknown future. They were waiting for the time when, somehow, they must find a new way of life in foreign countries willing to receive them, if ever willing. How would they earn their living, or how long would it take to starve to death? Now they were living in concentration camps, fed on British and French rations. How long would that last? Beyond them was the darkness of unrevealed fate.

VI

“WE RUSSIANS are a very strange people,” said Michael to his sister Tania, after his first exploration of Prinkipo. “A stranger coming here to see us would think we hadn’t a care in the world! One can’t get away from the incessant strumming of these balalaikas. Everybody is dancing and laughing. Don’t they ever think of our Russian tragedy and all the horrors from which we have just escaped? Look at those girls!”

A cavalcade of donkeys trotted by. On their backs were some Russian girls, screaming with laughter.

Michael and Tania looked at a group of their fellow refugees. They were dancing on bare boards laid down on the grass. A volunteer orchestra of ex-officers was playing for them—American jazz music which had swept the world after the War.

Tania had her hand on her brother’s arm and smiled up at his serious face, watching this scene.

“You’re a puritan, Michael! You’re not truly Russian. It’s because of mother’s Austrian blood in you. Now I am all Russian. What is yesterday or tomorrow? Why not laugh today, until we weep?”

“We’re gipsies,” said Michael thoughtfully. “Olga was right. This island is like a gipsy camp. But why doesn’t Olga come out and enjoy the sunshine?”

“Olga is washing her underclothes,” said Tania. “She’s going to hang them out in the garden of the villa.”

“I’m afraid about mother,” said Michael. “She looks so tired and so frail. I don’t think she slept last night. I thought I heard her weeping.”

Tania sighed, and then laughed.

“Poor mother! She’s not in the least Russian. She can’t stop worrying, even when the sun shines, about the past and the future.”

“Holy Saints!” cried Michael with sudden excitement. “There’s Sacha Dolin! I thought I should never see him again.”

It was the comrade with whom he had walked on the last retreat. He stood still and raised his hands at the sight of Michael, and then held out his arms. Michael fell into them. The two men embraced and kissed each other. They had tears in their eyes.

Sacha Dolin held his young friend at arm's length. "We are both here! I thought the Reds had got you, my comrade. I thought you were dead by now."

"I found my family," said Michael. "This is my sister Tania. I've told her a lot about you."

Sacha Dolin took Tania's outstretched hand and raised it to his lips, and spoke with emotion:

"Your brother has the face of the young David. We love each other."

There were other meetings like that on Prinkipo. Friends who had been separated since the beginning of the Revolution found themselves together again, like shipwrecked people cast upon this island in the Bosphorus. Some of them, who had fled from Russia long before the last retreat, had been there for more than a year, which seemed like half a lifetime. It was like an endless picnic, very pleasant at first, very amusing—Paradise after the terror of the last days in Russia—and then demoralizing, aimless, and squalid. Dainty ladies of the old régime washed their linen and hung it in the gardens of their villas, as Olga was now doing. They combed their hair on the verandahs and walked with bare feet through the grass, and on summer days bathed, after undressing behind the trees which overhung the water's edge. Men who had been princes, or officers of the Imperial Guards, or bankers or merchants, or idlers or dreamers, mended their socks and their shirts after a few lessons from their women, and became carpenters or cobblers, proud of their handiwork, which wasn't too good.

All day long, and far into the night, there was music of the balalaika by the volunteer orchestra of ex-officers. There were donkey races on the sands. There was love-making under the trees and in the moonlight of this enchanted island. These ex-officers of the White Armies with their blouses outside their trousers, tightly belted, still wore the long boots of their soldiering days, even if they had had to put new soles to them or buy new ones in the bazaars of Stamboul. They still kept straight backs, except when they bent a hundred times a day over the little plump hands or long white hands of women who had been great ladies of the Imperial Court and had now been shipwrecked in that sea of defeat which had cast them out of Russia. They still believed that Lenin's Russia would not last, and that one day they would all go back again after the Red Terror had passed. At least, they hoped this would happen, except in moments of despair and self-pity when they knew it would never happen.

VII

THE MARKOVs had been assigned three little rooms at the top of a villa on the edge of the Bosphorus. Formerly they were the servants' bedrooms of a rich Greek merchant. On one of the walls one of these servants had used a stick of charcoal to draw a bleeding heart transfixed by an arrow, beneath which he had written in Greek the words 'I love you', though he had not mentioned his girl's name. Perhaps it was the expression of a general love for all kind women.

The rooms were barely and uncomfortably furnished, but seemed luxurious to Michael, who had not slept in a bed for six months before arriving on Prinkipo. His mother and Tania slept in one room in truckle beds once used by convalescent soldiers in the War. In another room Miss Browne slept with Olga. The third room, with a wide window looking towards Constantinople over the smooth sea, glorious in sunlight and magical in moonlight, was Michael's bedroom by night and the family sitting-room by day. For lack of cupboard space in their own rooms, which were hardly large enough to hold their beds, Olga and Tania had encroached upon the dining-room, as they called it. Olga's stockings—three pairs of them—hung over the back of a deal chair. Tania's winter petticoat, which she had stuffed into one of the bundles brought away in their flight, was hanging from a nail which she had hammered into the wall with the heel of a slipper. On a wooden shelf above a cheap chest of drawers the two girls had arranged some family photographs and knick-knacks which, by some odd trick of the mind, they had grabbed in the Villa Mimosa in the last moments of terror. There was a photograph of their father as an officer of the Imperial Guards, and one of their mother in Court dress, and one of Tania in her dancing frock, and one of Michael in a sailor-suit at twelve years of age. On a shelf they had put two cheap little vases which had been bought one year at Yalta on a summer excursion, and two paper fans which the girls had taken from a restaurant of Moscow where a gipsy orchestra had played before the tune of life changed to the beat of drums, when they were still children.

The other rooms of the villa were fully inhabited. The Countess Kovaleska and her daughter Paula were in two rooms on the floor below, and next to them was Prince Andreyev with two ex-officers who shared a single room. On the ground floor were four families, once of Moscow, among them being Princess Ivanova, with two little daughters, who shared

the biggest room of the villa, divided by a blanket across a line, with two ladies who had once been in the service of the Empress. In the garage was a naval officer named Captain Boris Gronov, with his wife Madeleine, who was a young Frenchwoman.

They were all very helpful to each other, as people are, it seems, when shipwrecked. Princess Ivanova had a samovar with which she made tea for Michael's mother and the two girls, and any friends who might drop in during the afternoon. Captain Gronov, once of the Imperial Russian Navy, was handy in putting up shelves or hammering in nails and making furniture out of packing-cases. Prince Andreyev, a handsome fellow still wearing the uniform of a cavalry officer, brought back tea and sugar and sweetmeats and pastries, and even bottles of good wine, from Constantinople, to which he made frequent visits. He had sold a diamond ring to a Greek who did business of that kind in the Pera Palace Hotel, robbing his clients—who knew they were being robbed but desired ready money for the necessities of life—with the utmost courtesy and obsequiousness.

Prince Andreyev had taken a fancy to the Markovs. He especially admired the beauty of Olga. He insisted upon their accepting his invitations to supper-parties in his room with other friends, who smoked cigarettes incessantly, recounted the story of their escape from the Bolsheviks at great length, laughed quite a lot over the petty discomforts of their present way of life, and sang songs to the tinkle of the balalaika which Prince Andreyev himself played very well. And now and again between these times of song and laughter, and the handing round of sweetmeats, and the refilling of glasses with cheap wine, there would be those sudden silences which happened so often among the Russian refugees, as though a spectre had appeared among them—the spectre of that Terror back in Russia which had destroyed their old way of life and many of their relatives and friends and all their hopes and dreams. It was a spectre which touched them with the chill finger of dreadful reality. This picnic life could not last for ever. What then? What then, O God of Pity?

Such a silence fell, such a spectre came, one night when Michael had been playing his violin, which he had brought down to Andreyev's room to try his fingers out after many months.

“You played that well, my dear,” said his mother, after he had finished the ‘Humoreske’. “It brings back happy memories.”

It was a mistake to talk about happy memories. It reminded this little company of homes they would never see again and of relatives and friends

now dead or lost in the maelstrom of revolution. The silence came. The spectre stood in the doorway.

A woman shivered. It was Princess Ivanova. Michael found himself looking into the eyes of Sacha Dolin, who sat on the floor in the angle of the room. In Sacha's eyes there was the remembrance of Lydia, his wife, who had been caught by the Red tide in Moscow.

Andreyev laughed harshly.

"There is still a little wine, my friends. It's good wine, isn't it? Why do you all look like lost souls?"

"We are lost souls," said Sacha Dolin.

Prince Andreyev laughed again, with an impatient shrug of his broad shoulders.

"Life still has its moments. We must forget our past. We must put a steel shutter between those days and these. I invite you all to a party next week—let us say Thursday—if someone will tell me when Thursday comes. I have made friends with a benevolent old Greek who pours money into my hands, in return for a few foolish trinkets. Olga Markova, I beg the honour of your company at my party. It's my birthday, I believe. If it isn't, it's somebody else's birthday, and I wish to celebrate it. You must persuade your mother and sister to come, as well as your brother Michael, who plays the violin not too badly."

"I shall be enchanted!" cried Olga. "My mother and sister will, I am sure, be equally delighted. So will Michael."

"You'll need your trinkets later on, Andreyev," said Sacha Dolin from his place on the floor. "They'll come in handy for bread when the British Government tires of feeding us."

"Later on?" laughed Prince Andreyev. "I don't understand those words. Do we Russians ever think of later on, and the day after tomorrow when we may have no bread? That seems to me the thought of an Englishman or a Scotchman, or a French peasant. I am a Russian Prince. Did I think of 'later on' when I gave a party to two hundred people at the Hermitage, with a gipsy orchestra and hot-house flowers on every table? Should I have given that amusing party if I had thought of 'later on'?"

Sacha Dolin glanced at him and gave a slight smile. "That's true. We didn't think then of a World War and Red Revolution. At least not men like you, my dear Prince, though I confess I had certain apprehensions."

"Oh, you were one of those morbid Liberals," answered the Prince with a contemptuous laugh. "It was you Liberals who were the predecessors of

Lenin. It was you who undermined the old régime by liberalizing the aristocracy and even the official classes, so that they put up no resistance to the social upheaval.”

“And it was your type of mind,” Sacha Dolin answered harshly, “which made the peasant and the proletariat see red when they had their chance of revenge. Your parties were too luxurious, my friend, when there was starvation and great misery among the masses.”

Prince Andreyev sprang to his feet, overturning a chair.

“You insult me!” he cried fiercely. “You are talking like a Bolshevik. I kill a Bolshevik when I see him—like a rat.”

Sacha shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

“Just as you like, my dear Prince. It will save me a lot of trouble if you kill me.”

Captain Boris Gronov, that good-natured naval officer, rose quietly and tapped the young Prince on the shoulder.

“There are ladies here. You are giving a party, my friend. We were all very happy a moment ago, drinking your good wine.”

Prince Andreyev breathed hard for a moment. The jumping light in his eyes nickered, softened, and went out. He put a hand across his forehead, as though wiping away his anger.

“One of my ancestors was a gipsy,” he said, like a schoolboy ashamed of his rage. “Pardon me, my dear friends. And I shall expect you all to come to my birthday party on Thursday next at the Pera Palace Hotel. Eight o’clock precisely. I will book places on the boat. We are fourteen, I think. Michael, my dear lad, play something merry.”

Michael played something merry. It was a Gipsy Dance which put its rhythm into the feet and hearts of this company.

“Dance with me, Olga Markova,” said Prince Andreyev.

He came into the middle of the room and folded his arms and clicked his heels together. Olga was sitting on the floor with her head against her mother’s knees, and she sprang up and put her arms akimbo like a peasant girl. She looked charming with her head thrown back and her white throat showing above her white bodice which had been hanging out on the line that day. Captain Boris Gronov clapped his hands to the gipsy rhythm.

“Faster! Faster!” he shouted, as Olga and Andreyev danced.

His little French wife, Madeleine, was sitting next to Miss Browne on one of the beds. She spoke in Russian to the English governess:

“The Russians are like this! They are children. They are gipsies.”

Miss Browne laughed. “That’s what makes them so interesting. In England we don’t have parties like this. In Surrey, where I used to live, the local gentry don’t suddenly get up and dance like peasants after threatening to kill each other. I shall miss all this when I get back to an English vicarage.”

“When are you going back?” asked the French wife of Captain Gronov.

Miss Browne looked over her shoulder and lowered her voice. “Very soon now. But I daren’t tell these poor dears with whom I’ve been living for seven years. I don’t know what they will do without me. You see, I keep them tidy and look after them. And I love them so much that I hate to leave them in the lurch.”

“I want to see Paris again,” said the young Frenchwoman. “There is no civilization except in Paris. Unfortunately my husband has no money for the fare from Constantinople, and my father was killed in the War and left no money.”

“Oh, nobody has any money,” said Miss Browne cheerfully.

Olga was dancing with abandon. Prince Andreyev was sitting on his haunches kicking out his long boots in the style of the old Russian folk-dances. Everybody was laughing except Sacha Dolin, who was staring out of melancholy eyes at some far-off vision, and except Michael’s mother, who was looking at Olga with a kind of nervous apprehension.

“Olga!” she cried. “Not so wild, my dear. Come and sit down again.”

Michael was smiling across the body of his violin at this sister who thought herself beautiful, and was not bad-looking.

There were other evenings like that.

VIII

THAT ENGLISH officer, Oliver Alden, who had met Miss Browne on the quayside of Sebastopol, and who had been impressed by her refusal to get ruffled even in those dangerous hours, was stationed with his ship, the *Lion*, at Constantinople. He was not, as he told Miss Browne, much of a naval officer. Although he had the rank of lieutenant, it was rather an honorary rank and not taken seriously by regular naval men who had read some of his parodies in *Punch* before the War and were amused to find him as a messmate. He was attached to Naval Intelligence because, perhaps, he knew a little ancient Greek—though not much—spoke French and German quite nicely, and had been saved from the trenches by a good-humoured Admiral who liked his books and once had been in love with his mother. Things were done like that in the World War. Attached to the Naval Intelligence, Lieutenant Alden had been seasick on many types of craft in the North Sea, and air sick in many naval aeroplanes.

He had spent several months at Athens in counter-espionage work, which was utterly useless but very amusing. After the Armistice on the Western Front he had had strange and unbelievable adventures with General Ironside in Siberia, where a small force of British troops and marines had encountered the Bolsheviks. After that he had been in the Black Sea with British forces holding a line in the Caucasus and carrying supplies for Wrangel's army, which never reached the front lines, partly because there was no front line and partly because Russian staff officers were very Russian. The best work he had done in the Great War was to rescue a large number of refugees, among whom were Miss Browne's lot, who otherwise would have had an uncertain fate—perhaps even a certain fate—at the hands of the Reds who had a grudge against White officers, Russian aristocrats, and women of the old régime. Now he was attached to H.M.S. *Lion*, lying in the Bosphorus off Constantinople, which he found a city crowded with human interest of the strangest types. Having plenty of time on his hands and very little to do of any importance to a world in transition, he was able to study life as it passed in Constantinople at that period of history.

Life passed over the Galata Bridge, which seemed a bridge across two worlds where East met West. All day long it passed unceasingly, though held up for a moment at either end by toll-men who demanded small coins from every individual. Kurdish porters passed, carrying enormous burdens on wooden supports strapped to their shoulders. Negroes with black glistening

faces under red fezes passed this way. Turkish peasants came with their donkeys, which they straddled with dangling legs. Oriental gypsies with gay-coloured clothes in rags and tatters, strode alongside their caravans. Crowds of Turkish women, veiled below the eyes, came to do their shopping in the bazaars on the other side of the bridge from Stamboul, or to listen to a French military band in the public gardens, where they sat in a wide circle with their veils covering their faces and their little feet tip-tapping to the music.

Up the steps from the Galata Bridge there was always a coming and going, as there is over the bridge in Venice between the Danieli and the Grand Hotel. Little ragamuffin Turks pattered about in bare feet and offered to act as guides to French, British, Italian, Russian, or American officers, all of whose languages they spoke well enough to beg for coppers.

“Un p’tit sou, monsieur! One penny, sir! Due lire, signore! Give me a nickel, Mr. American! Vous voulez voir les jolies femmes? Pretty girls, gents! Me good guide!”

Up and down the steps came ex-officers of Russia, ex-princes and princesses, ex-bankers, ex-merchants, ex-millionaires, ex-shopkeepers, ex-poets, and ex-peasants. Some of them had been up these steps and down these steps for more than a year, until their boots had worn out and their spirit had worn out. Oliver Alden, naval man and novelist, looked into faces which gave him an inward spasm of pity because of their misery. There was one young man he saw several times who affected him like that. He had a handsome Russian face, but it was the face of a starving, diseased, and despair-haunted man. He looked desperately ill, and once, as Alden passed, leaned against a wall and wiped his forehead which was wet with sweat.

Alden stopped and spoke to him in Russian.

“Can I do anything for you?”

The Russian answered in excellent English.

“No, thanks! It’s most kind of you, but there’s nothing anybody can do for me. I am dying, thank God! My wife died last week. There is nothing for which I wish to live. Life, my dear sir, is worse than death for us Russians.”

“I’m sorry,” said Alden. “If a few Turkish pounds . . .”

The young Russian made a polite refusal by a gesture of his hand, and Alden left him and did not see him again.

There were strange contrasts of misery and gaiety. Misery beyond all words dwelt under some arches where the poorest of the Russian exiles had found shelter. There were 40,000 of them in Constantinople. They lived and

slept there, huddled together in family groups, in filth and a fetid atmosphere. Typhus chose its victims among them. It was like a pest house. As a contrast there was the scene in the Pera Palace Hotel, where an orchestra played jazz music for young 'snotties' from the British Fleet, who danced with Greek girls, and Russian girls, and girls of uncertain nationality and still less certain virtue, but dangerously attractive to young naval men who had been long starved of feminine charm. Elderly Turks and young Turks sat about the lounge, gazing at this life which had invaded their old city; the red tarboosh of Islam glowed through the haze of cigarette smoke and the glamour of rose-shaded lights. There was an American Fleet lying in the waters of the Golden Horn. American naval officers had come ashore and were watching life over fat cigars and little cocktail glasses. They were great dancers and had no difficulty in getting something feminine to hold in their arms.

Italian and French officers of a city under international control kept to their own groups. The Italians gesticulated freely and on their lips was the word *Fiume*, which at that time seemed to agitate the soul of Italy. Two words broke always through the dialogue of Frenchmen: '*Sales Boches!*': varied now and then by other words of contempt and anger: '*Perfide Albion!*' They agreed with Napoleon that England was a nation of shopkeepers. They accused England of betraying them in Syria. They had a particular hatred and contempt for a man named Lloyd George, whom they accused of treachery to France. The French, it seemed to Lieutenant Oliver Alden, listening to snatches of conversation like that, were not pleased with England, though nearly a million British dead lay in the soil of France, on whose battlefields they had fought in a war to end war, as they were told.

In a small room outside the dining-room of the Pera Palace Hotel were two Greeks who were business men. Their business was to exchange Turkish pounds, reluctantly, for diamonds and other jewels brought over in the boots or underclothing of Russian refugees, or any trinkets which might be worth the price of a meal in the caravanserai where people of all nations had gathered in a world turned upside down by war and revolution.

Oliver Alden, temporarily on shore leave, watched his fellow men unobtrusively and saw these little transactions now and then.

Some of these Russians on the edge of ruin—with ruin behind them and in front of them—gave gay parties to their friends after cashing a jewel or two. Wine flowed at their table. There was much laughter after much kissing of hands.

One evening, at a table next to Alden's, who was dining with an officer from H.M.S. *Lion*, a Georgian prince entertained a few friends. They drank sweet champagne. The Georgian prince—a handsome fellow with a dashing style—was charming as host. There were pretty women at his table with black hair smoothed back from their foreheads and looped over their ears. Presently the Prince had a short colloquy with the head waiter, who seemed a trifle anxious.

“Pardon me, my love,” he said in Russian to his lady wife.

Very carelessly he took her fur cloak from the back of her chair and handed it to the waiter.

“Bring me the change,” he said in French.

“These Russians,” said the young naval officer who was dining with Oliver Alden, “are all bandits. They’ve no morality. I prefer Lenin and his hairy Bolsheviks. I loathe the lot of them. Did you see what happened then?”

Oliver Alden nodded and laughed quietly.

“As a student of human nature I rather admire that. At least it gives me a thrill. It’s a defiance of fate. A *beau geste*. Tomorrow they may have to starve, but tonight, while there is still something to exchange, they laugh and drink good wine, and flirt with pretty women and get the best out of life as it comes. I see something splendid in that. I see courage.”

“I see damned idiocy in it,” said his fellow officer. “But, then, I’m a Scot from Aberdeen.”

Not far from the Tokatlin—another hotel with a reputation for good food and clean beds—was a place of amusement called the Petits Champs, to which Oliver Alden went with a friend now and then. One of his friends was a newspaper man—John Paulett—who had drifted this way in search of history in the making.

“This place is a house of sin,” said Paulett, “but it amuses me a good deal.”

“We’re lookers-on at life,” said Alden. “You and I, my dear Paulett, are always in search of drama, and you see more than you ever write for your disgraceful rag.”

Paulett smiled behind his horns.

“I write the news. I keep the private drama to myself. But you see that little girl just coming on to the stage. I happen to know her. She’s the daughter of a Russian general. Now she dances, with very little on, before

the lascivious eyes of fat Turks, Greek money-lenders, Armenian traders, Levantine Jews, and petty-officers of the British Fleet. I'm sorry for her. She's a sweet thing and dances like a sylph. Her name is Vera Sokolova. She's worth watching."

Oliver Alden watched her. She was dressed in a tiger skin as a bacchante. Her white limbs were beautiful and she had the grace of a Greek girl in the Golden Age.

"A cuddlesome lass," remarked an English petty-officer sitting at the table next to Alden and Paulett.

"Not so good as a wench I know in Clacton," said a Jack Tar sitting next to him, and a little drunk. "You should see my Liza when she's stripped."

A Russian orchestra played wild music. It was always the same music, night after night, and the rhythm of it beat into Alden's brain, so that whenever he thought back to those days in Constantinople he heard the echo of that beat of drums and the sudden quickening of this wild rhythm.

Paulett stared over to the orchestra.

"Those fellows were all with Denikin's Army. I can never find out what happened. None of these Russians ever tell one. Why were they beaten when they had the game in their hands and the Reds were fingering their throats with imminent apprehension? I suspect a yellow streak in them."

Other girls came on to the stage of the Petits Champs. Some of them were obviously amateur, and very much so. They floated around without a pretence of dancing. They were showing themselves in fancy frocks or next to nothing.

"It's a hard life for these young women," said Paulett. "Some of them sell themselves to Turks or Greeks to support their families or keep themselves alive."

"Tragic," said Alden. "Frightful."

He groaned over a glass of English beer.

The seaman who had drunk too much was letting his watch into his glass of beer by the end of a silver chain.

"What are you doing there, mate?" asked the petty officer.

"Giving it a swim," said the seaman who was a little drunk. "What I say is it's a mad world. So let's all go mad."

He seemed to find considerable amusement in seeing his watch in a glass of beer. Presently he desired to throw both the watch and the beer into the face of a young Turk near by, but was forcibly restrained by his petty officer.

“Let’s go and see the nightly battle,” suggested Paulett. “This place has a most unhealthy atmosphere.”

The nightly battle was between British and American sailors from their respective fleets. Both parties on shore leave for the evening had a habit of drinking too much cheap spirit in too quick a time. They attacked each other on sight, and it was fortunate for the British that the Americans, who were younger men, drank rather quicker than they did. The military police laid them out like ninepins with perfect impartiality, though it sometimes happened that the United States and Great Britain combined against the Red-caps. Then whistles blew, Italian and French police came to the rescue, and naval officers intervened to quell a general affray and conduct their men back to their ships in some kind of order.

“I’ve just come back from a trip to Smyrna,” said Paulett thoughtfully, as he and his friend went down to the Galata Bridge. “The Greeks are holding a line against the Turks which doesn’t seem to be very sound from a strategic point of view. There’s a long-headed Turk named Mustapha Kemal who is raising levies of men who fought us on Gallipoli. One day they’ll come riding into Smyrna. Meanwhile our Welsh Bard, Lloyd George, is encouraging the Greeks to believe that Great Britain is behind them. He can’t resist the charm of Venizelos, that smooth-tongued bandit.”

“Aren’t we behind them?” asked Oliver Alden, who was looking across to the minarets of Stamboul, touched by moonlight beneath a starlit sky in which there was still a depth of blue.

“Not on your life!” answered Paulett. “There are three million unemployed ex-servicemen in Great Britain, and income tax is destroying the landed gentry. The widows and orphans are mourning their dead. What price glory? We’re not going to fight again to give Greece an empire which she can’t hold.”

Alden spoke after a thoughtful silence.

“This city is seething with conspiracy and plots. As a naval intelligence officer I’m supposed to keep an eye on that side of things. Every Turk in this city is a spy for Mustapha Kemal, whom you mentioned just now. There’s a lot of gun-running under the very noses of the international police.”

“It’s all very amusing,” observed Paulett, stopping to light another cigarette—his sixtieth that day.

Oliver Alden agreed, but thought the amusement had lasted long enough and cost too much in human tragedy.

Paulett laughed and put his hand on Alden’s shoulder.

“You’re a sentimentalist, Alden. You’re too damn’ sensitive to human tragedy. You were born with an incurable pity for other people’s misfortunes.”

Oliver Alden smiled in the darkness of a starlit night, and then groaned a little.

“It’s a form of selfishness,” he said in self-defence. “I can’t be happy when I think of all those refugees, and those pretty girls selling themselves for the support of their families, and all the agony of Red Russia, and all the hunger, disease, and despair, and ruin caused by a world war which killed two of my brothers and ten million more. Is that being a sentimentalist? If so, I’m that.”

“Let’s look in at the Armstrongs’. It’s just about the time that lovely lady turns on the gramophone and dances on the roof of her little summer-house.”

Alden looked at his wrist-watch. It was only ten o’clock.

“The husband of that lovely lady,” he said, as he kept pace with his friend’s stride, “is not too happy in his married life. I think he expects the worst. One day the beautiful Beatrice will go off with a good-looking boy in naval uniform.”

“What makes you think that?” asked Paulett in a startled voice.

IX

THEY took a caique and were rowed by a Kurdish boatman to a little palace in a garden on the edge of the Bosphorus, where the British Fleet lay at anchor. It was an old place with a flat roof surrounded by flowering plants in green tubs, where Mrs. Armstrong, the beautiful Beatrice, as Alden called her, gave little dances on summer nights, or lay reading in a deck-chair too many hours of the day when her husband was busy in his merchant's office in the Grande Rue de Pera.

The garden was overgrown with creeping plants from which came a sweet, sickly smell on a dewy night. A tall cypress seemed to stab the stars with its spear point. From the other end of the garden a minaret gleamed white in the moonlight. It belonged to a little old mosque, where a Turkish Imam, very old and wrinkled, said his prayers, and slept, and read the Koran, and lived a hermit life.

"It's nice of you to come," said Mrs. Armstrong, holding out her hand to Alden. She didn't give her hand to Paulett, but lowered her eyelids for a moment with a Mona Lisa smile.

She was certainly beautiful. Oliver Alden, who had an eye for beauty, whether in the feminine species or in natural scenery, or the shape of a vase, or the colour of silk, or the lines of an etching, never saw her without a sense of pleasure. He had seen her first before the War, in a Chelsea studio off the King's Road. She was the daughter of Arthur Vicary, the portrait painter, who gave Bohemian parties, as they were called, to an amusing group of artists, literary men, and stage people.

Beatrice was then about nineteen, just home from a school in Auteuil, and very attractive and intelligent. She had a kind of enchantment difficult to describe, but obvious in its effects upon elderly painters and comic actors and young literary men. She had violet eyes and a straight little nose under a broad forehead, and there was an elusive humour about her mouth, as though smiling at her father's friends, and this half squalid life in Chelsea, and, perhaps, life itself. There was always something a little secret and reserved about her, as though she hid her real thoughts.

Oliver Alden had taken her to the theatre now and then, and brought flowers to her father's studio. He had gone with her to the Three Arts Ball, when she was dressed as Rossetti's *Belle Dame Sans Merci* and looked startlingly beautiful. It was a blow to him when she married Henley

Armstrong, who belonged to the old-established firm of that name trading in the Near East. Somehow he had drifted into her father's studio—a rich young man, unlike most of the inhabitants of Chelsea or Maida Vale. He had a romantic look, with very dark, sleek hair, and slightly foreign manners.

“A touch of the Dago about him,” said one of Alden's friends, with the usual English intolerance for any trace of the Mediterranean race. “He says he's Scotch, but I should imagine his mother was a Levantine.”

Beatrice married him in Chelsea Old Church and went out with him to Constantinople three months before a world war. It seemed fantastic—Constantinople, of all places in the world! Now here she was in a little old palace on the Bosphorus, with a mosque in her garden and British battleships lying at anchor under a starlit sky.

She had changed a little, and was no longer the tall, slim thing he had known in Chelsea. Her bare arms were rounded. Her throat was a lovely column. She had the maturity of womanhood and was more beautiful, but still with that look of being in hiding, and with that elusive smile about her mouth.

She must have had a strange time during the War, shut up in this old palace—a mouldy old building—while her own people were at war with the Turks. She could hear the sound of the guns at Gallipoli—and Constantinople was crowded with German officers and Turkish troops. The Turks had been kind to her. She had nursed their wounded. German staff officers had clicked heels to her and called her *Gnädige Frau*. Henley Armstrong, her husband, had been allowed his liberty and the use of his office. He had done good business with his old friends the Turks. Perhaps she had a grudge against him for that.

Alden watched her that night when he went round with Paulett. Never once did she address any word to her husband. Never once did she look at him. He might not have been there, as far as she knew or cared. Armstrong looked sulky, though he was coldly polite to his guests and served out some good whisky. There were three naval officers from H.M.S. *Lion* and two battalion officers, and a French colonel and an Italian officer of the international police. There were only two other women, and they were Russians in shabby frocks.

Alden talked for some time to one of these Russian ladies, who tired him a little by her reproaches against England.

“England,” she said, “betrayed us. Your Winston Churchill promised us military aid and then your Government withheld it, while our White Armies were fighting without guns and without supplies.”

It was useless to argue with her. It was useless telling her that the supplies sent out by England had never reached the right place because of Russian corruption and inefficiency.

Beatrice Armstrong and Paulett, the newspaper-man, had gone out on to the leads. Someone—Beatrice, no doubt—had turned on a gramophone with dance music.

“Let’s go and look at the moonlit scene,” suggested Alden to Princess Ivanova.

“It’s too chilly,” said the Princess. “But take a peep at it yourself while I talk to this nice Italian.”

She turned to the Italian officer and spoke to him in his own language with great fluency.

Henley Armstrong spoke irritably.

“It’s ridiculous of Beatrice to go on to the roof. It’s as cold as death out there these nights.”

He stood for a moment with an angry frown and then poured himself out a stiff dose of whisky which he drank neat, as Alden noticed.

“I’ll give her a warning,” said Alden. “Even moonlight over the Bosphorus is not worth the risk of pneumonia.”

And yet when he went on to the leaded roof outside the window he was willing to risk pneumonia at least for a few minutes. And it was not chilly. The air, indeed, was soft and mild, and drenched with scent from the sleeping garden. There was a crescent moon above the spear-headed cypress. Innumerable stars were strewn across the velvet curtain of the sky. The Bosphorus looked like burnished silver, and there lay the British fleet with all its lights gleaming. Very faintly one could hear a naval band playing in one of the battleships, blurred by the tinkle of a gramophone just outside this window, until it ran down and went flat.

Alden saved the record by lifting off the needle. Beatrice had been dancing with Paulett and they now stopped and stood together behind one of the green tubs at the other end of the roof.

Alden forgot them, spellbound by this moonlit view. His thoughts wandered to the strange life in this city below him and around him, invisible—Constantinople. It had been a great place in the history of Christendom, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, the seat of learning, until the Turks had captured it and their leader had ridden his horse over the dead bodies in San Sofia and stooped down to dip his hand in their blood, and put the imprint of his bloody palm upon one of the walls. From this place had fled the scholars

who brought Greek culture to the Western world—the beginning of that Renaissance which had flowered in Italy and France and then had come to England and touched the soul of Shakespeare.

It was amazing to think of all that now. Down below was a mosque with its minaret—a miserable little mosque compared with all the mosques of Stamboul built by Suleiman the Magnificent and other Sultans, to the glory of Allah and Mahommed His Prophet. Some of those old Turks had been monsters. The dead bodies of their victims had floated down the Bosphorus, not long ago, under Abdul the Damned. The bowstrings of their janizaries had strangled many men and women in palaces still standing on the Golden Horn.

Now this city was crowded with refugees from another Empire which had fallen. Thousands of those Russians would be sleeping tonight under vaulted arches where the poorest of them were huddled together in their sheepskins, ravaged by typhus, crawling with vermin. In miserable little rooms of apartment houses and Turkish tenements women of the old régime would be sleeping on truckle beds, or on mattresses laid upon bare boards. Ex-officers of the Imperial Army would be tossing under blankets, dreaming, perhaps, nightmare horrors of a civil war between Whites and Reds without mercy on either side. In the Petits Champs a Russian orchestra would still be thumping out its wild rhythms, and Russian girls would still be dancing, in an atmosphere of cigarette smoke and wine dregs and the stale smell of English beer, to a crowd of seamen, Turks, Armenians, Jews, and many other types.

“One could never put this into a novel,” thought Alden. “It’s all too fantastic. It’s all too crowded.”

He had forgotten Beatrice Armstrong and his friend Paulett. Now he remembered them. It was Paulett who spoke in a low voice, as he moved with this lady nearer to the parapet over which Alden was leaning.

“I shall have to go back to England in a week or two. I can’t bear to leave you here. I want you to come, Beatrice. I could make you happy.”

Beatrice Armstrong laughed very softly, and answered very quietly:

“Could you make me happy? I wonder! Can one forget seven years of torture?”

“It’s too frightful,” said Paulett. “It’s murder to a woman’s soul.”

“Hush!” whispered Beatrice.

She had seen the figure of Alden in the darkness beyond where the moonlight fell across her leaded roof.

They stayed very still for a moment, and then went into the lighted room. Beatrice's voice was clear and false:

“It's really rather chilly. I could do with a little drink.”

Oliver Alden went back into the room after a decent interval.

X

ELIZABETH BROWNE was a strange young woman to find among these Russian exiles on Prinkipo. Oliver Alden, who went over to the island now and then in charge of supplies, was intrigued and attracted by her. She was so perfectly English. She was such an amazing contrast to those Russian girls, Olga and Tania, and all the others who were waiting here until Fate or foreign potentates decided what to do with them. She had common sense, serenity, bluntness of speech, and emotional control. Certainly she was not beautiful, and yet, thought Alden, there was a beauty in her eyes—the beauty of a calm, humorous, courageous spirit.

“What is your astounding story?” he asked her one day, when he met her in the bazaar of Stamboul, doing a bit of shopping, he supposed, and seeing the sights. “How is it you became attached to that Russian family? Why do you still stay with them now that they’re in exile on that lotus-eating island?”

Betty Browne—as she was known in family life—laughed at all these questions. She also smiled and shook her head at a young Greek who invited her into his booth where he had a display of Oriental rugs.

“Come in, miss! Very fine rugs. I’ll give them to you. Choose one, miss. It will look very good in your sitting-room. I’m selling them for a smile!”

She spoke to him in Russian and he looked astonished and answered her in the same language. He could speak all the languages.

Then she answered Alden.

“Well, I can’t say I’ve had a tame time! It was more exciting than Belgrave Square, where I had my first place as governess in order to relieve the burden of a reverend and impecunious father.”

“A clergyman’s daughter?” asked Alden.

“All respectable governesses are clergymen’s daughters,” answered Betty Browne, with a humour which was hardly betrayed. “My unfortunate father has a living at Rodsall in Surrey. I don’t suppose you know it.”

“Like the back of my hand!” said Alden with a touch of excitement, because he was walking with a young woman who knew that place which he hadn’t seen for several years. “I’m an old Carthusian. I used to go birdnesting for miles around. I know every bush in Puttenham, and Elstead, and Eashing, and ten miles round Charterhouse.”

Miss Browne glanced at him sideways with a slight increase of colour. "If you mention those names again I shall become very Russian and burst into tears. They're like an old song to me. I must have seen you with other Charterhouse boys on Puttenham Heath."

"Good God, yes!" said Alden. "And now we're walking in an Oriental bazaar after escape from war and revolution."

A stout old Turk bowed to him obsequiously.

"I have many little treasures, my admiral. They will please the pretty lady. You would like a rest. I have excellent coffee for my customers."

"No thanks," said Alden. As he passed on with Betty Browne, the old Turk spat on the pavement of the covered bazaar.

"This place is like Aladdin's Cave," said Betty Browne. "But I don't like its smell much."

Alden agreed.

"It's a smell which has been hoarded up for ten centuries. I dare say it's the same smell that greeted the nostrils of our Crusaders."

"It's a mixture of incense and old cheese," said Betty thoughtfully. "I dare say it might grow on one. Perhaps when I'm back at Rodsall I shall dream of it as a very romantic smell."

"Tell me," said Alden, "what have you been doing in Russia all these years?"

Betty Browne laughed, and in that laughter Alden knew that he heard the untold and untellable story of Russia in war-time and revolution.

"It would be a tale as long as the Arabian Nights," said Betty Browne. "First there was the War. Then came Kerensky, who tried to keep the soldiers at the front. We lived through the hundred days when Lenin appeared. We saw dead bodies in the streets of St. Petersburg. We fled to Moscow and got caught there by the Red tide. We saw dead bodies in the streets of Moscow. They were mostly boys. Cadets of the old Army. There were many executions. Every day hundreds were shot. Ex-officers, you know, and people of the old régime. We had the proletariat quartered on us in a house opposite the Kremlin. We lived in a cellar of the house where Countess Markova—the mother of Olga and Tania—had often entertained the Empress and her ladies. It wasn't amusing. There was no soap and we shared the lavatories with Red soldiers. I was rather scared about Olga and Tania, and I thought they might shoot Michael as the son of a high officer in the Imperial Guards. We had some near squeaks. Anna Markova was hauled off to prison and interrogated about her husband. We gave her up for lost but

she was let off for a time. Then we put on peasant dresses and got away in a farm cart. We joined a party of gypsies for a time and wandered south with them. We were caught in Kieff and Michael would have been shot if I hadn't talked to the commandant like a Dutch uncle. I think he liked me because I was English. He had once been to Margate and seemed to think it was heaven. After that we lived with a nice family on their country estate.

"For some reason the peasants left them alone for a long time, until they set the house on fire and shot the father and son, Nicolai and Boris Nicolaievitch, who had been very nice to us. We had to hop it again. We slept under bushes, and trudged the long Russian roads for weeks and months. We saw men hanged on the trees. It's queer what faces men make when they're hanged. We heard many stories, enough to freeze one's blood. We didn't get much to eat, of course. Olga had typhus and nearly died. Tania bit the hand of a Red soldier who tried to kiss her, and he banged her head with the butt of his gun. Nobody wanted to play about with me, that's one comfort."

"Good God," said Alden again. "What frightful experiences. And you look as if you had never left Surrey."

"We were a year before we got to the Villa Mimosa in the Crimea," said Miss Browne. "We were jolly glad to get there. It was very luxurious after our wanderings. We slept in beds with clean sheets. Anna Markova, poor dear, wept with joy at the sight of this summer home. It seemed so very safe, and so very far from Moscow. General Wrangel came to tea with us several times. We entertained quite a company of Russian aristocrats who had all come down to the Crimea and thought it safe. . . . At the end, as you know, it wasn't as safe as all that. If it hadn't been for you . . ."

Alden stood stock-still and stared into the eyes of this young woman.

"What a story," he said, "in spite of all the million things you've left out! And yet you look untouched by all that. You look like any of those girls who at this very moment are swinging their clubs on Puttenham golf course and have never known danger, or death, or vermin, or typhus, or the tiger in the soul of man. How have you kept like that?"

Miss Browne looked astonished. "Why not? It's nothing to what some of these Russians have been through."

They left the bazaar and wandered through Stamboul and went into a mosque, where Alden kicked off his shoes and put on the slippers provided by an old Turk.

“Very impressive,” said Betty Browne. “The Mahommedans knew how to build all right. I can’t say I know much about their religion.”

They went into other mosques, and at midday stood under a minaret where the Imam cried out the call to prayer in a long-drawn chant in the Eastern scale. Groups of Turks were washing their feet and wrists at the fountains. They spat as an English naval officer passed them with a young woman of his own country. In market squares other Turks sat about, smoking their narghiles. They spat as Alden passed with Betty Browne.

“These Turks don’t seem to like us,” said Betty Browne.

“They’re rather peeved with us,” said Alden. “They don’t like this international control of Constantinople, nor our mandates over Palestine and Mespot, nor—especially—our handing Smyrna to the Greeks. There’s a fellow named Mustapha Pasha who is raising an army to get back Smyrna. If he does, there’s going to be some dirty work.”

“More of it?” asked Miss Browne, with raised eyebrows. “I thought peace had come.”

“We call it peace,” said Alden grimly.

They took coffee together in a little coffee-house not far from San Sofia, where he had shown her the carved imprint of a Sultan’s palm which he had made on the wall after dabbling it in the blood of Christians.

“Tell me about your Russian family,” said Alden, lighting his first cigarette after coffee. “That girl Olga is easy on the eye, as the Americans say. A dangerous young woman.”

“She’s hardly a woman yet,” said Betty with an indulgent smile. “She’s only just becoming conscious of her own beauty. I remember her as a little girl in short frocks. I tried to teach her English manners, poor babe!”

“What’s going to happen to her?” asked Alden.

Miss Browne suddenly became slightly pale.

“What’s going to happen to any of them?” she said in a low voice. “I can’t bear to think of all they will have to go through—my dear Anna Markova, who is a saint—and Tania, my wild bird—and Michael who used to say his prayers to me after I had tucked him up in bed in the house at St. Petersburg before the War.”

“There are nearly a million of these Russian exiles,” said Alden. “They will always be wanderers from a lost world. I can’t imagine their future.”

Miss Browne asked for a ‘gasper’, and Alden gave her the usual Gold Flake cigarette which was served up with his rations.

"I've a fearful blow for them," said Betty Browne. "I hardly have the courage to tell them. They seem to find me a bit of a comfort in hard times. They rely on me in a way."

Alden guessed that she was going back to England, and he was right.

"My father wants me," she said. "My brother was killed in the War, like so many other brothers."

"Two of mine," said Alden quietly. "When do you go, Miss Browne?"

She was going quite soon. As soon as she could brace herself to leave this Russian family with whom she had lived for seven years.

"I shall feel very Russian in England," she said. "One becomes Russian in one's mind."

"How does that work?" asked Alden.

"Things frightfully important in an English village would seem ridiculous. The local gentry with their talk about herbaceous borders and the weather, will seem very dull and stupid, poor dears, because they know nothing about lice and typhus and corpses hanging from tall wayside trees, and the long roads of Russia with a Red Army coming hard on one's heels. I shan't know how to behave in father's drawing-room. I shall say awful things, very shocking to English ears. And I shall always long to come back again to Anna Markova and Olga and Tania and Michael, because they really can't get on unless I look after them."

"One day," said Alden, "I shall invite myself to tea in your father's rectory."

"I'll give you a good cup of tea," said Betty Browne.

Some camels were being led past their coffee-house by an old Turk. A tall man with a red tarboosh on his head and bare feet under ragged trousers straddled a small donkey. A ragged and veiled woman walked across the square. A French officer in *horizon bleu* stopped to light a cigarette, and saluted Alden civilly as he passed. A Cossack officer strode by with his long black coat swinging and his cartridge-belt glistening in the sunlight. It was very far from Rodsall in the county of Surrey.

XI

OLIVER ALDEN sat one night at dinner with Sacha Dolin in a Russian restaurant not far from the steps leading up from the Galata Bridge. He had met this man several times on the island of Prinkipo in the sitting-room of the Markov family on the attic floor of a Turkish villa which was now like a slum tenement. He had been attracted by Dolin's haggard face and moody eyes and long silences which he broke now and then by words of harsh irony spoken with a smile.

"If I could know all that passes in that man's mind," thought Alden, "I should get closer to the Russian tragedy and all that history which lies behind a blanket of fog."

He saw that this man of thirty or so was devoted to the mother of young Markov, and very charming in his manner to that boy who had been his comrade on the last retreat. Another thing in his favour was that he had been a painter before the War, and Alden had a soft spot in his heart for all artists who loved beauty which had been banished from the world by war and revolution. He met Dolin one evening in Constantinople, striding gloomily along the Grand Rue de Pera in a shabby old uniform clumsily patched.

"It would be a favour to me if you would dine with me," said Alden, stopping in front of him and speaking in French. "I'm a lonely man this evening, and I hate loneliness."

Sacha Dolin was startled for a moment and seemed to come out of a dream.

"I shan't be good company," he answered. "I have the *cafard*. As you know, that means an extreme form of self-pity. Nevertheless it's kind of you to offer me a dinner. To a Russian refugee that is a pleasant invitation."

"We'll talk about Art," said Alden.

"Then we shall be talking about something that has died," answered Dolin.

The restaurant was crowded with the usual types. That is to say it was crowded with French, Italian, and English officers, special correspondents from foreign newspapers waiting for history to happen, commercial travellers, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, with pretty ladies of various nationalities, and two or three young Turks. One could get good food here. The chef, as Alden knew, had once been the captain of the Czar's yacht. He

was a very good cook. The waitresses were Russian women of the old régime, some of them of high rank, it appeared, when now and then a Russian ex-officer came into the restaurant and bowed over their hands before taking his place, or when a Russian girl accompanied by some foreign officer curtsied to one of the women who afterwards served her meal.

Sacha Dolin was one of those who bowed low and kissed the hand of a grey-haired little woman who brought the menu to Alden's table.

"You! My dear Sacha!" she exclaimed. "Someone told me you had been killed."

"It's only my soul that is dead, Princess," answered Dolin. "My body still walks about and gets hungry. My English friend here has been good enough to invite me to dine."

"How is Lydia?" asked the Princess.

Sacha Dolin went very pale for a moment.

"Lydia is in Moscow," he said. "She couldn't get away. I shall never see her again."

The little princess with the grey hair—she was Princess Ozlova—raised her hands.

"Oh, God of pity!" she cried.

They were speaking in Russian, which Alden could understand after a year in Russian ports from the White Sea to the Black Sea.

"That little lady has a sweet face," said Alden presently, when she was called away by one of her ladies.

"I painted her portrait ten years ago," said Dolin. "She had a fine house in St. Petersburg and a summer palace at Yalta. Now she serves in this eating-place. Some of those young women used to go to her dances. I used to fall in love with them, or at least pretend to fall in love with them. They knew Lydia, who became my wife. She was the prettiest of them all, and left her rich family to marry a poor painter. We were absurdly happy until the War came. Life was like a fairy tale, and I even made a bit of money."

During the course of the dinner several of the young waiting women came up to him, and each time he rose and kissed their hands. Each time in their rapid Russian the name of Lydia was spoken with pity for this man who had lost his wife.

Oliver Alden, old Carthusian, who knew the countryside round Godalming, and was now, by a freak of fate, in naval uniform, studied this

scene around him, and these characters who moved about in it, like a play-goer watching a drama from the stalls. This man by his side had been through frightful adventures. He had seen into the very depths of the hells that men make for themselves. A few years ago these Russian women had been the maids of honour and the ladies-in-waiting of the Court in St. Petersburg. They had had their summer palaces in the Crimea. They had driven to the music of sleigh-bells down the Nevsky Prospekt, wrapped in rich furs. Peasants had bowed and crossed themselves in the presence of these gentlewomen. They had had English and French and German governesses. Now they were kitchen-maids and serving-maids in a Turkish restaurant. In St. Petersburg now members of the proletariat were sitting in the Imperial box at the Opera. In Moscow a group of fanatics under Lenin, their chief—a man of genius with a sardonic humour—were living in the Kremlin, inventing and proclaiming a new system of society, according to the gospel of Karl Marx. Djerjinsky—the man of terror—was executing thousands of ex-aristocrats and bourgeois, and social democrats, suspected of being hostile to this creed. They were more intolerant of heresy than the Orthodox Church under its mediaeval tyranny. They were as ruthless of political opposition as the Czars who had sent droves of exiles to Siberia. In the name of Communism human nature was to be forced into the same mould, and in the name of Democracy free thought and speech were to be suppressed. So said these ex-officers of the White Armies with whom Alden had talked for more than a year.

He talked now with this man at his side, this tragic-eyed man who said that Art had died, who said that his soul had died though his body walked about.

“How is it,” asked Alden, “that so many of your fellow Russians still have a certain gaiety in this exile? Look at that pretty girl over there, laughing with those English officers. She’s not pretending to laugh. She looks as if she hadn’t a care in the world! I’ve noticed it several times before. They laugh and dance on the island of Prinkipo, though less than three weeks ago some of them were in a panic-stricken flight. . . . Have some more wine, my dear fellow.”

Dolin raised his glass and drank some more wine. A little colour made his haggard face less like a death-mask.

He answered in French, which was the language they were speaking.

“It’s partly our Russian character,” he explained. “But it is mostly human nature. Shipwrecked people are quite gay, I’m told, when they reach dry land after the storm-tossed sea. And there is, one must confess, a certain

pleasure—a certain relief for a time—in being liberated from the conventionalities of civilization. Nothing matters except life itself. There's no shame in being ragged if all one's friends are in rags. To satisfy one's hunger is magnificent if one has escaped from starvation. I am very pleased with myself just now. This bortsch is excellent, especially when it is served on white linen and when one sits in a chair before a table. In the company of one's friends one finds a little courage—even a little gaiety. When one weeps it is alone and in one's heart. But we Russians have the gift of living for the moment. Some of us will spend all we have for an hour's pleasure, knowing that in the next hour we shall be penniless. That, of course, is idiotic. It is also Russian. We are like that. We are primitive like that. We are, of course, uncivilized.”

Alden laughed.

“You have the habit of saying you're uncivilized! And yet most of these women here speak three or four languages and have read many good books, and love music, and talk with very keen intelligence. You have a passion for intellectual truth. At least you don't blink at stark facts of life. Is that uncivilized? Take some more wine, Dolin.”

Sacha Dolin filled his glass. It was a good French burgundy. It warmed him and made him less melancholy.

“One hears good talk among Russians,” he admitted. “That is because we are nearer to the earth than most educated people in Western cultures. We have learnt to talk and argue, and even think, now and then. When we talk we think that we have done something. With us words are as good as deeds. But we are still peasants, with the peasant soul and the peasant knowledge of life's cruelties and hardships and passions. We know how near human nature is to the animals. In Paris and Berlin, and doubtless in London, people of good class are more divorced from the old earth, and pretend, with more success, that they have escaped from the animal stage.”

“What about Russian mysticism?” asked Alden.

Sacha Dolin smiled.

“It's true that the Russian soul is filled with mysticism. It is also at the mercy of superstition, which perhaps is the same. We believe in Fate. We are afraid of God's wrath if we sin, though we keep on sinning. We are aware of being very close to the secret forces which lie behind the veil of the things we see and touch. We are afraid of the devils inside ourselves. We believe in signs and symbols. But isn't that a proof that we are like savages—that indeed we still belong to the steppes and the forest, though we may have been born in St. Petersburg? I've seen the savage in the Russian soul. I have

seen the devils of which he is afraid. This, my dear sir, is admirable wine. I once drank wine like this in Paris when I was an art student. There was a little restaurant behind the Madeleine . . .”

Some of the people left the restaurant. A Greek girl laughed loudly when the man who was paying for her dinner overturned a chair. He was a young naval officer who had drunk a little more than was good for him. The chef who had been the captain of the Czar’s yacht came in from the kitchen to eat his own dinner.

“Tell me,” said Alden, “what happened in Russia when Denikin seemed to have the game in his hands? Why did the White Armies retreat when they were close to Moscow? What were your own experiences, my dear Dolin? It’s all a mystery to me, though I’ve talked with many Russians.”

“I will try to tell you,” said Dolin. “Give me a few cigarettes, my dear friend. It’s all very difficult to tell. I can’t talk unless I smoke.”

He smoked one cigarette after another and drank more wine. He talked in excellent French. He went on talking for two hours, while other people came to feed and others left, and Russian waitresses who had been ladies of St. Petersburg became flushed and tired in the heat of this room and in this long service at tables. The Princess gave a little scream when one of them dropped some plates. The ex-captain of the Czar’s yacht accepted a cigar from an American naval man. A mouse ran across the floor and frightened the women. Prince Andreyev, who had fallen in love with Olga Markova, strode into the restaurant and saluted the company with his hand to his fur cap, and kissed the hand of the Princess, and ordered a bottle of champagne which he drank at his own table, having sold a ring that day to his benevolent Greek who changed trinkets into Turkish pounds and robbed him politely.

And all the time Sacha Dolin talked and tried to tell Oliver Alden the things that had happened in Russia when the White Armies were fighting the Reds.

He had been one of the first volunteers when Kornilov, the little old Eagle, had raised his standard in the South. Kornilov had embraced him, and had then turned to a group of other men.

“Gentlemen,” said old Kornilov, facing them with a sombre laugh, “we are not many, I admit. I thought the Russian Imperial Army had three hundred thousand officers. Where are the rest?”

There were only six hundred of them at first, all ex-officers of the old army, as they had escaped from the Reds in broken boots and ragged shirts.

Some of them wore goloshes and patent-leather shoes, and even women's cloaks. They had six guns drawn by lean horses which they had captured from the Bolsheviks, and one armoured car, and an ambulance or two. It was the small beginning of an army which, before the tide turned, captured the best part of Russia. They were joined by Cossack cavalry under Kaledin. Later still they were joined by the Kuban Cossacks.

They captured many villages after hand to hand slaughter merciless on both sides. It was followed by the Campaign of Ice. This man, Sacha Dolin, had been among those who followed Markov, a very gallant fellow, across a frozen river. They were up to their necks in the ice-cold water. They held their rifles high above their heads. Some of them held on to the stirrup leathers of Circassian cavalry. They smashed their way into Ekaterinodar and fought across furniture piled in the streets, which ran with blood before they had turned out the Bolsheviks.

There was no mercy between Reds and Whites, no chivalry, no compassion. They were all Russians, but on one side were men whose fathers and brothers had been executed in batches, and whose mothers and sisters were in hiding like hunted creatures. On the other side were men who had fought in the War without arms or ammunition because of corruption behind the lines, and who had suddenly turned and said: "Our enemy is not in front of us but behind." Among them were men whose fathers and forefathers had suffered long ages of serfdom, which had kept the people in beastlike ignorance, in filth and misery, at the mercy of rulers who shot them dead or had them flogged with Cossack whips if they dared to claim any human rights.

"I tell you the truth," said Dolin. . . . "This wine is very good."

General Denikin succeeded Kornilov when that old warrior was killed by a shell.

"Denikin was stiff-necked," said Sacha Dolin. "He was intolerant of all but the old Czarist ideas, and quarrelled with those who believed in a Republic, as many of us did. He couldn't ride the whirlwind or bring order out of chaos."

He had a great chance. He got supplies from Britain and France. His armies gathered in strength. Twenty thousand British troops landed at Batoum and held a defensive line to protect Georgia and Azerbaijan and Armenia from the Red Terror.

"I was with the transports," said Alden.

Dolin nodded.

“It was the last chance of Imperial Russia. We thought we could roll back the Reds. For a time they rolled back. But many of our officers were still frivolous and still—shall I say—Russian. They preferred to make love to their women behind the lines. Supplies never reached the front-line troops.”

“I took out some supplies for your nurses,” said Alden. “They were used by the mistresses of staff officers.”

Dolin overturned his wine-glass and the white cloth was stained red.

“That was terrible!” he said. “That was another crime which God wouldn’t forgive.”

He took no notice of the overturned wine-glass.

“What happened then?” asked Alden.

Sacha Dolin stared across the restaurant at its whitewashed walls, as though staring into the past.

“In the north Kolchak had an army of a hundred thousand men, who advanced to a depth of two hundred and fifty miles, driving the Red Armies before them. I saw nothing of that. I was with Denikin, that man of narrow mind. He persecuted any officials who had supported the independence of the Ukraine or Georgia, because he believed as a fanatic in an indivisible Russia. He made many enemies. We didn’t bring pardon and peace with us but the cruel sword of vengeance. The road of the White Armies was lined with men hanged or massacred. On the other side they gouged out the eyes of their prisoners and cut off the fingers of dead women for their rings. I have seen, my friend, the work of the Beast. It is not good to remember.”

He became a little angry and picked up his overturned glass, which Alden refilled.

“Why do you wish me to remember?” he asked. “Why do you tempt me to tell you these atrocious things?”

“I want to know,” said Alden quietly. “We ought to know these things so that they shall never happen again. Tell me why the White Armies retreated when they had most of Russia in their hands?”

“How can I tell you that?” asked Dolin impatiently. “None of us ever knew. We asked each other: Why do we retreat? No one could tell. Some say it was France who deserted us. Some say it was England who betrayed us. Many of my friends still pretend to believe that.”

“And you?” asked Alden.

Sacha Dolin turned and stared into his eyes.

“I don’t say those things because I have a love of truth. Fate was against us, my dear friend. We were fighting against dreams and fears and despairs. There was a dream in the peasant mind—the primitive minds of our peasant soldiers—that Communism might give them liberty and peace. It was a new religion with Lenin as its prophet. They were possessed by fear—fear of new hangings and new massacres. They fell into despair because of all this bloodshed between fellow Russians. As we advanced our Armies became sullen and dispirited. In the enormous distances of Russia our lines became thin and straggling. Districts fell away from their allegiance and rose against us. The general staff tried to close up its lines, but there were no lines. Our men hid themselves in villages and stayed behind. They wandered off to their own regions. They used the Army transport for their families. Up North, Kolchak was heavily defeated. In the South we fell back and withered away. The Circassian division rode away from us. The Cossacks of the Don departed. Our retreat under Denikin was through terror-stricken regions where our troops were lost among the fugitive populations. It was like the end of the world. . . . It was the end of the world as once we knew it. Did you ask me to drink more wine with you?”

Alden asked him to drink more wine.

“Let us talk about Art,” said Sacha Dolin. “I have a very great worship for your English painter Constable. He saw into the very soul of nature. He loved the beauty of trees. He was in touch with their spirit.”

They talked about Art.

The restaurant was almost empty. The Russian princess and her serving-maids were now having their own dinner at a table in the corner of the room. Presently the door opened again and Alden saw the tall figure of Captain Boris Gronov whom he had met on Prinkipo. He might have been an English naval officer because of his fresh complexion and blue eyes. He was with his French wife, Madeleine—a little dark-haired woman with her black hair looped over her ears in the Russian style. He saluted Sacha Dolin and Oliver Alden, and laughed good-naturedly.

“You have had a good dinner, I hope? My wife and I have come to do a little work for our dear Princess and her ladies. We help with the washing-up, a small service which we are glad to do.”

He disappeared with his wife into the kitchen, after a few words with the Princess.

Sacha Dolin laughed harshly.

“That is what we have come to, we Russians. We are dish-washers. Our women are kitchen wenches. Our officer class do folk-dances in dirty cabarets. We are the nomads of a lost legion. It is all very amusing. As an Englishman you find it very amusing, no doubt?”

“As an Englishman I find it very tragic,” said Alden. “Shall we go and smell the night air?”

Sacha Dolin held his arm and walked stiffly.

“It was a good dinner,” he said. “I thank you a thousand times. I am, I think, a little drunk. That also is good.”

He put his arm round Alden’s shoulder and kissed him on the cheek.

XII

MICHAEL sat alone with his mother in the sitting-room which was also a bedroom. The two girls had gone to bed already, Tania taking three inches of candle with her to read a chapter of *Anna Karenina*, in which she was absorbed. It was one of those precious possessions which she had stuffed into her bundle on the flight from the Villa Mimosa. Miss Browne was still out of doors, partly for the purpose of letting the girls get undressed before she turned in, and partly because she wanted to walk down to the beach again and see the moonlight on the water.

Through the open window of the attic-room came the eternal tinkle of a balalaika. Down there on the plot of grass in front of the villa some of the refugees were strolling about and talking. Now and again a woman's light laugh could be heard, and the deep murmur of men's voices talking quietly.

Michael was playing his violin very softly with muted strings—a difficult bit of fingering, as an exercise. Once or twice he glanced over to his mother who was sitting on the edge of his bed doing some needlework—mending one of Olga's chemises. There was a touch of grey in her fair Austrian hair. It was the first time Michael had noticed that. And he noticed that there were little lines about her mouth which had not been there a year ago. Her hands were white and delicate—lovely hands, thought Michael, as her needle went in and out of the bit of linen. Presently she raised her head and their eyes met.

“What are you thinking about, my dear?” she asked.

Michael put his bow in its case, still holding the violin under his chin.

“I'm wondering what's going to happen to us. I'm always wondering. We can't stay here for ever.”

“No,” said his mother. “We shall have to make plans.”

“What kind of plans?” asked Michael.

Anna Markova laid down her needlework.

“The first thing is to write to our relations and find out whether they are still alive. There's my sister Josephine—Aunt Seppi—I've often told you about her—her gaiety—what lovely times we used to have as girls in Vienna. Uncle Rudi used to be so kind, and I remember how he used to take us to the Opera when he first fell in love with dear Seppi. Their boy and girl must be nearly as old as Olga and Tania.”

Michael was thoughtful again.

“They might put us up for a while. Uncle Rudi might help me to get work.”

“I’m longing to get a letter from Seppi,” said his mother. “I wrote two days ago. It will take a week perhaps before an answer comes.”

Michael was silent again for a few minutes. Then he blurted out something which frightened his mother.

“I was talking to Sacha Dolin. He too has a relative in Vienna. He says the Austrian gentlefolk are all ruined. Nearly everyone was starving in Vienna after the War, he says. There was no light or fuel. The children died like flies. It was almost as bad as Russia. Perhaps Aunt Seppi won’t be able to help us much. Perhaps she’s dead.”

Anna Markova gave a little cry.

“There is no happiness left in the world. The War killed the joy of life everywhere.”

“Courage, little mother!” said Michael.

He went across to the bed on which his mother was sitting and put an arm round her shoulder and his face against her cheek.

She forced herself to smile and touched his hair with a caressing hand.

“I know, I know. I must have courage. And I ought to be grateful for all that I have left. You, and Olga, and Tania. It’s wicked of me to be so weak and miserable when my three treasures are still alive.”

Michael took his arm from her shoulder and presently lit a cigarette—a habit he had picked up as a soldier of Wrangel’s army.

“The point is,” he said, “what other treasures have you kept, mother? Did you bring away anything worth a little money for a rainy day? Olga and Tania stuffed their bags with rubbish.”

Anna Markova sat very still for a moment, and then looked up at her son.

“I hid a few things,” she said. “They’re very precious. I hardly like to take them out of their hiding-place. And I can hardly bear to part with them until we are really desperate.”

“Let me have a look, mother,” said Michael.

She went to one of the bags and rummaged about in its depths and brought out some old shirts, rolled up tightly. They were Michael’s old shirts, out of which he had grown.

“No one would suspect treasures in these rags,” he said with a laugh. “In any case, we have escaped from Russia and Red bandits and gipsy thieves.”

“There are thieves everywhere,” said Anna Markova. “Over there, in Constantinople, there is a dreadful riff-raff, I am told.”

“There certainly is,” agreed Michael, who had gone over to Constantinople several times with Tania and Olga.

“Lock the door for a moment,” said his mother.

She waited until the door was locked and then with nervous fingers unrolled the shirts. Some old socks were tied up in them. She took from them some little glittering things which she put on the deal table where a candle was burning.

Michael touched them. He took up some of them and held them in the palm of his hand nearer to the candlelight.

“They look good,” he said. “They might be worth something. When we leave Prinkipo we needn’t starve to death.”

There were a dozen rings on the table and three in the palm of his hand. They had little jewels in them—pearls and emeralds and rubies. One of them had a single diamond in which there was a little world of light.

“They’re very old,” whispered his mother. “They’re eighteenth century. They belonged to my Austrian family.”

“God bless your Austrian ancestors,” said Michael, with a smile in his eyes. “How little they knew that their descendants would be Russian refugees, wondering how much an Armenian moneylender would advance for these trinkets.”

His mother glanced nervously at the door, as though thieves might enter at any moment. She spoke again in a whisper.

“There’s something here which is beyond all money, Michael. I should weep if we had to sell it.”

She put her fingers into another old sock and took out a little miniature set in diamonds.

“Yes,” said Michael. “I remember it.”

He gazed at it gravely—at a face beautifully painted on ivory. It was the face of a bearded man with soft eyes who had been the Czar of Russia. He had given it to Michael’s mother when she had come to St. Petersburg as a bride.

“Perhaps we shan’t need to sell it,” he said. “Somewhere in the world I shall find a place so that I can keep you and the two girls.”

“God will help us,” said Anna Markova, who believed in God.

There was a tap at the door and she clutched her treasures and thrust them between the shirts. Michael laughed at her sudden terror.

“It’s only Miss Browne,” he said, going to the door.

“Sorry to intrude,” said Elizabeth Browne, very brightly. “You ought to go out and enjoy the moonlight, Michael. One can see the domes of the mosques in Stamboul like little snow-clouds far away.”

She came into the dim room lit only by one candle. On the table still was the miniature set in diamonds.

“I shouldn’t leave that lying about,” she said in her practical way.

“We’ve been counting our treasures,” explained Michael. “They’re our life insurance.”

Miss Browne laughed, but there was pity in her eyes.

“Poor dears! I don’t know what’s going to happen to you all.”

She stooped down and kissed the hand of Countess Markova.

“Sleep well and don’t worry,” she said. “Now I suppose I must go and prod my elbow in Olga’s back. She always takes more than her fair share of the bed.”

Presently there was a squeal from the next room. Olga was having a tussle with Miss Browne who had been her governess.

“The English,” said Michael, “are very remarkable, if they are all like Miss Browne. They never lose their self-control. They take everything calmly and make a joke of it.”

“She has been a great comfort to us,” said Anna Markova.

She kissed Michael on the forehead and left him, to go to her own room where she slept with Tania.

Michael sat on the edge of his truckle-bed and took off one of his boots. It was quite a time before he took off the other. In that space of time he thought very deeply about the unknown life which lay ahead. It seemed to him that he had nothing to offer the world but a few tunes played not too well on an old fiddle, and there were thousands of Russian refugees who could do the same thing rather better. He had come late for this kind of thing. Denikin’s crowd were already in Budapest and Vienna and Berlin and Paris, playing in restaurants and cabarets, where Cossacks danced with knives in their mouths and Russian women sang gipsy songs, and ex-officers of the Imperial Army played the balalaika to foreign tourists. How could he protect his mother from poverty and starvation? How could he find food and

clothing for Olga and Tania? How could he educate himself and do something worth while in life?

Sometimes he had had boyish dreams of fame and fortune. Sometimes he had dreams of love, and always there was one girl in his dreams. It was Vera Sokolova whom he had once kissed under a Christmas tree in St. Petersburg. They had met in Moscow before the Red Revolution in which her father had been killed. They had talked a lot about life. They understood each other. Once she had wept and he had put his arms about her and something had stirred in him, a kind of passion, indescribable and mystical—a kind of pain and a kind of joy. Now she was dancing over in Constantinople, as he had heard from one of his friends. She danced in a leopard skin, showing the grace of her body to Turks and Armenians and rough seamen from the British and American fleets. He hated the idea of it.

Michael took off his other boot and let it fall with a thud on the bare boards.

XIII

VERA SOKOLOVA came over to Prinkipo to see the Markov family. She was the girl who danced in a leopard skin at the Petits Champs. In the old days she had gone to the same school in St. Petersburg as Olga and Tania, and had driven in the same sledge with them to many children's parties in big houses off the Nevsky Prospekt. She had spent summer holidays with them at the Villa Mimosa in the Crimea when her father and mother were in attendance on the Emperor and Empress at their summer palace. Her father had been executed among the first batch of nobles after the Kerensky régime. Her mother had died of typhus on the flight of Denikin's army. Now Vera was under the protection of the Countess Volkova, who arranged the ballet at the Petits Champs in Pera.

Olga and Tania fell on her weeping and laughing when she appeared at the villa in Prinkipo.

"Vera!" cried Olga, "how beautiful you have grown. How enchanting to see you again."

Tania held on to one of her hands and kissed it passionately. "Oh, Vera, do you remember how we used to fight with each other? Do you remember how we used to tell each other stories in bed? Do you remember how we had pillow fights and games of hide-and-seek, and played duets on the nursery piano in St. Petersburg?"

"I remember everything!" answered Vera, putting her arms round both the girls, while tears rushed into her dark eyes. "I remember all that happiness and all that naughtiness. If only those days would come back again!"

Michael was standing by. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with his braces hanging down, having been cleaning his top-boots.

"Michael," said Vera. "You say nothing to me. You haven't kissed me yet. How tall you are! How noble you look! You were a boy when I saw you last. Now you are a grown-up man and I am shy of you."

"Kiss her, Michael!" cried Tania. "She asks for it. And we were like brothers and sisters."

Michael's face coloured. He felt very shy of this girl who said she was shy of him. He hated to kiss her in front of his sisters. But he stooped down and kissed her hand.

“We’re no longer children,” he said gravely. “I feel a thousand years old.”

“I hope you don’t think I look a thousand years old!” cried Vera merrily.

“You look very nice,” said Michael.

“There,” said Olga. “That’s a great compliment from Michael. The other day when I told him I thought I was beautiful, he had the cheek to tell me I was mistaken and deceived myself.”

“You have become a beauty, Olga!” said Vera, holding her at arm’s length. “Michael will have to look after you. It’s very dangerous to be beautiful in this wicked world. There are many beasts about, my dear. I meet them every night at the Petits Champs. They sit there drinking wine and gazing at us girls, licking their lips and picking out those who are the prettiest and trying to get us to come down and drink with them.”

“Oh, my dear!” cried the mother of Michael. “You make me very frightened. That is all so dangerous for young girls. Your poor mother would be terribly shocked to think of your dancing in such a place.”

“One earns one’s living,” said Vera calmly. “I am very well looked after by the Countess Volkova and some of the others. In any case, there’s nothing I don’t know, and to know is to be warned.”

Michael spoke bitterly.

“I hate to think of you dancing naked before those foul men. It’s frightful.”

Vera laughed at him. “Not quite naked, Michael. I wear an excellent leopard’s skin. In any case, what does it matter? I’m not ashamed of my body. Have you become a Puritan? My body is beautiful, they tell me.”

“You are wonderfully graceful, Vera,” said Tania, staring at Vera with envy. “Every time you move it gives one pleasure. God made you delicately. Your hands are so nicely shaped. I am longing to see you dance.”

“I dance badly,” said Vera. “I just rush around like a Greek maenad. I don’t know the art of the ballet yet. It needs a long education. But I have a sense of it. It is in my body and spirit, I think. Countess Volkova tells me that I might be a great dancer one day if I get proper training. That is my hope. I want to be a Pavlova. I am very ambitious.”

“Tell us about your life,” pleaded Olga. “Is there any chance for me at the Petits Champs? How much do you earn? Do you meet rich young men, or rich old men, who might support one in luxury and restore the fortunes of one’s family?”

“Olga, you’re shameless!” said Michael severely.

“You alarm me, my dear,” said his mother. “I wish you wouldn’t say such things even in fun.”

“I say them seriously, mother,” said Olga with laughing eyes. “We must be practical. We must look forward to the future and I don’t look forward to everlasting poverty.”

“I think I shall write a novel,” said Tania. “I believe I could one day write a great novel like *Anna Karenina*. That is my ambition. Or perhaps if I don’t look so high at first I might write crime stories for some paper. Of course I shall have to write in French now that Russian is no good to anybody.”

“Tania!” cried Olga impatiently, “for goodness’ sake stop talking nonsense. I want to hear all about Vera’s life. I wish I could go over to Constantinople and do a little dancing. That is more amusing than this exile on a desert island. Vera, my darling, tell us all about it.”

Vera told them something about it, while Michael’s mother made tea and poured it out into a set of cheap cups which Michael had brought back from Constantinople after selling one of the rings which had been hidden in a sock. He had also bought out of the same proceeds a new pair of shoes for his mother and a brush and comb for Olga, and some stockings—which looked like silk—for Tania. For himself he had picked up a safety razor with six blades, which unfortunately failed to cut.

Vera sat on the edge of his bed. Olga squatted on the floor with her hands round her knees. Tania laid her dark head against the deal chest of drawers.

“It’s a hard life,” said Vera. “Sometimes one gets very tired. I do my Greek dance twelve times between midday and midnight. It’s very dirty behind the scenes and the stench is killing. Sometimes I think we shall all go down with pestilence. Then the hall is filled with tobacco smoke and the reek of wine and stale beer. Sometimes the sailor men get drunk and are sick on the floor.”

“Oh, Vera!” cried Michael’s mother. “Need you tell us all that? It’s too awful!”

Vera looked surprised and lifted her dark eyebrows. She had a long, thin face, with rather high cheek-bones and very bright luminous eyes, and through her pale skin there was a glow of colour.

“I thought you wanted me to tell you about my life. I thought you wanted me to tell the truth.”

“Yes, we do,” said Tania. “Nothing matters but truth. And we have seen so much that nothing is too frank for us. We have seen dead men, and men hanged, and people dying of typhus and every kind of dirt. Why should we be afraid of the truth, mother? You are still very Austrian. You turn your face away from anything unpleasant.”

“Go on, my dear,” said Olga. “I think I shouldn’t mind men being sick sometimes. One is removed from them a little, after all.”

“It’s worse for the programme sellers,” said Vera. “We take turns at that. The men like to see us off the stage and moving about among them. Sometimes it’s unpleasant. A fat old Turk put his arm about me one night and wouldn’t let me go. He spoke bad Russian, but well enough to let me know what he meant.”

“What did he mean?” asked Olga.

“He wanted me to live with him. He had a villa down the Bosphorus. He promised me silk underclothing and jewels, and a bed with fine cushions.”

“Curse him,” said Michael. “If I had been there I would have smashed his face.”

“It wasn’t a bad offer,” said Olga.

Tania smacked Olga’s hand.

“You’re a wretch, Olga! You pretend to have no morality.”

“Olga says these things without understanding them,” said Michael. “She talks like a child. Otherwise I should be very angry.”

Olga laughed at this rebuke from a brother one year younger than herself.

“Hark at the lad! I suppose he thinks he can order us about like a Turk in his harem. But I thought we were listening to Vera’s story, instead of working up to a family quarrel. Go on, Vera, my darling. Everything you say thrills me to the marrowbones.”

Vera smiled at her, and held her hand for a moment. “You haven’t changed since we played together in the Villa Mimosa. I’ve changed from the skin inwards. I seem to have lived a hundred lives.”

She told them more about her life in the Petits Champs as a dancing-girl. She made them laugh by her account of all that happened behind the scenes—the stage fright of girls who had never appeared in public, the quarrels, vanities, rages, tears, of this amateur company of ex-officers and women of the old régime, who rehearsed new scenes half an hour before presenting them, so that everything went wrong. One of the girls—the daughter of

Princess Tchernavina—had hysterics one night because she had had nothing to eat all day and found that someone had stolen the handbag in which she had kept her money. Of course there were tremendous love-affairs, tremendous jealousies. One of the men who danced like a Cossack—he had been a bank clerk in St. Petersburg—had threatened to kill Maria Volhovsky because she was too kind to Prince Igor Nicolai Nicolaivitch, who played the big drum. One night all the lights went out and there were wild scenes in the dressing-rooms where the girls were changing for the dance of the sylphs. Vera couldn't find her leopard skin and was in a state of nature for half an hour.

“I nearly caught my death of cold. Meanwhile, there was a loud uproar in the audience. Some English sailors started fighting with Americans. A young Turk was robbed of his gold watch. It was pandemonium until the lights went up again.”

Tania sat listening to these stories with excited eyes. She gave little screams of laughter and emotion.

“It's all very fantastic,” she said. “But then life is like that. We're all living in a fantastic world where anything may happen.”

“Vera,” cried Olga, “for heaven's sake get me a place in your company. I'll do anything. I will learn to dance. You will teach me. I will go on as a houri. I will show my beauty of body for the enjoyment of brutal men. Anything, my dear, to get away from Prinkipo, which I'm beginning to find enormously wearisome.”

“No, my dear,” said her mother. “You are too young. You are too wild. I shouldn't have a moment's peace of mind.”

“In any case,” said Vera, “there's not a chance. Every Russian refugee in Constantinople begs for some place in our performance. They come all day long, saying that they can sing, or dance, or play some instrument. And when all expenses are paid there's very little to go round. We just keep ourselves alive.”

Vera stayed until the last boat went back to Constantinople, in time for her show that evening. Michael walked with her to the landing-stage as his mother and sisters were preparing a meal for a few friends, among whom would be Sacha Dolin and Prince Andreyev, and Captain Boris Gronov with his wife who helped to wash up sometimes in the restaurant over at Pera.

“Prinkipo is very peaceful,” said Vera, walking by the side of Michael and trying to keep pace with his long strides.

“It’s a paradise between two purgatories,” said Michael. “I shall hate to leave it, but the girls are getting impatient with this picnic life. Olga has a romantic imagination. She thinks the future is going to be all roses. Tania is more thoughtful. She knows we shall have a hard struggle, but she has the courage to face it and isn’t afraid. I am afraid.”

“Fear is weakening,” said Vera. “Don’t be afraid, Michael. You are young and strong. Why should you be afraid?”

Michael strode on a few paces more before he explained why he was afraid.

“I’m very ignorant. I ought to have been to a university and learnt some profession. Over here in Europe I shall have to compete with educated men who know things and have something to offer. I’m not afraid for myself, but for mother, who is not too strong, and for the girls whom I shall have to protect. Now that my father is dead I am the head of the family. Everything is on my shoulders.”

“You are very serious,” said Vera. “You haven’t our Russian temperament, Michael. You are rather German, I think, because of your mother.”

Michael shrugged his shoulders.

“The future is not very amusing in its prospect.”

“It’s always an adventure,” said Vera. “That, after all, is what life means. It’s a strange adventure on the way to Heaven. It’s a trial of one’s spirit. God tests our strength and courage. I think God likes to see us go through the test with courage and gaiety, without despair.”

“You believe in God?” asked Michael, looking at her sideways with surprise. “After all the horrors of war and revolution?”

“Somewhere there must be God,” said Vera. “I say my prayers to Him. Don’t you believe in Jesus Christ?”

“Jesus Christ was a good fellow,” said Michael. “I admit that. But I cannot believe that He bothers about humanity.”

“Because humanity betrays Him again, crucifies Him again,” said Vera. “But, even then, I am sure that He still has pity.”

“No,” said Michael. “If there’s a God, He has no pity. If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, He has no pity. I’ve seen innocent children dying in heaps of typhus and starvation. I’ve seen the dead bodies of young girls massacred by Red soldiers. Where, then, is God?”

“God must weep,” said Vera. “Because there is still love and pity in hearts like yours, Michael, there must be the Spirit of Goodness, higher and more wonderful than that of men, and that surely is a proof that beyond this mystery God waits. I’m a dancing-girl. I dance in a leopard skin. But I think sometimes, and I am aware of God. This beauty, Michael, that moonlight touching these old trees, that sea with little waves like silver, you and I walking together with our spirits touching—these vibrations of life, all this awareness of mystery in us—don’t they mean something more than we understand, and bring us very close to eternity and a guiding spirit?”

Michael was silent again as he walked on. He was thinking very deeply. He was much stirred by these words.

“Sometimes,” he said, “I feel a kind of *frisson*, as though I heard some voice outside myself. I listen intently, as though I should get some message in my soul. It’s hard to explain. I have moments when everything in the world, everything in the universe, becomes a part of me and when I am a part of everything. It’s a kind of joy. It’s a kind of ecstasy. It is perhaps the nonsense of Russian mysticism, which is another name for imbecility.”

“It’s adolescence,” said Vera, like a wise old woman, though she was only twenty. “It’s the stirring of your manhood, Michael. You feel the rush of the Vital Force which is Life. I believe that you are very near to God when you feel like that.”

It was a strange conversation between these two young people on the island of Prinkipo. But they had seen strange and terrible things, and the adventure of life had made them grave for their years, though in Vera’s case this gravity didn’t last for more than a few minutes now and then. It lay in hiding behind her usual gaiety, her light laughter among other friends, and her joyous rhythm as a dancing girl who had to please her public.

They came to the landing-stage, where a few other refugees were waiting for the steamer. Her lights gleamed from afar in a blue twilight. They were reflected on the smooth sea. On board there was the strumming of a balalaika.

“Let’s take shelter in this shed,” said Michael. “There’s a chilly breeze.”

The shed was empty, and the two young Russians stood there alone.

“Vera,” said Michael, “you said something just now which I shall always remember.”

“Yes?”

“They were kind words. You said that I had love and pity in my heart—like God—though not to the extent of God’s love.”

“As a boy you were like that,” said Vera. “I don’t think you’ve changed. I remember your pity for a wounded bird. I saw your love for your lovely mother, and for Miss Browne who taught you English, and for Olga and Tania, and your dog who was a mongrel.”

Michael took one of her hands and raised it to his lips. “It’s you I shall always love, Vera,” he said huskily. “We have always been good comrades. Now it is more than that. You come to me in my dreams. I shall always dream of you. Will you wait for me in this strange adventure of life, until one day you will marry me?”

Vera was silent and then put her arms about him and kissed him on the forehead.

“Oh, Michael,” she said, “it’s too soon to talk of that. We can’t follow the same adventure. We may be separated for many years, I going my way towards the unknown and you going yours.”

“I shall follow you wherever you are,” said Michael. “I shall come to you one day, even if seas divide us.”

“I shall often think of you, Michael. I shall always wish you courage and good fortune. I shall pray for you.”

“At this moment I have no courage,” said Michael. “You are already leaving me.”

Vera laughed in the lonely shed.

“It’s only fifteen minutes to Constantinople. Come and see me dance one night.”

“I should hate to see you dance before that awful crowd.”

“I will dance to you, if I know you are there. . . . Heavens! that’s the steamer ready to go. I must rush, Michael.”

She ran like a wild thing. The gangway was down and the passengers had gone aboard. Vera was only just in time, but that was good enough, and she stood and raised her hand to the boy on shore. He stood there motionless until the boat was a pale gleam with little twinkling lights in the dusky twilight which put its veil over the darkening sea. Through the veil a star peeped out.

XIV

IT was a sad blow to the Markov family when Betty Browne departed from them. Olga and Tania wept with passion and did not believe that they could live without her. She had been like a rock to which they had clung in the shipwreck of their Russian life. Her courage had made them less afraid of Red Terror. Her English sense of humour had been reassuring in the most dangerous hours. She had slaved for them, mended for them, foraged for them. Always by some miracle of tact and character she had steered through the storm of Revolution, talking to kommissars with a cool assurance which somehow daunted them, getting peasants to deliver up hidden food, and going through gipsy adventures as though caravanning in the safety of Surrey. She had saved Olga and Tania from vermin and other abominations. She had attended to their morals, and their manners, and above all she had been their good comrade as well as their unpaid governess.

“We shall be lost without you!” cried Olga.

“We shall be like lost sheep among wolves!” cried Tania.

Their mother was equally grief-stricken at the loss of this young Englishwoman who had stood by them in war and revolution and who had become like her eldest daughter, though she was still called Miss Browne or “Brownie”.

“We owe you everything,” said Anna Markova. “We shouldn’t be alive without you. And now you are going I am more frightened than ever about Olga and Tania. I don’t know what will become of them.”

Betty Browne kissed her hand.

“Pray for me sometimes,” she said. “In England I shall always remember you all. I want to howl. If it weren’t so silly I should shed a bucket of tears and make my eyes all red.”

Her eyes were red on the morning she left Prinkipo. Michael carried her bag—she had packed her things into one small bag—down to the landing-stage, while Olga and Tania clung to her on each side. Oliver Alden, that very helpful though temporary naval officer, had booked a berth for her on an Italian steamer going to Naples. He was waiting for her at the quayside below the Galata Bridge, and relieved Michael of the handbag.

“‘Oh to be in England, now that April’s here’,” he said very cheerfully. “It gives me a pain in the left side to know that I’m carrying the bag of a

lady who is going to England, and even to Surrey, and even to a village in Surrey where I used to go birdnesting in my innocent youth.”

“Don’t forget you’ve promised to come and take tea with me one day,” said Betty Browne.

“I’ve written it in my heart,” answered Alden.

“Do Englishmen have hearts?” asked Olga with mock surprise. “They seem so cold, so lacking in emotion.”

Alden smiled under his naval cap at this pretty girl.

“Englishmen,” he said, “are suppressed volcanoes. We’re the greatest emotionalists in the world, but we’re taught to hide all that by our Nannies and nursery governesses.”

“It must be very bad for you,” said Olga seriously. “Personally, I don’t believe in repression. When I want to laugh, I laugh. When I want to weep, I weep. When I am passionate I let it go off with a bang. But then, of course, I’m Russian.”

“Hasn’t even Miss Browne taught you a little English self-control?” asked Alden, laughing at this candour.

“I gave up trying,” said Betty Browne. “Nature was stronger than my book of rules.”

She slipped her hand through Olga’s arm and hugged it tight to her side.

Passengers were already going aboard the Italian steamer which was surrounded by Turkish caiques, rowed by Kurds, with Greek and Armenian traders trying to sell their merchandise to the ship’s crew.

“Nobody’s allowed on board unless making the voyage,” said Alden. “They’re afraid of stowaways and people without passports.”

“Oh!” said Betty Browne. “What a pity!”

She had turned a little pale. She was blinking away her tears. The moment of farewell was near. Olga and Tania began to weep again noisily, and flung their arms about this plain-faced English girl who had been with them through strange and terrible adventures. Michael was the last to embrace her, and he kissed her a dozen times on both cheeks, making her face flame with colour because he was so Russian and she was so English.

“One day we shall come to England,” said Michael. “One day we shall all live together again. You are our sister.”

“Oh, my poor dears,” said Miss Browne. “Whatever will you do without me? You’re all so disorderly. You’re all so helpless. I feel a beast leaving you all like this.”

She had to leave them. The ship's siren was wailing like a banshee, the sound that had been the signal for so many partings and for so many beginnings of new adventures. They saw Miss Browne waving a handkerchief across the rail as the ship went out to the golden waters.

"A nice type of young woman," said Oliver Alden. "Dead honest. Steel true. I dare say she plays a good game of golf."

He treated the Markov family to tea at Tokatlin's and kept from them an unpleasant piece of news which had reached him as a Naval Intelligence Officer, temporarily attached to the supply service of Russian refugees on Prinkipo.

XV

It was necessary to leave Prinkipo. News was brought one day by Oliver Alden that the British Government could no longer see its way to provide rations for the Russian exiles. It was with much regret that they had to withdraw this aid.

“The fact is, my dear lad,” said Oliver, speaking to young Markov, a few days after the departure of Miss Browne, “that the Labour members in the House of Commons have been making trouble about it. They have a secret sympathy—not too secret—with the Russian Soviet Government. They believe it to be a democratic institution which has established the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. You and I may believe that it is another form of tyranny, very stern in its discipline and very ruthless in its methods. I confess I keep an open mind. But meanwhile I feel terribly sorry that I have to stop supplies. It makes me feel a bit of a cad.”

“For some of us,” said Michael, “it is perhaps a sentence of death.”

“Not so bad as that, I hope,” answered Alden, who felt a bit of a cad though he had no control over the British House of Commons.

The news was received with stupor by some of the refugees. They had relied on these British rations for their daily needs, supplemented by occasional meals in Constantinople after bartering little treasures. Some of them had settled down in Prinkipo and had no idea what would happen to them after this picnic life. They were like English gipsies who had squatted on a heath so long that it seemed an outrage when they were told to move on.

“We are betrayed again,” said Prince Andreyev. “The English have always betrayed us.”

“What shall we do now, Michael?” asked Tania. “We shall have to earn our daily bread somehow. It’s not going to be easy. And we shall have to get a lodging over our heads. That will cost money. Where’s the money?”

“Vera is a wretch not to find me a place at the Petits Champs,” said Olga.

“I must make some plans,” said Michael gravely.

One of his plans was to find lodgings in Constantinople. For a few weeks, until he found some work, they would have to live by selling one more of his mother’s rings—the one with a big diamond which held a little world of light.

“It’s hateful having to sell it,” said Michael that night when his mother unwrapped the old shirts and took it from a sock.

Anna Markova touched it with her lips.

“I shan’t regret parting with it,” she said bravely, “if it provides us with food and lodging.”

“You are always brave, mother,” said Michael.

“I always try to be brave,” she told him, as he put his arms about her.

For a little while she had not been brave, after reading a letter from her sister in Vienna.

We are in great distress [wrote Michael’s Aunt Seppi from Vienna]. All the Austrian gentry are reduced to dire poverty. My dear husband has lost everything he had in Bohemia, which now belongs to the Czechs. Vienna is a city of despair. Thousands are starving. We are longing to see you again, and will do all we can to help you, but at the present time we do not advise you to come. There are too many Russian refugees here already, and many of them are in a dreadful state. A little later, dearest Anna—

It was the breakdown of another hope. She had hoped that in Vienna she would get house room for Michael and the two girls and herself. But her sister was now stinting and scraping to keep her girls decently dressed and well enough fed. Her sister’s husband, once with great estates, was an ill-paid official in the Hofburg.

He had written a separate letter, very kind, but not encouraging.

You ask me whether I could send your boy, Michael, to the University here. My dear sister-in-law, I must tell you frankly that such a thing is impossible. I earn a mere pittance. I am wearing pre-war clothes. I deny myself cigars. My pretty daughter has to go to bed when her underclothes are in the wash. That sounds incredible. It is what happens in Vienna. Perhaps things will be better in a year or two. You know our Austrian character. We live on hope, and a little music now and then.

“I remember,” said Michael’s mother, “that your uncle Rudi was a great dandy. He used to take us for drives round the Ring in a carriage with two horses, and the flower girls used to throw bouquets to us in return for a handful of silver.”

“That was in another kind of world,” said Michael.

Both those letters made Michael’s mother more anxious. She had grieved over them. Michael could see a look of despair and fear in her eyes which she tried to hide from him. But now she put a brave face on things. She made light of parting with that diamond ring. She was even a little gay about it.

“I believe it will bring us good luck,” she told Michael. “I have a feeling, my dear, that now we are leaving Prinkipo we shall be happier. At least we shall know the worst, and I have a good friend helping me.”

She spoke the last words mysteriously, with a little secret smile.

“Who is that?” asked Michael. “Mr. Alden or Princess Ivanova?”

“It’s a secret. I don’t like talking about it in front of the girls. They would only laugh at me.”

“Tell me,” said Michael. “I’ll promise not to blab!”

“Perhaps you will laugh at me too, Michael. You have become rather sceptical. But I have found a new saint. She is called the Little Flower. She works the most wonderful miracles for those who believe in her. It was Princess Ivanova who told me about her first. She was literally starving in Constantinople and then heard of the Little Flower. That very day—five minutes after—she found ten English pound notes lying in the gutter at her feet as she went up from the Galata Bridge. Thousands of people must have passed them. They were rolled up tightly in an india-rubber band.”

Michael was silent for a second. On the tip of his tongue was a sceptical remark, words of utter disbelief, a laugh of ridicule. But after a glance at his mother’s face, with a kind of mystical light in her eyes, like a child who talks of fairies, he spoke gently:

“My word, the Little Flower sounds good! I hope she will work a miracle for us. If she does, I’m prepared to say my prayers to her night and morning.”

He was not quite sure that any miracle happened when he went to sell the diamond in a dark old shop kept by an Armenian, behind Tokatlin’s. He had been recommended to this man by Andreyev. Tania was with him when he pulled the ring out of his pocket and unwrapped it from a bit of tissue paper.

“How much will you give for this? It’s a good diamond and worth a lot.”

The Armenian peered at it under his hooked nose.

“It’s a diamond, you say? It looks to me like paste.”

“It’s a diamond which shone in the Imperial Russian Court,” said Michael haughtily. “Don’t talk nonsense, old man.”

“Lots of rubbish comes from Russia. It’s mostly rubbish I get offered by you refugees.”

The old man stuck a glass into his eye and peered at the diamond again.

“It might be a diamond,” he said doubtfully. “I wouldn’t like to say.”

“It flashes like a star,” said Michael. “Give it back. I’ll take it somewhere else.”

The old man clutched it in his hand.

“No, no, don’t be hasty, young man. I’ll admit it’s a diamond. But it has a flaw in it. It’s worth nothing much. There are too many diamonds in the world today. They’re just trash—jewels for Christmas bon-bons.”

“Give it back or I’ll grab it,” said Michael. “You’re an old robber. I’ll fetch that Italian policeman outside.”

“Now don’t be silly,” said the Armenian. “Don’t be violent, my dear boy. I’m going to make you an offer. You have a noble face and your sister is very beautiful. I’m fond of young people. For that reason I make you an offer which will ruin me. I offer you two Turkish pounds for this stone which you call a diamond.”

It was Tania who grabbed the diamond from the old man as he opened his palm again to blink at it. It lay in his palm like a star throwing out light, until Tania snatched it.

“For the love of God,” said the Armenian. “One can’t do business in this way. I’m a gentle old man. I dislike violence. And I’m very generous in my dealings. Now what do you say if I offer ten Turkish pounds?”

What Michael said was a very terrible oath in Russian.

It was half an hour before the old robber offered a sum which Michael and Tania thought worth accepting. It would enable them to get rooms in Constantinople and live somehow for a few months.

They found rooms in an apartment-house at the far end of Pera. They were clean, airy, and nicely furnished. The rent seemed cheap.

“Payment in advance, of course,” said the proprietor, who was a Greek with smiling eyes and a knowledge of Russian which he spoke badly but fluently.

Michael paid over the first instalment.

“We shall move in tomorrow,” he said. “We shall be here at five o’clock.”

“Good! . . . Good!” said the Greek. “Excellent. The rooms will be ready for you.”

It was a tiring business packing up and getting away from Prinkipo, after many farewells from those not yet ready to go for lack of lodgings in Constantinople. Michael’s mother looked very tired when they arrived at the door of their new apartments, five flights up a tall house.

“The rooms are not at all bad, mother,” said Michael, “I think you will like them.”

The Greek with the smiling eyes opened the door.

“The rooms are ready,” he said. “They are spotlessly clean.”

Michael strode into the sitting-room and stared round with astonishment and stupefaction. There was not a stick of furniture in it.

“What is this?” he asked in a strangled voice. “Where is the furniture?”

“The furniture?” asked the Greek, with mild surprise. “It is of course removed. I’ve had it cleared out of all the rooms. The price I named was for unfurnished apartments and even then too cheap!”

“Oh, Michael!” said his mother, touching his arm.

Michael threatened to knock the head off the Greek if he did not return the furniture without delay. The Greek with the smiling eyes smiled rather dangerously.

“The International Police are very trustworthy,” he answered. “If I am knocked on the head, you and your womenfolk will get free lodgings in a prison which is very verminous.”

“We had better stay, Michael,” said his mother. “I am very tired.”

They stayed. That night they lay on the bare boards with their bundles for pillows. On the following day Michael brought back some mattresses with the aid of a Kurdish porter, and later some cheap bits of furniture, brought on a cart by two donkeys.

The washing arrangements in this apartment-house left much to be desired. It was all very squalid for Anna Markova who had once been a great lady of Russia, and for two girls who were old enough to remember their pretty frocks and their pleasant nurseries. They regretted the absence of Betty Browne. She would have made things more comfortable. She would have found a joke somewhere.

XVI

OLIVER ALDEN took tea now and then in the little old palace on the Bosphorus where there was a miniature mosque in the garden and a beautiful lady in the drawing-room. He found a pleasure in sinking into a deep arm-chair in a nicely furnished room which might have been in an English country house, except for polished floors strewn with Persian rugs, and that marvellous view from the lead roof outside. He also felt a pleasure in sitting opposite Beatrice Armstrong, who made a very charming picture in her short-sleeved frock of sprigged muslin, with the Turkish sun touching her reddish hair, as it streamed through the lattice windows. It was amusing and pleasant, he thought, to find this civilized and English-looking room in a city crowded with refugees and every type of race in the Near East. It was interesting to talk to Beatrice who had known his own crowd before the War, in Chelsea and Kensington. She talked intelligently, but always with that hint of being in hiding and keeping a little secret chamber of her soul locked against the outside world, and even against her best friends.

One afternoon she asked him about England.

“What’s it like now? Henley and I went back for a few weeks after the War, but we didn’t see much of it, and had to rush back again because of his business. He saw a chance of making some money and that’s a thing he never lets slip.”

Oliver Alden noticed a faint hint of contempt for a money-making husband, but took no notice of that and answered the question about England, which she repeated in another form.

“I can’t say I know much about those island people,” he said, accepting her offer of a Turkish cigarette. “I went home on leave four or five times during the War, and saw *Chu Chin Chow* and other shows, and listened respectfully to the platitudes of my honoured father, who was all for killing the last German, even though the last of our own blue-eyed boys were to die in the process. That made me feel rather sick, especially as my two kid brothers had already died like little gentlemen in the neighbourhood of Ypres. I didn’t like the ferocity of elderly ladies, or the smug satisfaction of University professors and retired civil servants who were doing their bit and denouncing the Hun as they grew potatoes on their back lawns or helped in the harvest fields. So many of my contemporaries were dead or mangled that I felt rather hipped on shore leave. I preferred being sick in the North Sea.”

“And now?” asked Beatrice. “Can one live in England without everyone prying into one’s private life? Have people become more broadminded?”

Alden puzzled over that sentence for a moment. Did it conceal any secret desire for a hiding-place? He remembered some strange words he had overheard between this woman and his friend Paulett, the newspaper correspondent.

“I don’t know about becoming broadminded,” he said. “I doubt if there’s much change in the English mind and tradition after the hectic fever of war days and the somewhat wild reaction of post-war days, when English girls seemed to lose their heads a bit and grab at the first man who offered them a drink, or a dance at a night-club. I expect all that is rather temporary. England is very traditional, especially when one gets beyond the reach of London where the pavement ends.”

“Yes,” said Beatrice thoughtfully, “I expect one must live in London if one wants to avoid gossip and social curiosity. I have a horror of that—and yet I pine for English lanes and meadows. Do your people still live in Cadogan Gardens?”

Alden laughed as though Cadogan Gardens hid a private jest.

“They do. My honoured father has only left Cadogan Gardens for three months during the last six years, and that was when he attended the Conference in Paris and helped to draw up the Treaty of Versailles, which its authors still proclaim to be a sacred covenant bringing peace to a stricken world and fulfilling the promises of a war to end war—and may God have mercy on their souls!”

“You don’t seem to agree with them,” said Beatrice, with her elusive smile.

“It was a peace of vengeance,” said Alden. “It violated all the promises of Wilson. It betrayed the hopes of the common folk for a new era of justice among peoples—their decent hopes for security and fellowship. It will lead to a pack of trouble in Europe. There are going to be many more chapters in the Martyrdom of Man.”

Beatrice Armstrong fluttered her eyelids at him as she answered in a low voice: “The martyrdom of woman will go on until the last chapter. No hope for her, I’m afraid. War or no war, she is the slave or the plaything of men. She’s bound to have a rotten time anyhow, because she’s made that way. Don’t you agree, Oliver?”

He hesitated to agree with such a philosophy of pessimism. He hedged on the subject.

“They’re more delicate, perhaps. They’re more easily wounded.”

“Private relationship is more difficult than international agreement,” said Beatrice. “It’s more difficult to live in peace with one man than with a nation. The warfare is secret but very deadly sometimes.”

Oliver Alden was silent for a moment. He knew perfectly well that this was a personal revelation. Women, except, perhaps, Russian women, never talk in the abstract, they bring every problem down to their own experience.

“Do you think of going back to England soon?” he asked irrelevantly, and then felt rather mean in asking this question, having heard those words between Paulett and Beatrice. It seemed like prying.

“Henley can’t leave Constantinople just yet,” she answered. “His business all went to pieces during the War. Now he has to build up again. As you know, his firm is the oldest trading house in the Mediterranean.”

“Yes,” said Alden, “I know that.”

“My husband,” said Beatrice, “is a trader by instinct and blood. He has a touch of the Mediterranean race. Some people call him a Dago. I heard a young English snotty the other day talking over a cocktail in this very room. He said, ‘That fellow Armstrong is a Dago’. Of course he didn’t know I heard him. The naval voice is very carrying.”

“He ought to have had his ears boxed,” said Alden.

Beatrice shrugged her beautiful shoulders.

“Oh, he was only telling the truth. Henley is a Dago all right. He has a touch of the Oriental.”

“Well, why not?” asked Alden. “What’s wrong with that?”

Suddenly, to Alden’s dismay, she put her hands up to her face and began to weep convulsively.

“My dear!” he said, “my dear. How can I help?”

He had known her as a girl. He had once been in love with her. He had often been to her father’s studio. He had a right to ask if he could help.

She calmed herself with a fine act of self-control.

“Sorry,” she said, after a few moments. “That’s idiotic. But you’re an old friend, Oliver, and I want a friend.”

“He’s here,” said Alden. “How can I be of any use, Beatrice?”

She left her chair and walked over to the window, and he could see her touching her eyes with her tiny handkerchief.

When she turned and spoke to him again she was very pale.

“What’s the good of pretending? Everybody knows I hate my husband. It’s common talk in the whole of the British Fleet.”

“Why do you hate him?” asked Alden. “I mean, would you care to tell me why you hate him?”

She told him at some length why she hated Henley Armstrong. It was a matter of temperament. The man was fiendishly jealous. He couldn’t bear her to be friendly with any other man. During the War they had quarrelled because she liked some of the German officers in Constantinople. He had sulked. He had a violent temper now and then. Once he had locked her in her bedroom. He drank much too when the mood was on him. Weeks would go by and he would hardly speak a word. She had suffered mental torture with him. It was like being shut up with a neurasthenic. He had behaved badly when the British Fleet had come to Constantinople, after the War. Naturally she was glad to see English naval officers. That made him insanely jealous again. He imagined they had all fallen in love with her.

“Very probably they did,” said Alden judicially. “I can quite understand his anxiety.”

Beatrice smiled faintly.

“Oh, they’re just boys. It’s rather a treat for them to come here.”

“Other people come,” said Alden. “Newspaper correspondents among them.”

Beatrice Armstrong glanced at him quickly and a sudden flame of colour leaped to her face.

“Why do you say that?” she asked. “Do you mean John Paulett? Has he said anything?”

“Not a word. But I was out there one night, on the leads. You were talking together. I heard.”

Beatrice was pale now. She looked frightened. There was a wild-bird look in her eyes—a wild-bird trapped.

“He wants me to go to England with him,” she said in a low voice. “He says he will make me happy. Perhaps you heard him say so.”

“Yes,” said Alden.

She stared into his eyes.

“Tell me about him,” she said. “Is he all right? I mean, is he a pukka sahib and all that?”

Alden thought out these questions before answering them.

“I know him only over restaurant tables. He seems very much like the ordinary man—though perhaps a little more intelligent. He has a sense of humour. He pays for drinks at the right time. He wears well-cut clothes, though they’re a bit shabby, as they ought to be. I like him.”

He hesitated for a moment, and then spoke bluntly:

“All the same I wouldn’t hop off with him if I were you. It’s taking too much of a risk. This fellow Paulett may be a first-class rotter for all I know. And though I hesitate to say so, because it seems like preaching, there’s such a thing as loyalty—I mean loyalty to a husband. Couldn’t you get on to better terms with Henley Armstrong? His very jealousy proves that he adores you.”

“No,” said Beatrice. “It’s the jealousy of a mad dog. It’s the jealousy of a Turkish Pasha. It’s degrading to me. It’s a daily torture.”

“If I can be of any help,” said Alden, “in any possible way——”

He wanted enormously to be of help, but her answer chilled him.

“No one can be of help, really. It’s my torture. One can’t take away from other people’s pain, even if it’s only toothache.”

Alden sighed and then smiled.

“Sympathy helps a bit now and then. Friendship helps. I knew you in Chelsea, Beatrice. I was in love with you as a boy. I’m your friend.”

“A good and honest one,” she said, holding out her hand.

It was unfortunate that he held her hand in his strong clasp when her husband came in unexpectedly. Instantly he looked suspicious. Alden could see a sullen line harden his mouth.

“Had a nice tea?” he asked in a cynical voice. “Another old friend?”

“Pre-war,” said Alden. “And, by Jove, how nice it is to see some of your father’s pictures, Beatrice.”

He went over to study one on the opposite wall—a good landscape painting of the Roman bridge at Eashing.

“One can’t beat English landscape painters. We have the tradition. It’s our line of country in the world of Art.”

“Have a cocktail?” suggested Henley Armstrong.

Oliver Alden declined with thanks and took his leave a little later.

XVII

THE orchestra of the Petits Champs lost one of its members, who died of pneumonia in a garret room of the house in which the Markov family had obtained unfurnished lodgings. Michael sat with him when he was taken ill, and his mother nursed him until he died after five days and nights. It was very sad, because he was a nice fellow who had once been an actor in the Moscow Arts Theatre. But his death left a place vacant which Michael filled, after an introduction to the leader of the orchestra by Vera Sokolova.

“For an amateur you don’t play too badly,” said this friendly man, who was a first-class conductor. “At least I hope you will spare me the excruciating agonies I suffer from some members of my orchestra, who play as though they were hyenas and jackals. The noises they produce torture my unfortunate ears until I want to utter screams of pain.”

“I think I can find my way about a line of music,” said Michael modestly. “If I get on to the wrong note I will play it very softly.”

“The drums drown a good deal,” said the great man. “My drummers have well-developed muscles. They ought to have been blacksmiths.”

Michael felt proud when he came home to his family and announced that he had obtained this job. The pay was not magnificent. It was less than that of an office-boy in the City of London, but in Constantinople it would help to pay for bread and soup.

“It’s a start,” said Michael. “I feel tremendously pleased with the idea that I have begun a career. If I practise hard I may become a violinist like Kreisler. It opens a wonderful vista of fame and fortune.”

He spoke with smiling eyes, but not without serious ambition in his secret mind.

“Hurry up, then,” said Olga. “I am greatly in need of some new underclothes.”

“And I,” said Tania, “wish to buy some new books. I have read all I have until I know them by heart.”

Michael’s mother was pleased with him, with a little emotion because this boy would have to work very hard in that place, the Petits Champs, which she disliked very much after all she had heard from Vera Sokolova.

“We shan’t see much of you,” she told him, “and I shall feel very lonely without you in this awful city.”

It was quite true that Michael's family didn't see much of him now that he had a place in the orchestra. The Petits Champs didn't close down until two o'clock in the morning, and there were always afternoon rehearsals, more trying and tiring than the evening performances because of Sorokin's desperate efforts to teach music to ex-officers and other amateurs. It was an exhausting process for him. A man of fine and sensitive ear, he suffered exceedingly. A man of excitable temperament, he wore himself out by his storms of rage, agony, and emotion. He smashed his baton repeatedly, trying to get the right rhythm from this orchestra. He screamed at them. He wept before them. He laughed like a demented man. He made hideous faces at them, expressing the torture of his own soul.

"O God of mercy!" he cried. "Have you no ears? Have you no sense of time? I give you the beat and you ignore me. I say play softly, and you make the din of devils. I show by my hands, by my body, by every vibration in my being, how you should play that line, and by the living God you take no notice and do the very opposite. You are not thinking of what you play. You are probably having visions of beef-steaks and gross meats. You are thinking of the women you loved, or of the Bolsheviks you killed. You are strangling Red devils when you should be playing the angelic music of Schubert. You are wondering whether your uncles and aunts have been executed by Djerjinsky when you should be concentrating on Moszkowski's masterpiece. You inflict Chinese tortures upon me. You have no more music in your souls than fat Turks or German sausages. Oh God! That first violin is playing like a strangled cat, like a dying seal, like a pig's bladder pricked by a pin."

Over and over again there were scenes like that, interrupted by violent quarrels in the orchestra who blamed one another for the horrible orgies of sound produced by the general effect or suddenly resented the abuse of their leader and rose in a body, threatening to go on strike or to hurl poor Sorokin into the Bosphorus.

Michael had one compensation, which was also a pain. Every night he saw Vera Sokolova. Over the body of his violin he saw her come on to the stage in her leopard skin, or in less clothes than that. She had a grace and rhythm which he found beautiful to watch. In her Greek dance she was like a primitive thing of the woods, a wild-eyed maenad, a child of Nature, filled with the vibrations of life which move in all that lives. He was aware that she excited the audience, that horrible audience of seamen and riff-raff and dissolute men and vile women whom he came to hate, whom he hated most because they watched the beauty of Vera with leering eyes. They clapped her with thunderous applause. They demanded a repetition of her leopard-skin dance when she was panting and exhausted, as Michael could see from his

place below the footlights. Drunken sailors called out foul words to her. Young Turks stared and smiled at her. It was, thought Michael, disgusting and degrading.

He told her so several times when he had the chance of talking to her now and then, but she put her hand on his arm and laughed, and called him Puritan and German and foolishly non-Russian.

“This is my apprenticeship,” she told him. “I’m learning something every time I appear. And I rejoice that I can give a little pleasure to an audience like this. One day perhaps I shall appear in Paris or Berlin. Then I shall remember these nights in the Petits Champs, with you down there in the orchestra, looking anxious and not too well fed, my poor Michael—our days of trial and poverty—the days when we needed courage and hope.”

“I hate this place,” said Michael. “There is evil in it. It stinks of vice.”

“It’s a part of life,” said Vera. “It won’t touch us if we keep ourselves pure.”

Yet it touched this girl Vera one night in a way that was very displeasing to Michael. She was one of the programme sellers between her dances and had slipped on a frock which was supposed to be in the style of a Russian peasant girl, though peasant-girls are not so dainty in the fields. Michael had his eyes on her as she moved about, offering her programmes to naval men of three fleets, British, French, and American—and to the ordinary groups of Turks, Greeks, and Armenians. She chatted with some of them gaily, as part of her business, making them laugh—and Michael felt a surge of jealousy. Then rage took possession of him. It was when Vera was talking to an elderly Turk, rather distinguished-looking in his red cap. He wore a monocle and looked like one of the officers who had fought at Gallipoli during the War, as no doubt he had. He fixed his monocle and smiled at Vera. Suddenly he put his arm round her waist and drew her close to him and kissed her. For a moment she struggled and after releasing herself smacked him across the face with the back of her hand. He didn’t seem to like it. The monocle fell from his eye. He seized her wrist very tightly and twisted her arm so that she gave a cry of pain. Michael was within a few yards of her. He was playing second fiddle in Schubert’s ‘Marche Militaire’. He was half-way through that stirring piece, conducted by Sorokin with a dramatic baton.

Michael let his bow drop, thrust his violin on to an empty chair by his side and leapt over the rail dividing the orchestra from the audience. In a second he was on the Turk and using his fists like sledge hammers.

Vera gave a scream. Other women in the audience screamed. Two English seamen, fuddled by their drink, were delighted with this diversion

and hit two inoffensive Greeks just to get a fight up. An American sailor said, "We won the War," to an English petty-officer, who struck him on the jaw. Six American sailors resented this treatment of a messmate and attacked the English petty-officer and his group at one of the tables. Some ex-officers of the Imperial Russian Army, acting as waiters, endeavoured to restore order and were involved in a free fight which was joined by several Italians, a young Jew from the bazaar in Stamboul, and a Smyrniot carpet seller. Three Turks leapt down from their box next to the stage and endeavoured to fight their way towards their compatriot with the monocle who had been assaulted by Michael and was bleeding at the nose.

The orchestra went on playing. The drums beat louder. A cornet-player, watching the affray with considerable interest, lost his place in the music and produced the wrong notes very loudly. An English seaman jumped over the rail of the orchestra and put his arm round the neck of a Russian ex-officer who played the 'cello, who was put off his stroke by this affectionate caress. Sorokin shouted, waved his baton, swore Russian oaths, and tried to control his musicians.

It was pandemonium, which lasted for twenty minutes, until the appearance of the military police. Then suddenly there was calm. Michael resumed his seat, bleeding slightly from a wound on the forehead which he had received by falling against the sharp end of a table when flung in that direction by the tall Turk with the monocle. Vera had disappeared behind the scenes. Five minutes later she reappeared on the stage dressed as Columbine and looking as though she had just come from a woodland grove in fairyland.

Sorokin bent down to Michael during the Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song' which he was conducting. He spoke softly but intensely:

"You are an imbecile, Markov! You are a madman! You are like most Russians, a savage of the lowest species. A cannibal! A bandit! Don't you realize that we may lose our licence from the International Police and get condemned as a disorderly house? Then we shall all starve. Then we shall kill you as the cause of our starvation."

Michael blinked his eyes but continued to play Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song'.

He did not regret his action. He would do it again if any swine molested Vera.

Between the acts and behind the scenes when the orchestra were given ten minutes for tea and cigarettes, Sorokin resumed his denunciations. He threatened to turn Michael out of his orchestra.

“I am sorry,” said Michael, “but I am an ex-officer who fought under Wrangel.”

“Exactly,” said Sorokin. “You have become accustomed to murders and massacres.”

“As an ex-officer,” said Michael proudly and angrily, “I defend women when I see them molested by brute beasts.”

“As an ex-officer,” said Sorokin, “you ought to have been in the nursery with a nanny who would smack your backside. In any case you play the violin like a street-corner musician. You have no more ear than a turnip. You are one of my Chinese torturers.”

“On the contrary,” said Michael, white to the lips, “I play extremely well, considering that I am conducted by a madman and play in a lunatic asylum.”

Vera arrived at this moment and took hold of Michael’s hand.

“It was very noble of you,” she said. “You were like a mediaeval knight rescuing a damsel in distress. I hope Mr. Sorokin has been congratulating you on your gallant rescue of his dancing-girl.”

Sorokin laughed—all his anger gone.

“I’ve been swearing at him like a prison warder. Perhaps I allowed my temper to get the better of me.”

He caught hold of Michael and pulled him to his great chest, kissed him on both cheeks, slapped him on the right shoulder, and thrust his fingers through Michael’s hair.

“It was after all superb,” he said. “I’m only sorry that I couldn’t watch the battle. It reached Homeric heights, judging by the din behind me.”

XVIII

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT desired to have a report on the situation in Asia Minor, with particular attention to the possibilities of Greek resistance to an impending attack led by a Turkish patriot named Mustapha Kemal who defied the Peace Treaties and had raised considerable levies with mounted troops and field artillery. Oliver Alden, of Naval Intelligence, was detailed for this task, and proceeded to Smyrna on a Greek boat which had formerly been a pleasure yacht owned by one of the Vanderbilts.

There were several Greek officers on board. At the beginning of the voyage they paced the deck in their smart uniforms with gold epaulettes, looking very pleased with themselves. They talked incessantly, smoked innumerable cigarettes, and fingered strings of beads which are used to work off nervous energy. Down on the lower deck, huddled together, was a crowd of peasants, singing old folk-songs, perhaps as old as the Golden Age of Greece, and very pleasant in their chant-like sound blown to Alden's ears by a stiff breeze, which increased in strength as Constantinople became dream-like in the distance and the little ship came into the open waters.

One by one, as the stars came out, the Greek officers retired to seek their cabins. The songs on the lower deck ceased and the huddled peasants were also sick. Oliver Alden had become less prone to seasickness after many tossings in the North Sea, and stayed on deck because of a star-strewn sky and a sense of magic on the waters. He was on the sea of adventure in the ancient world. The Greeks of Homer's age had sailed their boats on these waters and had looked up to those same stars with a belief in the fairy-tales of mythology. Behind those stars they had seen the heroic gods and the beauty of goddess women. Those Greeks had been great traders and pioneers of civilization. They had established colonies in Asia Minor which even now remained. The peasants round Smyrna were of purer stock than the Greeks of Athens. Their spades and ploughs still turned up exquisite bits of pottery and statuary which had been fashioned by their forefathers three thousand years ago, and the foundations of old cities in which there had been noble architecture and a culture more advanced than any that had followed. It was based on slave labour, but Greek slaves had a better time than free labourers in English fields or factories, at least in the Victorian Age. It was astonishing how the Greek spirit had become aware of beauty and had worshipped it. It seemed to be the breath of their life. Everything

they worked and fashioned expressed this sense of form and life. Their philosophers had reached out to ultimate truth.

Alden was not very strong on Greek philosophy, but standing there on the deck of a small Greek ship, looking up to those millions of twinkling stars above an iridescent sea, he had an idea that Greek thought had gone as far as human intelligence may get behind the veil of truth. All very astonishing, he thought. In spite of all our mechanization and our discoveries of scientific law, we were not really more civilized. Even Christianity had not gained much of a victory over barbarism. That World War was rather a knock-out blow to man's belief in progress. What happened in Russia—what was happening—was not very reassuring to our self-conceit. All those cruelties—all those horrors . . .

He leant over the rail watching the long white wake of the ship from which little flames seemed to leap because of the phosphorescence.

A girl came up to him and leant close to him with her arms on the rail. He had noticed her sitting alone on a coil of rope forward of the bridge. She spoke to him.

“Say, Mr. English officer, I guess you and I are the only passengers who are not losing our suppers tonight. Those Greek warriors have given themselves up for lost.”

“Travelling alone?” asked Alden civilly. “An American?”

“Greek,” answered the girl with a laugh. “I learnt the American language at their college in Constantinople. But I can speak English with the right accent. I can also speak Russian, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic, at least well enough to say, ‘I’m a respectable young woman and though I’m quite willing to be pleasant I’m not going to allow any kissing and hugging.’”

Alden glanced at her by the light of a three-quarters moon and those stars above. She was a slightly made young woman, with a rather boyish look because of short hair. She had very bright merry eyes.

“You’re a bit of a linguist,” he admitted. “But why should you lay so much stress on your moral character?”

The Greek girl laughed again.

“Well, it was necessary in the company I’ve been keeping. For the past two years I’ve been living among Red soldiers, Circassian peasants, and Greek sailors. In fact, until yesterday, I was a Greek sailor myself. That’s how I got away from Russia. The boys rigged me out in a pair of their second-best trousers—very loose, you know—and the upper part of a seaman’s kit. I was a nice-looking young seaman. The captain got a bit fresh

when he found that I was a perfectly good female. So I said to him in Greek, 'I'm a respectable young woman. I'm quite willing to be pleasant——' ”

“Come and have a cup of coffee,” said Alden. “I would like to hear your adventures.”

“Then you will have to sit up all night,” said the Greek girl.

They sat up all night. Alden provided the young woman with cigarettes. She returned the compliment by offering him the contents of a paper bag which held a slab of Turkish Delight and some sticks of chocolate.

Like Miss Browne, she had been a governess in Russia after her education at the American college in Constantinople, where she had learnt the American accent and negro spirituals and funny little coon songs, which she sang to Alden between chapters of amazing narrative. The German lady and her two children had escaped from Moscow at the beginning of the Revolution. This girl had been caught by the Red tide. She had played the piano for them in soldiers' billets. She had marched with them. She had seen massacres between Whites and Reds. She had been sick at the sight of newly hanged men and then had become hardened to that sort of thing. She had had typhus and slept in pigsties and cattle-sheds. She had wandered all through Russia and lived among Circassians. And somehow through all of it she had kept her gaiety and even her virtue.

“I am still a virtuous young woman,” she said. “And I say my prayers now and then, and I can't say I regret my adventures. I must say I've seen a lot of life. I hope to see some more when I rejoin my parents in Smyrna. It's a great thing, isn't it, to go on seeing life and go on laughing at its funny ways?”

Alden lighted his thirtieth cigarette.

“They don't seem to me so funny as all that,” he remarked. “You've told me things which have raised the hair on my scalp. I'm staggered by the cruelty and beastliness of men. And I'm still more staggered at your laughter and high spirits after all those adventures. I find life terrible when I hear such tales.”

“But it's Life,” said the Greek girl. “Certainly it's terrible sometimes. But isn't life like that? And there is always death very near. I laugh at death. I despise it. It can't frighten me. When one has learnt not to be frightened at death one regains one's sense of humour. Nothing matters then. And isn't all history like that? Men have always killed each other and fought like wolves, and at the same time been kind and generous and loving to their womenfolk and devoted to their children. I find that men are children. I can disarm any

man who looks like a wild beast by talking nonsense to him, and not being afraid of him. They eat out of my hand. They share their food with me. They don't lay a finger on me. I've nursed their heads on my lap when they were wounded and dying. They're so much like little children—even the worst of them.”

“I wish I had your pluck,” said Alden, very much impressed by this young woman.

She laughed and her eyes danced with mirth.

“I know that word ‘pluck’. There was an English girl at the American college. She taught me that word.”

“Sing me another coon song,” said Alden. “They're very amusing.”

She sang him another coon song, about another coal-black mammy. Just before dawn she fell asleep with her head against his shoulder, and he kept very still so that he shouldn't wake her.

XIX

THERE was a fête day of some kind in Smyrna when Alden arrived. Along the front, stretching in a wide curve of white marble-fronted houses, beyond the broad quays, there was a ceaseless parade to and fro of Greek soldiers with their girls. All the ships in the harbour were dressed in bunting and flags were flying from many buildings. Greek officers, very dandified, in much decorated uniforms with highly polished boots, drove along the esplanade in open carriages, carrying big bouquets, on their way to a review by the Commander-in-Chief outside the city. Smyrniot girls, Greek, and Armenian, were in fancy frocks with laced corsets and high-heeled shoes, tripping gaily along with their young men. Bands were playing merry music and the sun-drenched air thrilled with the sound of trumpets and bugle calls. The Turks were visible among these Christian inhabitants. They were mostly dockside labourers, and porters wearing the red fez of Islam. It was all very gay, as though the Greek Army were celebrating a victory, though their only victory, so far, had been achieved at the Conference Table by a wily old diplomat named Venizelos, who had gained the ear of another elder statesman named Lloyd George and obtained for his country an empire bigger than they could safely hold. Over there on the hills the Greek Army was holding a line which divided them from a Turkish force gathering and growing in strength as the months passed. That Turkish wolf, Mustapha Pasha, had vowed by Allah, and Mohammed His Prophet, that he would never rest until he had taken Smyrna and driven the Greek Army into the sea. But no shadow of doom crept through the sunlight that lay glittering on those white-fronted houses as Oliver Alden stepped on to the quayside.

He said 'au revoir' to the Greek girl who had slept against his shoulder and awakened merry and bright.

"Good luck," he said, smiling at her. "I hope you will have a nice quiet time at home until you marry some good fellow with a prosperous business."

She held out her hand in a boyish comradely way.

"We shall meet again in the funny old world," she said. "I don't want to marry a man with a widening waist-belt. I'm ready for a lot more adventure before I make baby clothes and mend a husband's socks."

She was the daughter, as she had told Alden under a night of stars, of the proprietor of the Grand Hotel Splendid Palace, to which she pointed. It stood

square and ugly along the water-front.

“My papa and mamma are going to be vastly surprised,” she said. “They must have given me up for lost long ago.”

She saluted in the naval style and went on her way to her father’s hotel, into whose name he had crowded all magnificence.

The Greek officers who had been seasick all night looked pale and less heroic than at the beginning of their voyage. But they pulled themselves together and were soon being embraced by loving womenfolk, who were awaiting them at the landing-stage. The peasants who had sung old folk-songs carried their bundles down the gangway and were welcomed also by their own kind. Probably they were returning to farmsteads outside Smyrna after the War years when they had been diggers of trenches.

Oliver Alden, Naval Intelligence Officer, permitted himself a few hours of sightseeing before reporting to Greek headquarters. Smyrna, he thought, was a rather attractive seaport. Once it had been busy with the merchandise of many races. Camel caravans had plodded their way to this port from Eastern cities. Armenian traders had grown rich and had built those white marble-fronted houses which he now passed. Ships and barges were laden with the produce of Greek farmers who still tilled the soil which was ploughed by their forefathers in the days of the first colonies. The Turks had not driven them away, though they had massacred many of the Armenians as recently as the World War.

This sea front with its modern houses masked an older city into which Alden wandered with watchful eyes. It masked an Oriental squalor of narrow streets with wooden shops and booths where groups of Turkish women, more closely veiled than those in Constantinople, bargained for silks and slippers and household goods. In the old markets at the end of Frank Street, Alden sauntered through narrow passages with vaulted roofs, where old Turks sat cross-legged in their alcoves selling carpets from Ouchak and Angora, dried raisins and vegetables, strips of coloured silks for Turkish dresses, Sofrali linen, Manissa cotton, German-made hardware, and all manner of rubbish from the East and West, drenched in the aroma of spices, moist sugar, oil, and camels.

Alden was politely received at the Greek headquarters, where he was saluted by the military guard. A band was playing outside in the square, and Alden was astonished by hearing the music of ‘Patience’ which he had once strummed on a piano in a Chelsea studio and heard with rapture from the pit of the Savoy. Strange music to hear in Smyrna on a day of festival! In the state-chamber of the Commander-in-Chief Greek staff officers, waisted,

scented, highly polished, swaggered in and out. An Intelligence Officer whom Alden had met in Athens during the War embraced him emotionally and invited him to dinner that night.

“My wife will be enchanted to meet you,” he said. “She plays the piano delightfully. We will have a little music.”

“How are things going?” asked Alden with professional zeal. “I suppose you know that Mustapha Kemal is getting all the supplies he needs and is ready for attack?”

A sudden look of fear came into the eyes of the Greek Intelligence Officer. It was just a moment’s revelation of secret terror. He covered it by an uneasy laugh.

“Our General is very confident,” he said. “Our staff officers are extremely cheerful about the situation.”

Alden was taken into the General’s room. The Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army was a very fat old gentleman, uncomfortable in his tight belt and perspiring freely on that hot day. The windows of his room were open, and the merry music floated in with the scent of flowers and the smell of the warm sea. As Alden sat in front of him after an impressive salute, the old gentleman’s fat fingers moved about a big map of the Greek lines, and he spoke in rapid French with a frightful accent.

“The situation is excellent. My army is magnificent in training and morale. They are longing to advance against the Turk who is utterly demoralized. These poor Turkish peasants—I’m sorry for them—forcibly enlisted by that scoundrel Mustapha Kemal—want nothing but leave to go home. We intend to advance and smash their lines. It will be a parade march.”

He laughed deep in his throat and repeated those words.

“It will be a parade march, Lieutenant.”

“The political situation,” said Alden, “is not favourable to Greece. I have information which it is my duty to lay before you.”

The Commander-in-Chief relied upon the information of his own officers. He agreed that the political situation was of the worst. It reeked with treachery and intrigue.

“The French are of course conspiring with the Nationalists at Angora and supplying them with arms and ammunition. That is a betrayal of the Peace Treaties. The Italians are no better, and very jealous of Greek claims in Asia Minor.”

“It is all very awkward, sir,” said Alden.

The Commander-in-Chief waved away that thought.

“We rely upon ourselves. We trust also in the noble friendship of England and in the sympathy of your great statesman Lloyd George. He has said generous words about the Greek Army. They are not exaggerated. The Greek Army will astonish the world by its valour and victories.”

Alden was not in a position to contradict this optimist. He was not authorized to inform this old gentleman that England and its people were fed up with war and that the British Dominions had given notice that they would not send a man or a boy to fight for Greece if there was more trouble with the Turks. As an officer of Naval Intelligence he had no authority to warn this genial old man against the Celtic exuberance of a British Prime Minister who was losing his spell over the people who had believed in him.

“I am much honoured by this interview,” said Alden, rising and giving his best salute. “You will permit me, no doubt, to keep in touch with your Intelligence Officers.”

“They will tell you everything,” said the General. “We wish to keep in the closest touch with the British Navy and Army. We receive valuable information from your Naval Intelligence in Constantinople. Our relationship is most happy and comradely.”

That evening, and on other evenings, Alden had dinner with the Greek Intelligence Officer whom he had known in Athens. His name was Pericles Politis and he was a charming little man, with a pretty wife and two children of six and seven who looked like Raphael’s angels in the Sistine Chapel. They spoke French very prettily, and Alden, who had a passion for children, was delighted to play with them, and hunted the bazaars in Smyrna for amusing toys which delighted them. Mrs. Politis played the piano after they had gone to bed, and her husband sang old French chansons in a pleasant tenor. Alden was persuaded to sing some English songs and they listened with enthusiasm to his rendering of ‘Drink to me only with thine eyes’, and ‘I saw a lady passing by’.

“We shall always regard you as one of our great and dearest friends,” said Politis. “It is a great honour to have you in our house.”

“Not at all,” said Alden in his English way. “It’s pleasant to have this peep of home life. I have fallen in love with your children.”

They plied him after dinner with Greek wines and sweetmeats. At intervals Mrs. Politis, who did not seem to have any servant, slipped out of

the room to prepare more cups of Turkish coffee or to bring in a tray with brandy liqueurs.

It was when she was out of the room on one of these duties that her husband turned to Alden and spoke to him in a low voice:

“My dear friend,” he said, “I have moments of great terror.”

Alden raised his eyebrows.

“Of what kind?”

“Our Commander-in-Chief is very confident. Our staff officers are very pleased with the military situation.”

“Yes!” said Alden.

Politis stared into his eyes.

“I am not so pleased. The morale of our troops is very bad. That grey wolf, Mustapha Kemal, has a military genius. His Turkish levies are fired by fanaticism. He has ample stores of ammunition and considerable artillery. He is ready for attack. I am, I must confess, very much afraid.”

He looked very much afraid. There was a greenish pallor beneath his dark skin. There was terror in his eyes.

“It isn’t on account of myself,” he went on, “though I don’t pretend to be a hero. But I am afraid—terribly afraid—on account of my dear wife and my children. If the Turks break our lines and come down to Smyrna they will not be safe. I dare say you have heard that there were unfortunate incidents when we first came here. The Turks will not forget that. There will be a massacre.”

Alden knew about those unfortunate incidents. When the Greek Fleet had put into Smyrna the sailors had bayoneted many Turkish porters and dockside men in full sight of officers and women sitting on the balcony of the Grand Hotel Splendid Palace. Turkish blood had stained the stones of the esplanade.

Alden sat with his cup of coffee on his knee. For a moment he felt the presence of a spectre. It touched his spirit.

Mrs. Politis came into the room again.

“Irene wants you to go up and say good night to her,” she said with a smile. “Is that asking too much? She wants to tell you that she loves you very dearly. She wants to be your little sweetheart!”

“And so she is!” said Alden.

He went up to Irene's room. She sat up in bed in a little blue dressing-gown, and her liquid dark eyes, very big and beautiful, were shy as he came to her.

"It would be very kind of you if you would tell me an English fairy story," she said in French.

Her little sister popped up her head from beneath the bedclothes of a little white cot in the same room.

"I want to listen too," she cried.

Alden told an English fairy story to these two Greek children in his best French. It was the story of Cinderella, which held them spellbound.

"What reward will you give me for that tale?" he asked when he had finished it.

"A thousand kisses," said Irene.

"A million kisses," cried little Eunice.

He was satisfied with less than that, and then said good night to them.

Irene called him back.

"Why did you look so grave as you left the room?" she asked. "Why did you have a sad look in your eyes?"

He laughed and said, "Not a bit sad. Quite merry, in fact."

But the quick eyes of Irene had seen the shadow of a thought in his mind. It was the thought of what would happen in Smyrna if the Turks broke through.

XX

LIEUTENANT ALDEN was one of those officers who stood on the deck of a British cruiser watching and listening to a scene of horror in Smyrna.

“This is frightful,” said Alden to a fellow officer. “It freezes my blood. Surely to God we can do something to save those people.”

The other officer was leaning over the rail, looking through a glass.

“Pretty ghastly,” he agreed. “But those are our orders. England doesn’t want to get mixed up in that schemozzle. We don’t want another war on our hands.”

Alden was white to the lips beneath his naval cap. He could see fierce flames rising from the Armenian quarter on the esplanade. Those marble-faced houses were burning. Their roofs had already crashed in, flinging up fountains of sparks above the rush of flames. On the quayside were crowds of Greeks and Armenians. They seemed to be running about. Their figures were dark below the glare of fire. Screams of terror came from them, blood-curdling across the water.

“God!” said Alden. “We led those people on. Lloyd George promised them our support. It’s hellish.”

Somewhere in that scene of horror—that furnace of hell’s cruelty—were Politis and his pretty wife and those two children like Raphael’s angels. One of them had wanted to be Alden’s little sweetheart. She had offered to reward him for a fairy-tale with a million kisses, of which he had accepted six.

Immediately opposite his line of vision, in the centre of the front which swept round the bay like the curve of a Turkish scimitar, was the Grand Hotel Splendid Palace. It had caught fire. Flames were licking out of its windows. Great tongues of greedy flame. Alden thought of that Greek girl, Daphne Casamatis, who had fallen asleep with her head against his shoulder under a sky strewn with innumerable stars. Perhaps this would be her last adventure. She would never sing her little coon songs again if the Turkish bayonets were still greedy for Greek blood. He had admired her courage, her gaiety, her contempt of death. She wasn’t afraid of death, she said.

“I’m afraid the Greeks asked for it,” said the naval officer at his side. “And that long-haired wizard, Lloyd George, thought he could incite the British Empire to another little war. Nothing doing. The Dominions made

that pretty clear. The old man sounded the tocsin and nobody listened. The World War was quite enough for one lifetime. I can't say I'm lusting for another."

"Women and children are being massacred while we stand by like this," said Alden, with anguish in his voice. "Is that our naval code?"

"It's the code of Blue Funk, Alden," said the other officer. "Our little gentlemen in Whitehall have all got the wind up. What do they care if there's another massacre of Armenians, as long as they keep their jobs?"

There were other neutrals looking on at the burning of Smyrna and the terror of its population, at the mercy of Turkish soldiery. An American fleet was lying in the bay. Their wireless was busy interchanging messages with British ships.

"I am sending my marines ashore," wirelessly the American Admiral.

The American marines took possession of the quayside and shoved back with the butt ends of their carbines any Turk who tried to maltreat crowds of fugitives who had escaped from their burning houses and were fighting each other to get on small boats. Some of them were wading into the sea. Shrieks rose from Greek women among groups of Turkish militia who beat them, tearing off their clothes and robbing them of rings and trinkets. As night fell the seafront became an inferno, as the flames spread and houses crashed and the sky was red with fire.

XXI

THE fate of Smyrna created a panic in Constantinople, where there were many Greeks and Armenians and Russian refugees and Jews, and people of other races who were afraid of the sword of Islam. Many of them fled, crowding the trains which would take them, they thought, to safer cities further west, though there was not much safety to be had for some of them in future history which is now the past.

That grey wolf, Mustapha Kemal, whose irregular army had smashed the Greek line in Asia Minor, advanced his troops and his guns by rapid stages towards the Dardanelles. He demanded the return of Constantinople and the evacuation of the international armies and police. He took a high hand with the Great Powers who had smashed the Turkish Empire and shared it out among themselves in the name of Mandates. The victorious powers were very much abashed by this challenge of their high authority and of their peace treaties. They had had an idea that they had arranged things very nicely and made a secure and permanent peace. They had demobilized millions of men who had fought for four and a half years in the World War. It would be difficult to get them back again. They had spent quite a lot of money on that World War. Great Britain had spent as much in those four and a half years as in two and a half centuries of previous history. Now the price was being paid in taxation which was sacrificial. The dead were in new graves, on a thousand battlefields, and their headstones had not yet been put up above the little mounds of earth. The ex-servicemen in many countries were still seeking jobs in a world which seemed to have no use for them now that they had come back. There was bitterness in their hearts. They assembled at street corners, asking awkward questions of God and government. What had they been fighting for? Where was their reward? Where was the fulfilment of all the promises made to them that the War was going to make the world safe for democracy, that there were to be homes for heroes, that this peace was to be the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth?

“They won’t get me again for any bloody war,” said front-line soldiers who were now in back-street slums.

“*Je m’en fiche de la guerre, et des généraux et de tous les imbéciles,*” said the former French poilu who was now back in his factory or on his farmstead.

The Allies who had loved each other so much during the War, at least according to official speeches, now did not love each other so much. They had quarrelled over the spoils of victory, and over the sharing of mythical millions to be paid by Germany and the defeated nations. France was seriously annoyed with British policy and perquisites in Syria and Palestine. "The English have armed the Arabs against us," said French staff officers, using black troops against Arab chiefs. "That imbecile Lloyd George wishes to drag us into a war with Turkey, after giving away our claims to Greece, which was pro-Boche in the Great War."

"We fought for nothing," said Italian soldiers; "England and France took the swag. We have been betrayed. Our secret treaty of London was repudiated by that long-toothed schoolmaster, Wilson, who insulted our ambassadors and treated them like naughty schoolboys. The Mediterranean is our sea. To hell with the Greeks."

Mustapha Kemal had been supplied with French artillery and French ammunition for his attack on the Greek lines. Now a French politician named Franklin Bouillon was over at Angora offering cigarettes to Mustapha Kemal Pasha and his political advisers, assuring them of the friendship of France, and its earnest desire to act as mediator with Great Britain, which was, of course, a nation of shopkeepers. M. Franklin Bouillon had a great gift of words which never ceased, and a great gift of smiles which never left his face, and an extraordinary self-assurance which made him a self-appointed ambassador of France in this new menace to peace.

To Constantinople came a very tall British General, by name of Harington, commonly called Tim by his military friends. He had been the greatest staff-officer in France and Flanders under General Plumer of the Second Army. Now he had been sent by Lloyd George to pull the chestnuts out of the fire in this very burning situation which might light the flames of war again throughout Europe. He carried in his pocket an ultimatum which would make the guns go off if he delivered it to Mustapha Kemal Pasha. But he had instructions to delay its delivery to the last possible moment of negotiation. This tall general was cold as ice in his manners and in his judgment. He knew that if it came to a battle, his troops were not in a good position or in sufficient numbers for a margin of safety. They were holding a line next to French troops on the other side of the straits round about Chanak. They had hedged themselves in with barbed wire through which presently Turkish soldiers came to grin and spit while negotiations were in progress. One morning the French troops had orders to quit. They marched away from their lines, leaving the British troops unguarded on their flank.

The Tommies said rude things to them as they departed. It was all very awkward.

It was very awkward to Russian refugees in Constantinople, including the orchestra at the Petits Champs and the waiting women at the Russian restaurant by the Galata Bridge, and families like that of Michael and his mother and sisters in tenement houses, and the last of them on Prinkipo, and men like Sacha Dolin and Prince Andreyev living on a few jewels hidden in their boots, or getting their meals and a little money for cigarettes now and then by such jobs as washing-up in restaurants and cabarets, like Captain Boris Gronov who had once commanded a Russian warship.

The Petits Champs became deserted by its old clientèle. The pretty Greek girls who had attracted young naval officers had fingered their throats and fled. The young naval officers were denied shore leave. Princess Ozlova and her waitresses in the eating-house near the Galata Bridge stared at empty tables and whispered to one another with frightened eyes. The captain of the Czar's yacht, who had been the chef, took off his white cap and held conferences with the Princess and Russian ex-officers who came in with the latest news and the latest rumours.

"If we stay," said the ex-captain of the Czar's yacht, "we shall certainly have our throats cut. For my own throat I do not care very much, but I am alarmed about my wife and daughter. The Turks are efficient in the art of massacre. They have no love for Christians."

He spoke with fear in his eyes. His face was like the unbaked pastry which he made in his kitchen.

"The Turks in Constantinople are losing their manners," said Captain Gronov, that helpful naval officer with a pretty French wife. "Madeleine, who is a good Catholic, was talking yesterday to the Reverend Mother of the convent in Pera. That good nun had a story to tell which is rather a warning to all of us. You had better repeat it, Madeleine."

Madeleine repeated it, and there was no colour in her face.

"The convent has been served by a Turkish porter at the gate for forty years. He has grown old in their service and is devoted to the Reverend Mother. She spoke to him yesterday and said, 'What will happen if Mustapha Kemal enters Constantinople with the troops from Smyrna?' I hardly dare tell the answer."

"Tell it, Madeleine," said Gronov. "I find it amusing."

Madeleine saw no humour in it.

“He answered the Reverend Mother: ‘Madame, you know that I love you. When the massacre begins I myself will kill you so that you suffer no pain at all’.”

Captain Gronov, once of the Imperial Russian Navy, laughed loudly at this little anecdote.

“That is the soul of the Turk,” he said.

The others were not amused.

One of the young women who served in the restaurant suddenly caught hold of the little Princess with the grey hair.

“I’m terrified!” she cried. “Princess, save me. I’m not brave. I daren’t wait until these Turkish soldiers come.”

“Where shall we go?” asked Sacha Dolin, who was sitting with an empty coffee-cup by his elbow and a dead cigarette between his lips until he flung it away from him to speak these words.

“Paris,” said the ex-captain of the Czar’s yacht.

Sacha Dolin laughed harshly.

“Paris is overcrowded with Russian refugees. It’s the new St. Petersburg.”

“New York,” said Captain Gronov. “The New World. Let us turn our backs on this stinking Europe. Let us find peace and perhaps a few dollars now and then.”

They discussed this problem until the small hours of the morning. They had already discussed it until the small hours of other mornings. Very few customers came to interrupt their talk.

Sacha Dolin lay down on the floor and slept. His friends were still talking when he woke up again after a bad dream.

XXII

MICHAEL MARKOV was one of those who decided that the time had come to leave Constantinople, for the sake of his womenfolk. There were other reasons. He was uneasy in his mind about his sister Olga. She was seeing too much of Prince Andreyev, who had been attracted by her. Michael had no confidence in his character. He was wildly extravagant on money raised by the sale of family jewels which he had brought out of Russia in a leather case hidden among his shirts and vests. He drank heavily at times and went from moods of wild gaiety to black despair or quarrelsome tempers. He was handsome, elegant, and sometimes charming, but not at all the kind of man whom Michael desired for a brother-in-law.

His mother and Tania increased his alarm by their own anxiety about Olga. When he came home late from the Petits Champs several times Olga was still out, though it was long past midnight.

“You ought not to allow it, mother,” said Michael. “It’s disgraceful. A young girl like Olga ought not to be playing about in Constantinople at this hour of night, especially with a man like Andreyev.”

His mother sighed and raised her hands with a little gesture of hopelessness.

“I’m afraid Olga is getting too old to worry about that word ‘allow’. She’s very wilful. She demands her liberty as a young woman.”

“The fact is, Michael,” said Tania, looking up from a book which she was reading by the light of an oil-lamp, “Olga is ready for the adventure of love. She desires the experience of love. Andreyev is a good-looking animal, though he has no more intelligence than a child of eight.”

“Can’t you talk seriously to her?” asked Michael, who had considerable respect for the good sense of his younger sister. “Can’t you warn her of the extreme danger of going about with a loose-minded fellow like Andreyev?”

Tania laughed at this idea of talking seriously to Olga.

“If you had read as much Dostoevsky as I have you would know that passion is not to be argued with. It’s a blind force. It makes men and women utterly unreasonable. Olga is incapable at the present time of anything resembling common sense. She is daft on Andreyev.”

Michael stared at her gloomily.

“Do you mean to say she is in love with that imbecile?”

“In love?” asked Tania calmly. “What does that mean? If you ask me whether she despises him, I say yes. She knows that he is lacking in morality and loyalty. She knows that he will tire of her in a month or two, or a week or two. But if you ask me whether she enjoys his flattery and is touched by his desire for her beauty, I say yes again. Olga is very happy to have his arms about her.”

“I’m deeply worried,” said Anna Markova. “I can only pray for her safety. She mocks at my pleadings. She laughs at my fears.”

“She won’t laugh when I give her a bit of my mind,” said Michael fiercely. “As for Andreyev, I’ll spoil his handsome face if he shows it in my neighbourhood.”

They were all silent at the sound of a singing voice. It was Olga coming up the wooden stairs of the tenement house. It was two o’clock in the morning.

Tania opened the door for her and laughed ironically, staring into her sister’s eyes as though to read recent history in them.

“You’re a beauty, you are!” said Tania mockingly.

“Others think so,” answered Olga, lowering her eyelashes for a second and looking towards her mother and Michael.

“What have you been doing?” asked Michael, like the stern father of a Victorian household. “What do you mean by coming back in the middle of the night in this cutthroat city?”

“I’ve been enjoying myself,” said Olga, taking off her fur coat, worn as shabby as a cat with the mange. “Andreyev and I were dancing at the Pera Palace. There was only one other couple. It was very amusing. One of the Turkish waiters spoke to me in a whisper. He said, ‘It’s time for all beautiful Christian ladies to leave Constantinople.’ He said they expected Mustapha Kemal to enter the city before many days. It was a friendly warning. When I told Andreyev he went as white as a sheet. After that he drank too much and was very silly. That is why I’m late. He had to get sober before he could see me through the streets.”

“Olga, my dear!” cried her mother. “You frighten me. How can you spend your time with a man who gets intoxicated? I’m ashamed of you. I thought Miss Browne had taught you to be a good girl.”

Olga Markova was very much amused.

“Poor Brownie! Her moral lectures are all wasted. My Russian blood makes them ridiculous. But you needn’t look so frightened, little mother. I

can take care of myself all right, even with Andreyev when he is a little drunk.”

She looked over at Michael and laughed at him.

“Michael, my child, for goodness’ sake don’t look like Mr. Murdstone in *David Copperfield*. You look as though you had been reading the Old Testament on an English Sunday morning.”

Michael didn’t answer her directly. He looked at his mother for a moment and then spoke in a strained voice.

“We must get away from Constantinople. It’s getting too dangerous. We must go to Vienna and see what we can do there. I think we’re becoming rather demoralized in this city of vice. It’s time we went.”

“Vienna!” said Tania, with excitement in her voice though a moment before she had yawned sleepily. “Vienna! That will be wonderful.”

“Yes,” said Michael’s mother. “I shall be glad to leave Constantinople. Every day now makes it more dangerous. When shall we go, my dear?”

“Tomorrow,” said Michael. “We shall have to sell another ring or two.”

“Poor Andreyev,” said Olga, with a little smile about her lips. “I shall be sorry to disappoint him.”

Nobody answered those words, though Tania stared into her sister’s eyes again and then laughed and said, “Better come to your chaste bed, my little one, and mind you don’t forget to say your prayers.”

It was when the two girls were in bed that Michael’s mother gave a cry which wakened them. Tania, in her nightgown, came into the sitting-room where her mother and Michael stood looking as though they were in the presence of death, white-faced with fear in their eyes.

“What’s the matter?” asked Tania. “Mother, why do you look like that? Michael?”

Olga came into the room with her long fair hair falling over her shoulders. Her bare feet made no noise on the polished boards. She stood looking but asked no question.

“They can’t have gone, mother,” said Michael. “It’s impossible!”

“They were in that box,” said his mother. “I felt them less than a week ago.”

“Great God!” cried Michael.

He was rummaging in a wooden box, flinging out shirts and socks and bits of Olga’s underclothing, and some rags which had once been Tania’s

frocks.

“What has happened?” asked Tania in a frightened voice.

“Someone has robbed us,” said her mother faintly. “The jewels have gone. We have nothing left.”

“Who could have done this?” asked Michael, standing up and putting his fingers through his hair. “What devil has stolen those things? How are we to get away?”

The two girls rummaged among the rags. They searched every sock as though hunting for vermin. Their mother was on her knees with them, until suddenly she fell on her face with a little moan.

The rings had gone. Gone was the portrait of the Emperor set in diamonds. There would be no money for escape from Constantinople which was awaiting the arrival of a Turkish army whose guns were not far away. Some thief had searched among the rags of Russian refugees for any trinkets that might be hidden there. Perhaps it was the man with the smiling eyes who had let his rooms unfurnished.

XXIII

AFTER that horror at Smyrna, Oliver Alden returned to Constantinople. It was his last trip as a Naval Intelligence Officer. The Lords of the Admiralty had signed some papers which would end his career in the British Navy. A certain Admiral who happened to be his uncle had written him a nice chit.

My dear Oliver [he wrote], you've done some very good service and I don't blame you for chucking it now, after a long innings. The Senior Service holds out no opportunities for men like yourself. Many officers have been 'axed' because we are all pacifists now and the Fleet will be reduced to a mere skeleton until one day we shall get frightened again, and then find that we have lost our power and prestige. Your father is one of those who now talk Peace when there is no Peace. God help us all. Anyhow, come and do a bit of shooting with me over Sussex stubble. What's your idea for the future? The Diplomatic Service? Journalism? Novel-writing? Personally I should advise you to go to New Zealand and do a bit of farming. England is no place for a decent life nowadays. We shall be taxed to death and parlour-Bolsheviks infest the land.

Constantinople was not as Alden had left it. No noisy music with a beat of drums came from the Petits Champs. Its orchestra had gone. Its dancing-girls had fled. The Russian restaurant by the Galata Bridge was shut up and deserted. In the Pera Palace Hotel there were no Greek houris playing Circe to snotties from the British Fleet, only a group of officers in khaki—General Harington and his staff—sat now and then in the tea lounge.

Alden called round at the little old palace which had a miniature mosque in its garden. He wanted to see Beatrice again and find out what was the next act in that drama of domestic life. He was rowed out to that palace as usual in a Turkish caique. The boatman grinned at him and spoke a few words in English.

“Mustapha Kemal come soon. Stamboul Turk again. Plenty massacre of Greek and Armenian. English no good. All go home soon. Allah is great.”

Alden stepped ashore and went into the garden. The old Imam was sitting on the steps which led up to Beatrice Armstrong's verandah and the leaded roof outside her drawing-room.

Alden spoke to him in French.

“Anybody at home?”

The old man with a million wrinkles rose and raised his hands.

“The beautiful lady has gone,” he said. “Armstrong Bey is dead. I heard the shot which killed him after the beautiful lady had gone. He killed himself because he loved the beautiful lady. It is only the Christians who do that. Mohammedans do not kill themselves because women are unfaithful. They kill the women. It is a better plan and more pleasing to Allah.”

“Good God!” said Alden in English.

He stared up at the leaded roof. It seemed only a few weeks since he had stood there, looking over the Bosphorus at night and watching the lights of a British Fleet under a sky of stars. It seemed only yesterday since Armstrong had asked him to have a drink. He had come in suddenly and found Alden holding his wife’s hand. It was after that conversation when Beatrice had come out of hiding and unlocked her heart with her secret key. He had looked into the torture chamber of a woman’s soul. So she had gone off with Paulett after all?

Oliver went out of the garden and returned to Constantinople, and walked up the Grand rue de Pera which looked deserted. But one man whom he knew came face to face with him. It was Paulett himself. Alden stopped and could not hide his amazement.

“You? I thought——”

“No,” said Paulett. “You thought wrong. Beatrice has bunked off to England without me. Perhaps she was wise. All the same I feel very hipped about it.”

“Hipped?” asked Alden. “Only that?”

Paulett shrugged his shoulders.

“I’m not going to shoot myself like Armstrong, poor swine. No woman is worth that. I still have an interest in life. Next day’s paper is what matters. I’ve the instinct of a journalist.”

He talked about the situation. Harington hoped to pull off peace, mainly by a surrender to the terms of the Turkish Nationalists. There was to be an exchange of populations. All the Greeks were to be booted out of Asia Minor. All the Turks in Greek territory would be brought over the new frontier.

“More refugees,” said Alden. “More human agony and misery and lice and disease. We have made a very pretty world.”

“Good stuff for special correspondents,” said Paulett. He raised one finger and strode away. He had put up a bluff perhaps about his indifference to the flight of Beatrice without him. There was a film over his eyes. Perhaps hipped was too mild a word—or perhaps he was an egoist. One couldn’t tell.

Oliver Alden could never tell that part of the story. Beatrice became a nurse in Kenya. She married a coffee planter out there. Alden never met her again, but years later she wrote to him. She was the mother of two sons and very happy, she wrote. Once he had been in love with her.

Alden met another friend in Pera. It was young Markov whom he had first met on the quayside of Sebastopol.

He was walking along hand in hand with one of his sisters, the dark one who was Tania, with black hair looped over her ears. They both looked dejected.

“Still in Constantinople?” asked Alden, saluting them.

Michael held out his hand and answered in his rather stiff English:

“We cannot leave. We were robbed. We have no money. My mother is very anxious.”

“Come and take tea with me,” suggested Alden.

They took tea, as once before, in the Pera Palace Hotel. They seemed to be hungry, according to the number of pastries they ate. Alden felt certain that it was their first meal that day.

“Let me order some more cakes,” he said.

This boy and girl told him about the theft of their mother’s jewels and about the flight of their fellow-refugees from Constantinople. Vera Sokolova had gone to Paris with some of the company from the Petits Champs.

“It is quite likely that we shall never see her again,” said Michael.

Alden noticed that Tania touched one of her brother’s hands as though to show her sympathy.

“We’re still young,” she said. “Life will have many surprises for us and some of them may be pleasant.”

“That’s true,” said Michael gravely. “We must always hope.”

Alden felt sorry for them. They were two babes in the wood, he thought. They had been caught in a jungle of wild beasts over there in Russia. There were other jungles.

In the hall of the Pera Palace Hotel he drew the Russian boy on one side and put something into his hands. It was a wad of English notes.

“It might come in useful,” he said. “Pay me back some day. Or don’t pay me back. I have a rich and foolish father.”

“No,” said Michael, glancing at that wad of paper in his hand. “It is too good of you. I cannot accept.”

Then suddenly he began to cry like a small boy and put his arm round Alden’s shoulder and kissed his cheek.

“You have saved us twice,” he cried. “How can we pay you back ever, except in love and gratitude?”

“That’s all right,” said Alden, shy, like most Englishmen.

The Markov family went to Vienna. Oliver Alden returned to England by way of Venice, where he stayed a few weeks. Vienna, Belgrade, Berlin and Paris increased their populations by receiving new batches of Russian refugees. Nearly a million Greeks whose fathers and forefathers had dwelt in Asia Minor were forced to leave their farmsteads, and shops, and factories, and all means of livelihood, by order of Mustapha Kemal Pasha who had no use for them. They huddled on the mainland of Greece at first, without shelter, in the filth of sodden camps, until the League of Nations took them in hand and built them huts and kept them alive, and even, later on, helped them to find some new fields to plough or business to do. In Constantinople the women were unveiled and the red tarboosh of Islam was flung away by orders of the Turkish leader who had no belief in the old code of Mahomet, and used his pen as he had his sword to make a clean sweep to a new goal. In Russia a little bearded man with slant eyes, which sometimes were very humorous, was devising a new social system, scribbled on bits of paper from a room in the Kremlin where once the Czars had ruled. What he wrote on those bits of paper meant starvation and death to many people. That was the price he believed was necessary for the happiness of those who might survive. It was a great experiment. One could not make an omelette without breaking eggs. Elsewhere humanity was on the move to new camps, and no one could foresee the future even a year or two ahead. A World War had broken up the old stabilities of life and peace was not yet established in many nations and in many hearts.

XXIV

COUNTESS MARKOVA who was Austrian born had sent a telegram from Constantinople to her sister Josephine in Vienna, and in the train had counted the hours before this meeting. The thought of coming to Austria again had been a joy to her, in spite of all her anxieties. As the train rushed on—they were in a third-class carriage of the Orient Express—she was happy to think that she was getting farther and farther away from Russia. It seemed that she was getting farther and farther away from misery and squalor and terror—back to civilization and peace. She would hear people laughing again. Vienna was a laughing city. She would be back with her own folk, from whom she had parted twenty-one years ago to marry a Russian officer. She had loved Russia for many of those years. She had loved the Russian people until they became like wild beasts after the disaster of the War, and the beginning of Revolution. All her married life and motherhood belonged to Russia, and that long stretch of twenty-one years had pushed the remembrance of Austria into the background of her memory. The last three years had been a nightmare of horror and never-ceasing fear. Even in Constantinople she had been afraid and miserable. Now all that seemed like a bad dream from which she had awakened. She felt younger, instead of an old worn woman. She was not very old, after all, in spite of Michael over there, so tall and grave, and Olga flirting with a young man in the opposite corner of the third-class carriage, and Tania with her nose between the pages of a book as usual.

Anna Markova, their mother, opened the flap of a little handbag which Michael had bought for her in Constantinople out of the money given to him by an English naval officer. Secretly she glanced at herself in a tiny mirror. Twenty-one years ago when she had left Vienna she had been a pretty thing. Her beauty had been prized in the Russian Court. Russian officers had tried to make love to her and kissed her hands, making her husband jealous as well as proud of her. She had been rather indiscreet for a time, pleased by all this flattery. She had narrowly escaped a scandal in St. Petersburg because of her friendship with a young cavalry officer. That was after the birth of Michael. There had been no harm in it—no harm at all. What did she look like now? Would Josephine recognize her? She saw her face in the little mirror, as though looking at it for the first time after many years. It gave her a slight shock. She was no longer a pretty thing. There was a touch of white in her hair. There were little lines about her mouth. And yet she didn't look

like an old woman, as she had felt for so long. She was less than forty, even now, having been married at seventeen. Forty was not a great age. Was it possible that she was still a little beautiful?

“Mother,” asked Michael, “why are you blushing like that? Why are you smiling as though you saw a good joke out of the window?”

Anna Markova blushed very deeply.

“I was thinking of old times when I was a girl in Vienna.”

“A love-affair?” asked Michael, teasingly.

“The mind plays absurd tricks sometimes,” she answered.

She was excited when they crossed the Austrian frontier. A rush of tears came into her eyes.

“We have come home again,” she said in German, as though these children of hers, these grown-up young people, were Austrian like herself.

“I am longing to see Aunt Seppi and Uncle Rudi,” said Olga. “Still more am I longing to see Vienna—the city of music and gay hearts and elegant ways of life.”

She accepted a cigarette from the young man in the opposite corner.

“I’m afraid Vienna has lost some of its elegance,” he warned her with a smile.

He spoke to Michael, in order to make the conversation more general. Perhaps he had been a little embarrassed by Olga’s vivacity.

“The Social Democrats rule Vienna now. They pretend to believe in Karl Marx and all that nonsense, but they are really not very Red. They are doing some useful work for their own class—municipal lodging-houses, free baths, free clinics, free everything. It is the middle class and the old landed gentry who suffer most. We’re all poverty-stricken.”

“Poverty is a relative term,” said Michael. “As a Russian refugee I might think your poverty quite like luxury.”

The young Austrian gave a good-natured laugh.

“That’s true, I suppose, and yet it is only a year or two since we were starving in Vienna during the blockade which went on after the Armistice. The city was without light and fuel. The babies’ clinics were stuffed with children who had no bones in their bodies—only gristle—for lack of fats. One of my sisters has hip disease because of that. I was at the University—my father was an official in the Hofburg. I never had quite enough to eat. I was so scraggy that I looked like the Invisible Man, all clothes and no body.”

“You have recovered remarkably well,” observed Olga in her candid way.

“And now,” asked Michael, “is there any chance of earning a livelihood in Vienna? I ask as a Russian refugee searching for a good job.”

The young man in the corner seat—they saw afterwards by the card he gave them that he was Franz von Schwarzenberg—laughed again and put one thumb down towards the carriage floor, and answered rather bitterly.

“Vienna used to be the capital of a great Empire which supported hordes of officials. The officials remain but the Empire has fallen—cut into bits to make new nations who are hostile to us. Austria is supported by charity under the supervision of the League of Nations. It is a country without a future. Vienna isn’t a good city in which to find a job—unless one is a Social Democrat.”

“Are you a Social Democrat?” asked Tania.

Olga was shocked at this innocent question, or pretended to be.

“Tania, my dark-eyed lady, this young man is a gentleman. He is perhaps an aristocrat. How dare you suggest that he should be anything so abominable as a Social Democrat?”

The young man in the corner coloured and laughed.

“I am a traveller in boots and shoes,” he said simply.

It was a little later on the journey that he presented his card to Michael, from whose fingers it was slipped by Olga. He left the train at Gratz, after polite salutations to the Markov family and a lingering glance at Olga, who expressed her regrets that he should have departed.

“Franz von Schwarzenberg,” she said, reading from the card again. “That sounds very splendid.”

Her mother gave a little cry of astonishment.

“As a girl I used to know a young man of that name. He was a Baron and an officer in the Hussars.”

“That undoubtedly was his son,” said Olga. “If he had stayed a little longer I might have become friendly with him. It’s possible that he is doing a good business in boots and shoes.”

Tania gibed at her.

“It’s less than a week since you were flirting with Andreyev. You’re like one of the Borgia women.”

“I’m always thinking of the family fortunes,” said Olga in self-defence. “Michael might do well in the boot trade. Everyone must wear boots. It’s not everyone who wants to hear music.”

“I agree,” said Michael. “It’s probably a better job than playing second fiddle in a third-class orchestra.”

He took the corner seat and sat back with his eyes closed and a frowning line on his forehead. He was dejected by the gloomy words of the young man who had got out at Gratz. Vienna didn’t seem to offer much prospect for Russian refugees. He made some calculations in mental arithmetic. After paying the railway fare out of the wad of notes pressed into his hand by an English naval officer—that generous friend—he had only a little money left. It would be perhaps enough to get himself a new suit in Vienna, which he needed desperately. Olga complained that her underclothing was in rags. Tania’s right shoe had gone at the seam. His mother was very shabby. Unless his Austrian uncle and aunt could come to the rescue, they would be in a very serious plight. He felt overburdened by the sense of responsibility. All he had in the world as means of livelihood was that violin on the rack above his head, and all over Europe Russians were playing the fiddle in orchestras and restaurants and cabarets and dance-halls. A man with a monkey and a piano organ might stand a better chance. That way of life might not be so overcrowded.

Olga and Tania didn’t fret. This journey to Vienna filled them with excitement and romantic hopes. Even his mother had become a little gay. But he felt that he had lost touch with almost everything. He had lost touch even with his fellow-refugees. Vera Sokolova had gone to Berlin with some of the company of the Petits Champs. Perhaps he would never see her again, though he had told her on Prinkipo that he would come to her even if he had to cross the sea.

She had let him kiss her on the cheek before she went. Then she had laughed and gone. Sacha Dolin had gone also, after a comrade’s embrace. He hoped to find his way to Paris. Princess Ivanova was on her way to England, where she had a sister. Boris Gronov and his French wife had sailed on an Italian boat to Naples. Most of them had avoided Vienna, because of stories they had heard about its poverty and lack of any luxury life for which the Russians might cater.

“I am ignorant,” thought Michael, in the corner of his railway carriage. “I have no education. I shall feel like a savage in Vienna. My clothes are a disgrace in a civilized city. I shall look like a tramp and put my mother to shame among her relatives. I am, indeed, no more than a tramp, with the

long road of life ahead of me and three women hanging on to me. I don't know what the devil I'm going to do."

"Michael," said Tania, "you look as though you were dreaming of ogres and hobgoblins. . . . And here is Vienna—our next adventure."

He had been dreaming that Vera was in the arms of a monster who wore a white waistcoat with a gold chain.

Olga grabbed her bundle from the rack.

"I hope I shall meet another young man like Franz von Schwarzenberg," she announced as the train slowed down. "I dare say Vienna is crowded with such elegant young men. I enter this city with joyful anticipations."

Four more Russian refugees entered Vienna, which was already tired of Russian orchestras, Russian cabarets, Russian music, and Russian dances. Austrians could play music for themselves. They went on playing the 'Beautiful Blue Danube' as though the world still danced in hooped skirts and peg-top trousers. Musicians in Vienna were two a penny.

Michael took down his violin from the rack, jumped down from the third-class carriage, and gave one hand to his mother.

She had a mystical light in her eyes. She had a look of joy for the first time since leaving Russia—since that moment when he had found her on the quayside of Sebastopol.

"My dear Vienna!" she exclaimed, as though it were the Celestial City.

XXV

ON the platform the Markov family looked about for their Austrian relations—Baron and Baroness Frankenstein, who were called Aunt Seppi and Uncle Rudi. The other passengers were already being embraced by their friends and people who had come to meet them. They were already having their luggage piled into taxi-cabs. Anna Markova gazed anxiously into the faces of the crowd.

“Perhaps our telegram went astray,” she said in a faint voice. “I don’t see them anywhere.”

For a moment Michael had the terrible thought that these Austrian relations had failed them and that he would be stranded in Vienna with his mother and sisters, with only enough money for a few days’ board and lodging. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He looked into the eyes of Tania and saw in them the same fear.

Then suddenly he heard his mother give a little cry, and saw her go quickly towards a lady who was looking about for someone.

“Seppi!”

“Anna!”

They were in each other’s arms, weeping and laughing at the same time.

It was more than twenty years since they had seen each other. Something had happened to both of them since then. They remembered each other as young women, unmarried, happy, eager for the joys of life. It was difficult to find each other again. Their faces and figures had changed. Their eyes had changed. They were not at all the same.

Michael and his sisters stared at their aunt for the first time. They had heard a thousand stories about her from their mother—her escapades as a girl at boarding-school, her enchanting beauty, her gaiety, her flirtatiousness with charming young men who competed for her hand. Two officers had actually fought a duel about her. They saw a middle-aged woman—to them she seemed almost like an old woman—with fair hair almost white, and a stoutness which was not very elegant. So that was Aunt Seppi! She was, as Olga confessed afterwards, a bit of a shock to them, though her good nature made ample amends for this sense of disappointment.

A tall man in a felt hat with a green feather was kissing Anna Markova’s hands and then her cheek. That was certainly Uncle Rudi, no longer the

dashing cavalry officer who had taken pretty girls to the Opera and thrown silver to the flower girls along the Ring to pay for their bouquets, but certainly distinguished-looking still, in spite of a shabby suit, bagging at the knees, and cuffs which had been frayed by too much washing.

“*Grüss Gott!*” he said several times with great emotion. “After all the sufferings you have been through in Russia we rejoice to have you with us. You can at least share our poverty. Our home will at least provide a shelter for you. So this is Olga, no doubt! . . .” He embraced Tania affectionately and then turned to Olga with similar interest. “So this is Tania!”

It was several days before he could identify his two nieces.

To Michael he held out his arms.

“My poor lad!” he said. “My poor lad! We have all had our share of misery, but yours has been worse than anything we know. The very name of Russia sends a chill down my spine.”

There were two young people in the background. Presently they came to the foreground. They were the cousins of Michael and Tania and Olga. One of them was Karl, wearing the pill-box cap of a University student, a tall, fair lad with shy eyes. His sleeves were too short at the wrists. He wore boots which looked too big for him. But he had charming manners and was not alarming. His sister Sophie was very Austrian, with gold-spun hair and blue eyes. She dropped a curtsey to her aunt who was Anna Markova, and gave a blushing cheek to each of the girls, and even to Michael.

After the moment of terror at not finding them, this family of Russian exiles had a sense of joy and relief. They were no longer homeless wanderers. Somewhere in this city they would find a roof over their heads. At least for a while they would be free from the haunting fear of starvation, with a wolf at the door with his jaws wide open. No more vermin! No more typhus! No more terror! They had reached civilization and safety.

On that first evening in Vienna, Michael sat at table after dinner with his uncle Rudi and his cousin Karl. His mother had gone to the drawing-room with his aunt and the girls. He could hear them all chattering and laughing through the folding doors. It seemed too good to be true to a young man who had been a soldier in Wrangel’s army and a refugee in Constantinople.

On the walls in this room of an old house in the Ballhausplatz were family portraits of women in eighteenth century costumes, looking very noble. Silver and glass were reflected on the polished table. They sat on tapestried chairs. Michael had eaten a dinner which was very simple and

perhaps hardly enough for a hearty appetite—his cousin Karl complained that he was still hungry—but elegantly served by an Austrian maid.

Michael remembered his camping with comrades like Sacha. They had lived like animals. He remembered going up the drive to the Villa Mimosa during the last retreat. He was hungry. His leg hurt after a long march in bad boots as though seared by a red-hot iron. He was lousy. He had not washed with soap for months. He was terror-stricken. Now he sat in civilization among his mother's folk and yet like a savage, because of his threadbare clothes and his rough hands and shock of hair which was overdue at the barber's.

He had felt ill at ease in first coming to this table. Perhaps he had forgotten his table manners, first taught to him by Miss Browne. He might do the wrong thing and put his knife in his mouth, or use a fork in the wrong hand. He could see his cousin Karl, that University student, watching him with critical eyes. He had overturned a wine-glass because of this uneasiness, and had blushed deeply and then grown pale, because of this misadventure. "I have forgotten how to behave," he told his cousin Sophie, who sat next to him.

"I thought you were behaving like a Russian prince," she answered, and he wasn't sure whether that was meant as a compliment or as an ironical remark.

He listened to the conversation of his uncle Rudi. It was a lament for the downfall of Austria, and a denunciation of the Peace Treaties which had changed the map of Europe.

"Those little men who sat round the table of the Conference in Paris," he said, "had no vision, no magnanimity, and no political understanding. They have Balkanized Europe. This city of Vienna is a bulbous head without a body. They came to us demanding reparations, having taken away all our sources of wealth and industry. Very quickly they saw that the Reparations Commission would have to be turned into an agency of relief. The Americans conducted a soup kitchen in the Hofburg for hungry children. The portraits of the Hapsburgs looked down upon those pallid little faces, sitting over the bowls of charity. Now we are only able to maintain ourselves as a State by means of international loans under the aegis of the League of Nations. The capital of a great Empire has become a pauper city and foreigners control our finances and profess to be indignant because we spend too much on pensions and the salaries of officials who otherwise would starve to death. I am one of them. But for my job in the Ministry of Railways I should be reduced to penury. As it is I am taxed beyond my

means and have to live by the severest economies, counting every shilling, stinting and scraping all day long, dressing in pre-War clothes, denying myself cigars, walking to save the price of a train-car. My ancestors would turn in their graves.”

Karl Frankenstein laughed at his father’s gloomy words.

“My dear father,” he said ironically, “all this talk must seem exaggerated to Cousin Michael who has been through the Russian Revolution.”

Baron Frankenstein was arrested for a moment by that remark.

“True! True!” he said. “The Russian nobility and gentry have been cast into the very depths. Russia is an Empire of living horror, and God alone knows what will happen there, or what is happening. Its present rulers are specialists in murder and propagandists of atheism. If we do not build a *cordon-sanitaire* against Russian Bolshevism, the whole of Europe will be swept by anarchy and the relics of civilization which still remain after the War will be drowned in the Red tide of terror.”

“Personally,” said Karl, “I think we ought to wipe out the Social Democrats who have taken possession of this city. Their municipal dwellings are hotbeds of Marxism. One of these days the Heimwehr will have to do a bit of shooting.”

Baron Frankenstein looked at his son, this University student, with a startled look in his eyes.

“No,” he said. “I hope not, Karl. We don’t want any barricades in Vienna. It’s not in our character. We’re a happy-go-lucky people. We’re not cut out for revolution or a reign of terror. I know Vienna. I was born here. We take life with a laugh, thank God. We prefer beer to bloodshed. As long as someone will give us a little music——”

“But, father, you are always denouncing the Social Democrats.”

Baron Frankenstein could not deny that.

“Certainly I denounce them. I disagree violently with their Socialistic creed. But they’re not Bolsheviks. And I don’t want to shoot them. Most of them are dear, simple people, who are essentially bourgeois in their outlook.”

Karl Frankenstein smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

“Those dear simple people have named one of their municipal houses the Karl Marx Hof. Karl Marx was the intellectual father of Lenin. One day I can see myself lying behind a barricade in the streets of Vienna, or leading

an attack on the Karl Marx Hof, as an officer of the Heimwehr like our friend Prince Starhemberg.”

“You speak very wildly, Karl,” said his father. “I devoutly hope that we Austrians will never know the agonies of fratricidal strife. Civil war, as Michael knows, is worse than world war. Fathers against sons, brothers against brothers. That is the worst of it. In Austria we still believe in God. We’re a Catholic people. We have no cruelty in our hearts. We love music and beauty.”

Karl Frankenstein looked at his father with a kind of smiling pity, and spoke his next words with youthful cynicism.

“I’m afraid you haven’t kept pace with the times, father. You’re still very pre-War, if I may say so. As one of the post-War brand, I’m more of a realist. All that stuff about music and beauty belongs to the period of the ‘Beautiful Blue Danube’. We are now in the era of machine-guns, poison gas, and aerial bombs. I don’t see Austria remaining untouched by the modern spirit. Its geographical position . . .”

He talked with the arrogance, masked by a little show of diffidence, belonging to the University student of most countries and most ages.

“We have reduced Michael to silence,” answered Baron Frankenstein, laughing good-naturedly. “Let us join the ladies. Let’s have a little music, which makes one forget the unpleasant aspects of life. I am anxious to hear Michael play the violin.”

Michael played his violin, badly as he knew, because of nervousness and lack of practice. Yet these relatives praised him and seemed delighted. His cousin Sophie spoke to Olga in a low voice:

“Your brother is very good-looking. He has such a broad forehead. And he looks as though he had a noble character.”

Olga looked at Michael with sisterly and critical eyes.

“It’s a pity he’s so shabby, poor boy! Do you think him good-looking? I don’t know if he has a noble character, but he is quite a nice boy, and we are good comrades, although he regards me as a great responsibility and a very dangerous young woman. That’s because I think myself beautiful.”

Sophie’s eyes laughed at her.

“I should not dare to say that of myself, even if I thought it.”

“We Russians,” said Olga, “are not afraid to tell the truth even if it is about ourselves.”

Her mother sat on the sofa with her sister Josephine. While Michael tuned his fiddle for another piece, accompanied by Tania, the two women talked in low voices.

“It is like heaven being in Austria again,” said Anna Markova. “In this room I forget all the trials of my Russian life.”

The Baroness Frankenstein sighed.

“I cannot even imagine them. My heart has bled for you, my poor Anna. But we, too, have our troubles. Rudi is very much afraid that we shall have to sell this house and go into a cheaper place—perhaps even into lodgings. The thought of it breaks my heart, but we are very poor—and getting poorer. All officials are having their salaries cut down by order of the League of Nations.”

Anna Markova looked round the room and suddenly for a moment her sense of security left her and she grew pale.

“Is this going too?” she asked. “That frightens me. Is there no place of safety—no place one can feel one’s very own until the end of life?”

“I’m afraid not,” said her sister Seppi. “The War spoilt all that. There’s no security anywhere—except, perhaps, in England.”

Anna Markova spoke again with a kind of fear.

“I’m afraid we are going to be a burden to you. Four of us! It’s too much—and yet I don’t know what we can do. Michael is only a boy. My two girls are so young to face the uncertainties and cruelties of refugee life. I had hoped . . .”

Seppi took her sister’s hand.

“We needn’t talk of that now. Later we must arrange something. Rudi is the soul of kindness, as you know. As long as we have a crust of bread . . .”

Michael played again. He played a Russian dance with fire and the quick rhythm into which the music rushed.

“Bravo, bravo!” said young Karl, clapping his hands lightly. “That’s what I call music. I prefer that to the ‘Beautiful Blue Danube’. Savage stuff. Nature in the wild.”

For some reason it did not please Michael’s mother. She spoke to him from the sofa:

“Michael, don’t play Russian music tonight. Play something by Chopin. That lovely serenade arranged by Kreisler.”

“I play like a wood-chopper,” said Michael. “I’m murdering everything. I think I’ll break my bow.”

Tania talked to him from the piano:

“You’re playing all right, Michael. But mother is becoming Austrian again. She can’t bear to hear Russian music. I remain Russian in body and soul.”

That brother and sister both looked very Russian at a piano in Vienna. Michael stood there with a lock of hair over his forehead, frowning heavily at his own inward anger because he did not play as well as he thought he ought to. Tania, with her dark hair looped over her ears and her high cheekbones, was a young woman of the steppes who would have looked at home in a Tartar tent. Olga, at the other end of the room, with her cousin Sophie, looked very German and quite in her right place in this drawing-room of Vienna, with its chintz-covered chairs and flower-patterned wallpaper.

Baron Frankenstein spoke quietly to his son:

“It’s delightful to have this family with us. That girl Olga is like a rose—so fresh and fragrant. I can’t make out that girl Tania yet. But I dare say she is equally charming. Think of all their sufferings through the time of terror.”

Karl nodded good-naturedly:

“I’ve no objection to them. They’re all quite interesting. But what about our financial distress, father? Can it bear the strain of supporting a whole family of Russian refugees?”

Baron Frankenstein lowered his voice:

“That’s what’s worrying me. It’s the devil of a problem. But I’m a firm believer in the old English proverb that blood is thicker than water.”

“It’s often more expensive,” said the cynical Karl. “Sometimes it’s deplorably sticky. And I should like to remind you, father, that I’m very much in need of a new suit, to say nothing of shirts, pants, and socks. Do I have to go on looking like a scarecrow because you have to maintain mother’s poor relations?”

Baron Frankenstein answered with two old-fashioned words which caused his son to give a slight laugh:

“Noblesse oblige!”

He forgot perhaps for a moment that nobility in Austria had become shabby genteel and that the Social Democrats were increasing the taxation of the middle classes to pay for free clinics, free baths, free education, free gymnasia, for the children of the working-folk in those great blocks of buildings which were the admiration of social reformers in other countries. He belonged to a previous era in history, poor gentleman. He was too

expensive a luxury for a post-War world. Even his old-fashioned sentiments of hospitality were too expensive for an official of the Hofburg whose salary had been cut down by order of the League administrators of Austrian finance.

XXVI

OLIVER ALDEN, who was once a naval officer, revisited the scenes of his youth in the neighbourhood of Godalming where he had once been at Charterhouse. A new generation of boys was in the playing fields, and a new chapel was being built as a memorial to their elder brothers who had fallen in the Great War. Alden watched a game of cricket by the first eleven, and had tea with the Headmaster and his wife—a vivacious lady of whom he had been very shy as an adolescent boy—and felt like Rip van Winkle when the Captain of the School was introduced to him and called him ‘Sir’.

He was no longer a naval officer. He was—astonishing as it seemed to himself—a journalist in Fleet Street, though so far his only contributions to the daily press were a few short leaders on the international situation, almost completely re-written by the political editor of the *Morning Chronicle*. He was being tried out, it seemed, before being given his first assignment as a special correspondent. His father’s name, and his pre-War contributions to *Punch*, had given him this job, while other men—experienced journalists who had been temporary officers in a World War—were wearing out both their boots and their hearts on the hard pavement of Fleet Street, which had been called by one of its historians ‘The Street of Adventure’, at a time when journalistic adventure did not include high explosive barrages, or poison gas, or air bombardments, or submarine warfare.

He tried to pretend to himself that his work on *Punch* was the cause of his appointment. The Editor—a dark Highlander with a faint relic of an Aberdeen accent—was pleased to mention those youthful essays in humour, but Alden was honest with himself after that moment of vanity, and knew that he would have had no chance down this street unless his father had been an Under-Secretary of State and a financial friend of the newspaper proprietor’s—‘one of the robbers’ band’, as Alden heard them described afterwards by a cynical colleague.

It was not only at Charterhouse that Alden felt like Rip van Winkle, after his return to England from the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. He had been away, except for short leaves, since the beginning of the War. When he entered his father’s house in Cadogan Gardens and walked up to his old room, where his schoolboy’s library still stood on the shelves, he knew that he had changed by more than those years—by a whole lifetime of experience—by a whole era of history. He had seen the world shattered—that pre-War world in which he had been born and educated. He had seen the

crash of a great Empire, and the beginning of a new social system called Communism, which was the new gospel of the proletariat in more countries than Russia. He had seen death very close and in the mass, not only the dead who lay on the battlefields, snow-covered in Northern Russia, but those who had been victims of hunger and typhus and every kind of disease. In his mind for all those years had been the whole drama of World War, with all its massacre and mangling of youth and all its human agony. That was because he had had an imagination under his naval cap—the morbid imagination of a mind which was always busy with what was happening beyond his own experience, and sensitive, absurdly, to other people's sufferings. That had aged him. He had lived a thousand years in seven years. He had died a thousand deaths. He had bled at the heart for human suffering, even when he was fairly comfortable himself except for being sick in rough seas and apprehensive of submarines.

Now, in this London house, he felt a *revenant*—a ghost of himself. He was aware of other ghosts; those of his two young brothers who had been killed in the neighbourhood of Ypres, as infantry officers, who ought to have been playing games in the fields of Charterhouse. He opened the door of the room they had shared, next to his own. He remembered their pillow fights. He remembered cursing them from his bed for dropping their boots on the floor when he wanted to go to sleep. He remembered Hugo carefully arranging his jug of water over the open door, so that when Peter opened it after coming back from a show at the Gaiety in full evening-clothes he was half-drowned by that waterfall. They had fought like tiger cubs after that episode, and then had celebrated peace in the small hours of the morning by rifling the pantry downstairs and bringing up cold chicken.

Now they were both dead on the Field of Honour. For what purpose? What good had their deaths done? This massacre of youth—what blessings had it brought to the world—what new heaven or new earth? Europe was still licking its wounds. The ruins had not yet been repaired. The victors were not exactly gloating on the fruits of victory. England was crowded with unemployed men; France was still afraid of Germany. No problem had been settled, perhaps no peace of any lasting kind had been made, though ten million men had been killed. The Peace Treaties imposed on the vanquished had already been challenged and flouted. The Turks were back in Constantinople and Smyrna. One day other nations would repudiate the Treaty of Versailles.

These thoughts passed through Alden's mind as he stood in the bedroom of his two dead brothers and saw their young ghosts laughing.

At dinner that night, and on other nights, he sat rather silent among his father's guests, or alone with his father and mother and his father's private secretary.

"I don't belong here any more," he thought. "I don't speak my father's language. I don't know what he's driving at. These politicians and government officials seem to think that they have done a mighty good job in the War and after the War, and that it's now a question of waiting until prosperity returns and 1913 comes back with its old securities and glories. I honestly believe they think that they were the real heroes of the War and suffered its worst sacrifices because they went through a few air raids and had to give up sugar in their tea. They know nothing of the horrors and they don't want to know. These are the people who kept up the blockade after the War and starved God knows how many German and Austrian children. These are the people who wanted to hang the Kaiser and exact untold millions of gold from Germany. These minds made the Treaty of Versailles, which is the blue print of future wars. My mother talks as though God spoke English with an Oxford accent and made a mistake in allowing the German race to exist. Certainly I don't belong here any more."

These bitter thoughts spoil the taste of the bread he ate at his father's table, and then, pacing his bedroom at night, he was conscience-stricken because of their bitterness. Perhaps he saw things wrong. Perhaps he had been infected by some Russian microbe. Perhaps he was disloyal to his old code and creed. Some of those people downstairs were sad and worn. They had lost sons and relatives. They were facing frightful taxation without a whimper, though it meant giving up old estates.

His father raised the question of a career now and then. He raised it definitely one evening when they sat alone at the long dinner-table, with one manservant looking after them. Oliver's mother had gone to make a speech at some women's banquet.

"What's your idea about a job, my dear Oliver? No hurry, of course. A little drifting about in London won't do you any harm. You have to find your way back. I understand that. But one day you will be thinking of marriage and so on."

"Yes," said Oliver, "I suppose so."

His father pushed a bottle towards him.

"Have another glass of port. It will do you good. I expect you had to drink some filthy stuff in the Near East!"

Oliver poured himself out another glass of port, and declined a cigar, having vitiated his taste by cheap cigarettes.

His father opened his mind on this subject of a career in more detail.

“I might get you an administrative position in Maclagens’. How would that appeal to you? It’s a good firm. I was lunching with one of its directors yesterday. They’re looking for a young man who would do a bit of travelling. I told him you were a first-class linguist.”

Oliver looked at the colour of the port, and then into his father’s eyes.

“Touting munitions of war?” he asked.

Sir Henry Alden smiled, and raised a deprecating hand:

“Why use the word ‘touting’? Honest salesmanship, my dear fellow.”

“Providing machine-guns and shells to the Japanese and Chinese?” asked Oliver in an inquiring tone of voice.

His father nodded, as he undid the band of a cigar:

“No doubt those markets will come along. The Japs won’t stand still. But of course there are many other countries who may do good business before long. The new nations will want to defend themselves. They’re all afraid of one another, and very self-conscious of their new national independence. They will want their armies and military equipment. Then there are the South American nations. They don’t exactly love one another!”

“And as an agent of Maclagens’,” said Oliver thoughtfully, “it would be my duty to induce them—if necessary by a little palm oil—to order the latest thing in lethal weapons.”

Sir Henry Alden nodded again:

“Exactly! I expect it would be part of your work to establish friendly relations with Government officials—directors of military contracts and so on. Very interesting, don’t you think? A chance for diplomatic qualities. No doubt palm oil goes a long way, especially in the East and Near East. Bribery is really a matter of geography, although somebody told me once that all morality is due to certain glands stimulated by climatic conditions. That’s going rather beyond me.”

He laughed and cleared his throat slightly and blew a beautiful blue ring from his cigar.

“As an agent of Maclagens’,” said Oliver, “I should no doubt have to exploit fear, and play off one nation against another. For instance, I might go to Japan and do a good business in the new type of tank, and then go to China and say to the chief war lord, ‘Say, mister, those Japs have a very new

line in tanks and armoured cars. Don't you think it might be well for you to order a few thousand? The safety of China depends upon sticking close to Maclagens'. Is that how it would go?"

Sir Henry Alden laughed good-naturedly:

"That's a bit crude, but that's the kind of thing, no doubt. Does it appeal to you at all?"

Oliver thrust his glass away and a slight flush crept under his tanned skin:

"It seems to me very dirty work, sir. It's making money out of blood and death. I'd rather sweep a crossing."

"Good God!" said Sir Henry, greatly surprised and shocked. He turned to look at Oliver, as though suspecting him of being unwell.

"My dear lad," he said, "you astonish me! After seven years in the Navy you talk like that? It's the kind of stuff they spout down in Shoreditch among the Reds."

Oliver shrugged his shoulders and smiled:

"Perhaps that's what makes them Red. I mean this armament racket for making profit out of war. It seems to me damnable."

Sir Henry Alden was frankly puzzled and secretly pained. He was, he believed, a man of the highest morality and public spirit, a supporter—with certain reservations—of the League of Nations and World Peace, based, of course, upon the continual subjection of Germany. Oliver's words suggested that he was in favour of shady business and murderous activities. After a pause he answered his son's objections:

"One has to take the world as one finds it. I'm afraid we can't eliminate human nature or national frontiers. There will always be a clash of interests between nations, and, in any case, every country has the right—and duty—to arm in self-defence. If we don't provide those arms, someone else will."

Oliver laughed and did not seem impressed:

"That's the argument of the drug traffickers and the white-slave traders."

His father ignored that comment, and spoke as though on the Front Bench in the House of Commons:

"We can't do without the export of arms so long as we maintain a system of private manufacture, which, personally, I think is the very backbone of our industrial system. Unless they sell their armaments to foreign countries our manufacturers couldn't maintain their plant or efficiency for necessary expansion in time of war."

“It enlarges the zones of danger,” said Oliver.

His father disagreed. He thought that our great firms of shipbuilders had done magnificent work by building up the Japanese Navy and providing war ships for almost every country in the world. It had given employment to vast numbers of men. It was a proof of our industrial supremacy. It had greatly added to our wealth. The Japanese Navy had been our loyal ally in the Great War.

“And one day they will turn us out of China and take command of the Pacific,” said Oliver. “The Yellow Peril is coming nearer. It’s damned close, sir.”

They strayed away from the immediate argument about armament firms, but before leaving the dinner-table Sir Henry Alden brought it back by a smiling question:

“Then you don’t want me to speak on your behalf to the Director of Maclagens’?”

“No, thanks, sir. I’ll look round for another line of business.”

He found it in Fleet Street, but even then on account of his father’s name and influence.

XXVII

AFTER his visit to Charterhouse, Oliver spent a week-end in the neighbourhood, and wandered round the haunts of his boyhood where he had gone birdnesting and tramping with other boys. He walked over Puttenham Heath and down the Surrey lanes where loosestrife was growing in the ditches and thrushes were singing in the hedges. New houses were springing up with bright red roofs, but this countryside was beyond the worst atrocities of the jerry-builder and still looked beautiful and unspoilt. Oliver remembered a promise he had made to a girl in Constantinople, which was now a mere dream behind him. What was the name of that young woman who had had such staggering adventures in Russia with a family of refugees whom he had helped to get away from Sebastopol? Betty Smith? Betty Jones? No, Betty Browne. Spelt with an "e". She was the daughter of the rector at Rodsall. He had promised to take a cup of tea with her one day. Why not?

He had admired her serenity and cool courage. She had struck him as an astonishing contrast to the Russian women. She was "Surrey" to the backbone. He thought of that Russian family with whom she had been governess. Their name was Markov. Yes, he remembered that. And one of them named Olga was alluringly pretty, with fair hair and blue eyes like a German girl, and a gaiety which had survived many ordeals. He had been attracted by her. She had given him the glad eye and he found it pleasing. That other girl—the dark-haired one . . .

He came face to face with Betty Browne in a lane leading from Puttenham Common, not to be confused with Puttenham Heath.

"Hullo!" she said. "I thought you would turn up one day; I've been expecting you."

She had a bag of golf-clubs slung over one shoulder, and looked like the picture of an English miss on the cover of a magazine. There was a smile in her steady grey eyes and she gave him a good hard grip when they shook hands.

"A far cry from Stamboul," he said. "May I ask for that cup of tea?"

Betty Browne looked amused.

"It's waiting for you. How's the British Navy? Are you an admiral this time?"

“I’m a journalist,” he told her. “I’m looking for a week-end cottage in this neighbourhood. I should like to play another game of golf some day.”

“I can find you the cottage,” said Betty Browne. “It belonged to an aunt of mine who has just departed from this vale of tears. A nasty old thing, she was, but the cottage is a peach. Old beams and low ceilings, a thatched roof in which the swallows build their nests, and modern sanitation.”

Alden thought that sounded the very thing. He also thought that it was nice to meet Betty Browne on a summer day in Surrey. She was so essentially honest. She was so undisguisedly English.

“My golf’s rotten,” he confessed. “How’s yours?”

“I’m rather good. I go round in something under thirty. A nine-hole course, of course.”

“Good heavens! That’s pro. form.”

They talked like that, as though they had met the day before yesterday. They went on talking like that in the drawing-room of Rodsall vicarage from which the vicar was absent, being at Worthing with a Sunday-school treat.

“All this is very pleasant,” remarked Oliver, looking round a room marvellously mid-Victorian in its style of furniture, and through french windows to a garden with a velvet lawn and clipped hedges.

Betty Browne laughed.

“I squealed with joy when I first saw it again. Now I’m beginning to get a little bored—and rather stupefied.”

“Stupefied?”

Betty Browne explained.

“It’s a hiding-place from life. I live in a walled garden and never hear the traffic of life outside. I seem to have cotton wool in my ears, and a kind of emptiness where my heart is supposed to be.”

“You’re an ungrateful woman,” said Oliver. “What more do you want after Red Revolution? Haven’t you a nice golf course and some good clubs?”

“Oh, I’m not grousing,” protested Betty. “In its own frame this place is as good as gold, but it’s a small frame, you know.”

“For people’s minds?” asked Alden. “Haven’t Surrey minds broadened out a bit, or are they still closed in by their herbaceous borders?”

“Poor dears,” said Betty. “They’re still keen on flowers and smooth lawns. But of course they’re all broken-hearted. England is Heart-break

House, as Bernard Shaw described it.”

Oliver expressed his astonishment. That idea had never occurred to him.

“They’ve all lost their boys,” said Betty. “There are young ghosts in every Surrey garden. You can see them in their mothers’ eyes, though of course they never say a word and just carry on as though nothing had happened. Even the middle-aged colonels who play their round of golf are haunted by what happened in Flanders fields. The sons and heirs have gone. Presently the houses and gardens will go. Income tax is a bit too heavy for them. They’ve already sold their pictures to rich Americans. They know that Old England has gone. They can’t get used to a new kind of world which has no place for them. It’s all rather sad, you know.”

“I’m glad to know,” said Oliver humbly. “I felt a bit bitter. Now I feel damned ashamed.”

“Have another of these cakes?” said Betty. “I made ’em myself.”

Oliver thought they were admirable.

Betty talked again. She talked well.

“I lost my manners in Russia. Of course I shock all these dear people horribly—or at least I did until I kept my mouth shut. I used to blurt out some of my memories of life on the roads in Red Russia. I talked about lice, and men hanged by the neck, and lack of sanitation, and the primitive ways of Russian peasants. Father went hot and cold. ‘My dear girl,’ he said one night, ‘I wish you wouldn’t be so devastating in your realism. You shocked Mrs. Starcross today terribly. I may say you alarmed her’.”

Oliver laughed heartily.

“We’re a wonderful people,” he remarked. “After a World War we still shrink from hearing anything that’s not quite ‘nice’.”

He asked after the Markov family and saw that Betty retained her affection for those Russian refugees.

“I miss them like billy-o!” she said. “Sometimes I dream that I’m sleeping in the same bed again with Olga and that she has taken up more than her share of the bedclothes. Sometimes I want to rush away from this place and look after them again. Of course they’ll all fall to bits without me. They simply can’t look after themselves.”

“There are more than a million of these refugees in Europe,” said Alden. “Many of them must be starving.”

Betty Browne went to a little cabinet and pulled out some letters. They were from Olga and Tania and their mother. There was even one from

Michael.

“They’re in Vienna,” said Betty. “Michael can’t find a job and is getting desperate—poor boy. Olga has flirtations with young Austrians, but they’re too poor to think of marriage. They’re living with an uncle and aunt who can’t afford to keep them.”

It was just before Oliver was getting up to go that Betty Browne abashed him by a reminder of a forgotten act.

“It was frightfully good of you to lend Michael that money. They would have been lost without it.”

“It was nothing!” said Oliver.

“It was everything to them,” said Betty. “And, by the way, Olga was rather sweet on you. She thought you were the nicest Englishman she had ever met—although, as a matter of fact, you were the only Englishman she had ever met!”

“I’m sorry you added the last words,” said Oliver.

“Still it’s nice to know I made a good impression. She’s a pretty thing, I must admit.”

Betty Browne hesitated for a moment, and then blurted out her secret thought.

“If ever you want a wife you might go farther and fare worse. She would be very ornamental at your breakfast-table.”

Oliver Alden raised both his hands as though warding off attack. “Kamerad! Don’t you go thrusting Russian refugees on to me. I have to earn my living as a journalist, and it’s going to be a hard life.”

It was a month or two later that he signed a contract for the cottage recommended by Betty Browne. It was all she had described. Its beams were so low that he knocked his head against them several times on the day of inspection. It had a trim lawn and an orchard in which real apples were reputed to grow. It had a doorstep worn by the feet of country folk for three centuries and more. It had a clipped hedge with a peacock cut out of its foliage.

It had a dovecot with white pigeons. Its rambler roses climbing up the colour-washed walls looked as though they had been pinned on to make a stage effect. It was three minutes from Rodsall church and twelve miles from the nearest railway-station, which was Guildford. It was extraordinarily attractive and inconvenient to a journalist on the *Morning*

Chronicle. After a few week-ends it was of no use to him for quite a time because he was given his first mission as a special correspondent.

XXVIII

VIENNA in 1922 was a gay city again, if one did not look for tears. Youth laughed again, if they had just enough to eat and a little margin now and then for an evening spree in the Prater, a cheap ticket at the Opera, or a glass of light beer in some restaurant where they made it last a long time while they listened to the music of Lehar or made love across the table. It was five years since Vienna was a city of starvation with all its children rickety—‘the English disease’, as it was called—and its young girls fainting in tram-cars for lack of fats, and its middle-class families shivering in rooms without heat in the stoves, because they could buy no fuel. It was five years since they had sat in darkness because there was no electric light, and had given way to despair—could that happen in Vienna?—because Austria had been destroyed after defeat, and there was no more laughter in life . . . until they laughed again.

An Englishwoman named Miss Chick had helped to cure the rickety children by artificial sunlight and cod-liver oil. The Quakers and others had fed them, turning the palace of the Hofburg into a soup kitchen. The League of Nations had given a loan to Austria which saved it from famine. Foreign tourists, eager to see Europe after the War—hordes of Americans enjoying vast prosperity which they believed would last for ever—came to Vienna and flung their dollars about with royal munificence. This foreign money flowed into the shops down the Kärntnerstrasse and round the Ring. Even the flower-girls came out again with their posies. Even the orchestras began to play again in the little restaurants of the Prater—that never-ending fairground beloved by the bourgeoisie. Austrian peasants reaped new harvests, and found a market for the fruits of the earth, and because of the miracle of life which is hard to kill in the mass, though individuals perish, youth regained its gaiety, forgot the years of hunger, and found the world and their own place in it quite amusing.

A young Russian refugee, who was our friend Michael, watched this life in Vienna with thoughtful eyes.

“These Austrians,” he said to Tania, “refuse to take life seriously.”

Tania, who was holding on to his arm, pressed it closer. “How wise of them!”

Michael indulged in a monologue.

“They make a joke of poverty. They are perfectly happy if they can chatter over a café table and listen to their Austrian music, which I find very trivial. They seem to me a shallow and scatter-brained people.”

Tania disagreed with this judgment.

“I find them all charming. They are truly civilized. They keep their manners, although everything else has been taken from them. And they aren’t melancholy like us Russians who fall into the very depths of despair even in the middle of a gay party. Look at you, Michael! Here we are, living very nicely with Uncle Rudi and Aunt Seppi, but you go about with moody eyes and a face like a Greek mask of tragedy!”

They were walking along the Schottischering and Tania turned to look at her brother’s face and smile into his moody eyes.

They were still moody when he answered her:

“It’s because I know that we shall have to clear out very soon. Uncle Rudi is as poor as a church mouse. He can’t afford to keep us. What then, Tania?”

Tania refused to worry about that foolish question of ‘What then?’ Time enough to worry, she thought, when Uncle Rudi showed the first sign of wanting to get rid of them.

“Meanwhile,” said Tania, very cheerfully, “Olga and I are having a wonderful time—especially Olga, who is surrounded by admirers, including Cousin Karl, who follows her about like a puppy with his tongue hanging out.”

“One day I shall have to kick his backside,” said Michael sulkily.

The brother and sister were held up one day when they tried to cross the Ring by a procession of young men carrying banners and wearing armlets on which was a strange device like a crooked cross. It was the sign of the Swastika, which seemed to have some mystical significance. The young men looked very serious, though Michael had declared that the Austrians did not take life seriously. They marched slowly and stared defiantly at the crowds assembled on the pavements. Some of these onlookers, standing close to Michael and Tania, did not seem to like the look of the marching men. In her free Russian way, Tania spoke to one of them:

“Who are they?”

A youngish man in shabby clothes answered her politely, but with undisguised irony. He did not speak very loudly:

“They call themselves the Heimwehr. Really they ought to call themselves Prince Starhemberg’s sheep. They are, of course, brainless.”

“Why of course?” asked Tania. “How does one know?”

The shabby young man smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

“You can see that by their low foreheads. They’re mental defectives who ought to be in a home for imbeciles.”

Tania was interested, especially by the name of Prince Starhemberg. She happened to know that young man. He had taken tea one day at Uncle Rudi’s house and he had made himself pleasant to Olga. He was extremely good-looking, with a boyish laugh which was amusing to hear. He was, she had thought, not distinguished by any unusual intelligence.

“What is their programme?” she inquired. “We are Russian refugees and don’t understand Austrian politics.”

The man in the crowd glanced over his shoulder and lowered his voice again:

“It’s not wise to discuss these things at the street corner. I happen to be a Jew, and I don’t want my head bashed by any of these brainless lads who uphold the intolerance of the Middle Ages.”

Tania asked a simple question in a confidential voice:

“Don’t they like Jews?”

The man in the crowd smiled. He had a student face, pale and thin, with thoughtful eyes behind his glasses. He looked underfed.

“They dislike Jews,” he said, with another glance over his shoulder. “They also dislike M. Poincaré, President of France. They wish to join up with Germany and to destroy the Treaty of Versailles. They dislike the Socialist municipality of Vienna, and all the Social Democrats who live in the municipal dwelling-houses which have lately been built by the working-classes. In fact, the only people of whom they approve are themselves, with whom, of course, they are perfectly satisfied.”

He was silent for a while, and then spoke to Tania again:

“Their stupidity makes me despair sometimes of human nature.”

Tania was prepared to discuss this theme on the kerbstone, if necessary, for the next two hours.

“Human nature doesn’t change very much,” she said. “We are, of course, not very far distant from our primitive ancestors who went about with clubs or flint-headed weapons.”

The shabby-looking man who had called himself a Jew laughed and turned to glance at Tania.

“Sometimes we forget that,” he admitted. “I used to think that in Vienna we had got beyond the Stone Age. As a medical student I used to believe in evolution and the advance of human intelligence. But I’m becoming disillusioned.”

Tania continued this conversation until the procession passed and her new acquaintance lifted his hat and edged away through the crowd.

“My dear Tania,” said Michael, with his elder-brother manner, “I wouldn’t talk so freely to strangers, if I were you. It’s dangerous and a bit unwise, don’t you think?”

“It’s a habit of mine,” said Tania, as though that settled the matter. “Besides, I find everyone very good-natured in Vienna, and willing to answer my questions. I’m having a very good time here.”

That was true. She and Olga were getting the best out of Vienna, while Michael, because of his anxieties, was getting the worst. Sometimes he even resented his sisters’ gaiety and carelessness, when he had been tramping the streets all day trying to find a job and meeting fellow refugees who told him that in Vienna there was nothing doing for Russian exiles. He had walked round with his fiddle to all the cabarets and restaurants and orchestras. He had been laughed at for his pains by good-natured Austrians.

“My dear young man,” said one of them, “we have more out-of-work musicians in Vienna than waiters or ex-government officials, or ex-officers of the Imperial Army. Besides, you come late to the fair! We have had hordes of Russian refugees in Vienna. Some of them starved to death in 1919. Others moved on to Berlin, where they may still be starving to death. Others went to Paris, where they are not doing so badly, I hear.”

That was what he was told, with the utmost good-nature, by the director of an orchestra in the Kärntnerstrasse.

That, in similar words, was what he was told by the Jewish proprietors of cabarets, night-clubs, and cafés-concerts in the Rosenthurmstrasse and its tributaries. That was what he was told by one of his fellow-exiles whom he met in a café in the Graben one day, when he went in to have a cup of coffee after one of these days in search for some kind of employment.

He had been sitting there with his elbows on the table, staring moodily at the comic pictures in *Jugend* which for him had no comedy. He had been thinking of Vera Sokolova. Olga had had a letter from her. She was dancing in a show run by a man named Baliev, in Berlin. It was called ‘The Bat’, and

was a great success. She was enjoying herself a good deal and learning to dance. The public seemed to like her. Baliev was pleased with her, and called her his darling Katinka. A German ex-officer had fallen in love with her and wanted her to live with him. He sent her flowers for her dressing-room and was a very pleasant man, though of course she refused to accept his offer. Now that she was earning a little money she could afford to be virtuous, unlike some poor Russian girls.

“Give my love to Michael,” she had added in a postscript.

Michael sat with his elbows on the table of this Austrian café. He was getting more and more shabby. His shirt was frayed at the cuffs. His boots needed mending, and unless he asked Uncle Rudi for money he couldn't get them mended. But his heart also was getting frayed and his spirit needed mending. Vera was making a success in Berlin. She would pass beyond him. One day she would live with a German ex-officer or become the mistress of some other man who could afford to send her flowers. How could he expect her to wait for him? What right had he to ask her to wait for him? He was one of a million Russian exiles who hadn't a dog's chance in life. One day he might kiss the tips of her fingers. She would remember him and be sorry for him. She might offer to give him a little money to buy new boots or have his shirt washed. Once he had dreamed of going to her as a famous man, or as a rich man, and saying, “I've worked for you. I've kept your beauty in my heart.” . . . Illusion! Boyish romance! Russian imbecility! On the chair by his side was the old fiddle he had brought away from the Villa Mimosa. He hated carrying it about. He might just as well leave it on the seat in this Austrian café.

He raised his head and looked across the room foggy with the fumes of coffee and tobacco-smoke. Over there was a Russian face. It belonged to a friend of his. They had last met on the retreat to Sebastopol. It was Serge Miliakov, whom he had met that night in Sebastopol when both of them were searching for their womenfolk.

Michael rose from his table. At the same moment Serge looked into his eyes and sprang up.

They embraced like men who meet after escape from death. An Austrian girl who had been writing a letter at one of the tables, looked up at them and giggled. A waiter hurried past with his tray and said impatiently, “By your leave, gentlemen, if you please!”

“You are here in Vienna?” asked Michael, as though disbelieving his own eyes.

“I’m here in Vienna,” answered Miliakov. “Strange as it may seem, I am still alive in Vienna, where most Russians starve to death.”

“How do you live, my dear friend?” asked Michael. “Have you found some kind of engagement?”

Serge Miliakov lowered his voice:

“I am kept by Nadia.”

“Nadia is also alive!” exclaimed Michael.

He remembered that night in Sebastopol when this man had gone a little mad because he couldn’t find his wife. He had threatened to shoot himself.

Nadia was alive. Serge had found her under the arches in Constantinople, among the verminous crowds—forty-eight thousand of them—who were utterly penniless and provided with food—enough for life—by the charity of Princess Kougoucheva and her refugee committees.

“She has found work in Vienna?” asked Michael, deeply moved by the knowledge that his friend had found his wife again.

Serge hesitated for a moment, and then spoke some words which sent a cold shiver down Michael’s spine:

“She is very brave and kind. She has become the mistress of a Czech who is a traveller in silk stockings. He is very mean, but she gets a little money from him now and then, which she passes on to me. That is how I live, my friend. Otherwise I should be dead.”

Michael’s face went very white and he breathed hard, as though suffocating.

“It’s terrible,” he said. “It’s better to be dead.”

Serge still found some pleasure in life, it seemed.

“Nadia and I love each other,” he explained. “We have happy hours together in spite of our tears. The Czech is very often away from Vienna. I smoke his cigarettes. Have one, my dear friend.”

“Life,” said Michael, “is horrible.”

“Nevertheless it is life,” said Serge. “We can’t alter it. We must endure it and make the best of good moments.”

They sat together for an hour or more, over empty coffee-cups.

XXIX

TANIA had an adventure in Vienna by herself, and said nothing about it to Uncle Rudi or Aunt Seppi, to avoid reproach.

It happened to her after she had been one afternoon to say a little prayer before the picture of the Madonna with the Hungry Child in St. Stephen's Church. She had prayed that Michael might get an engagement, and that Olga might marry a rich young man, and that she herself might find some employment in Vienna enabling her to study and buy the books she wanted. She also prayed that her mother might meet an elderly Austrian aristocrat—one of her former admirers—who would feel lonely in his old age and offer her mother his hand and heart as well as a share of his country estate.

Tania felt better after this prayer, especially as she had bought a candle for an Austrian penny and lit it from others burning before the holy picture, and reinforced her petitions by that little flame of faith. There was a group of other people praying round her, and she looked at their faces. One of them was a young girl in peasant dress with a scarf tied over her hair and a basket of vegetables by her side. She was kneeling on the hard stones, with her hands clasped and her head raised so that her profile was sharp cut against the pillar near by. It was a beautiful profile, Tania thought. This peasant girl was like Joan of Arc in a picture-book. But as Tania looked at her while the girl was wrapped in prayer, two tears like pearls rolled down her cheek.

"She is unhappy," thought Tania. "Perhaps her lover has forsaken her. Perhaps she's praying because her baby is dying."

Tania was a well-read young woman, and thoughtful. Her thoughts made her aware of the spiritual vibrations which had passed before this old picture of Mary and the Child Jesus for more than a thousand years. All through the centuries women had knelt here, asking for pity and pardon, because they believed that the Mother of Christ would hear them. Outside, beyond this dim church, life had gone on with its fighting and cruelties, by Christians who betrayed Christ. Women's hearts had been stabbed by the sharp sword of cruelty. They had been betrayed by their lovers and beaten by their husbands. They had prayed here in time of famine for starving babes, like that infant Jesus in the black old picture, who looked ill-nourished. That had happened only a few years ago, when thousands of Austrian babies had died of hunger because of a War blockade.

Tania rose from her knees, looked to see that her candle was still burning like a little star in this dim twilight of the cathedral, and wandered about in this forest of tall trunks and intertwined branches, which was a miracle in stone. Some of the old craftsmen had used their sharp chisels to make patterns as delicate as lacework. Some of them must have had a sense of humour when they carved the gargoyles and grotesque animals which looked down upon the Viennese crowds outside.

Tania enjoyed being alone for once. She was a little tired of Cousin Sophie's giggles and childlike conversation. She was more than a little tired of Cousin Karl's calf-love for Olga. She had slipped away, for an afternoon of exploration, from Aunt Seppi's drawing-room where, as usual, tea would be served to genteel visitors who said "*Grüss Gott*" when they arrived, bemoaned the loss of their old estate, denounced Jews and Social Democrats, and deplored a world which had slipped beneath their feet. All that was amusing and interesting at times, but one might have too much of it. Tania felt that she had had too much of it, at least for this afternoon. She wanted to be alone with her own thoughts, which sometimes she found more amusing than other people's conversation. She liked to walk alone in Vienna, watching the different types of people, peeping into picture galleries, staring up at fine buildings, looking at the flowers in the public gardens, and feeling very free and adventurous.

She was staring up at a big building when someone spoke to her. The building was one of the great municipal dwelling-houses which had been put up for the working-classes by the Social Democrats—so often abused by Uncle Rudi and his friends. It was, thought Tania, a very fine place for working-folk. It might have been a university college built round a spacious quadrangle.

"I wouldn't mind having rooms here," thought Tania, "I could be very happy in such rooms, studying science or some other branch of knowledge, especially if Michael was with me—or even Olga, if she didn't flirt too much and bring in too many brainless boys."

It was while she was thinking those thoughts that a voice spoke to her:

"Good afternoon! Has humanity advanced a little from the Stone Age since last we met?"

Tania was surprised. If an angel from heaven had spoken to her in the streets of Vienna she would not have been more surprised. But it was not an angel from heaven. It was the shabby man with whom she had talked in the crowd that day when the Heimwehr was passing. She recognized him

instantly. He was still shabby. He still looked underfed—but highly intelligent. He was still a Jew, she remembered.

“Do we know each other?” she asked, rather coldly, but not rudely, she hoped. Jews, after all, were human beings.

“We talked in a crowd,” said the shabby man. “I was interested in your point of view. I am Dr. Otto Seligmann, who helps to bring little Social Democrats into the world, and otherwise attends to the health and well-being of this community house, which is called the Goethehof.”

He smiled at her behind his rimless glasses, and seemed to like the look of her.

“You are a doctor?” exclaimed Tania, in astonishment. “I thought you were only a medical student.”

He explained that he had been a doctor for no longer than a year. He was not yet used to his title. It made him feel astoundingly old and vastly important, which of course was ridiculous.

“I live here with my sister,” he told her. “She works in a baby clinic but will be home later. If you would care to see something of the Goethehof, I should be delighted to show you round.”

Tania hesitated for the thirtieth part of a second.

She had a prejudice against Jews. There were many Jews in Soviet Russia. They had come out of their lairs during the Revolution. Uncle Rudi and Aunt Seppi spoke of Jews as though they were devils conspiring to overthrow the last strongholds of civilization.

“I should be enchanted to look round,” she said. “I’m very keen to see things.”

Dr. Seligmann, that shabby Jew, talked as he led her into the quadrangle:

“We’re rather proud of these tenement houses. The working people have helped to build them out of their own wages. Foreigners come to praise us, and think we have done a good bit of work for democracy.”

“You believe in democracy?” asked Tania, as they crossed the big quadrangle and went under a tall archway.

Her new friend looked at her sideways and smiled.

“Don’t you?” he asked.

“I want people to be happy,” said Tania. “I have a great desire to help a little towards human happiness.”

Dr. Seligmann seemed amused at this profession of faith by a young girl who was a Russian refugee.

“That’s an excellent ambition,” he agreed. “It’s also a good definition of the democratic ideal, though not put so simply by our political leaders, who prefer such slogans as ‘the Dictatorship of the Proletariat’, and preach the gospel of Karl Marx, which most of them have never read. But, as a medical man, I am without politics. My job is to help people to come into this world, and to go out of it, with as little pain as possible—and to keep their health between this entrance and exit. Sometimes it seems worth while, but I may be mistaken. It might be better if the babies weren’t born. They have a most unpleasant world waiting for them—don’t you think?”

He talked like that as he led Tania round the block of buildings.

“That’s our own cinema,” he said, pointing to a separate building. “We get quite good pictures sometimes, but, on the whole, I regard the general average of that entertainment as a degradation of human intelligence. They pander to the lowest form of imbecility and tend to encourage the criminal instincts of youth—which need no encouragement. I regret they are mostly made by Jewish directors.”

“You are certainly an idealist,” said Tania. “I’m beginning to be very much impressed.”

Dr. Seligmann glanced at her sharply, with a smile behind his rimless glasses.

“You’re ironical,” he said. “Perhaps I have been posing as a very superior fellow. On the contrary, I have no conceit in my own philosophy of life. I am merely bewildered by this strange mystery called life.”

Tania answered him impulsively.

“Oh, I like to hear you say that! I, too, am bewildered. I’m always seeking for a clue to the great mystery. That, perhaps, is the only adventure which makes life worth while.”

“We shall never find the clue,” said Dr. Seligmann, with a good-humoured laugh. “But come in and see our working-class homes.”

He took Tania into several working-class homes, after knocking at their doors, which were opened by working women with aprons round their waists and their sleeves tucked up. Small children peeped from behind their mother’s skirts. The rooms, as Tania saw, were spotlessly clean. They had light and air. They were neatly furnished. As homes for working-class folk they were good.

The reception of the Jewish doctor was very friendly. The women wiped their hands before holding the one he offered them.

“Come in, doctor! Let me make you a cup of tea!”

“No, no. I have only come to show this young lady your little home. She is a stranger in Vienna.”

They curtsied to Tania as though she were a great lady, though she was only a Russian refugee who had walked through hunger and disease and red revolution.

“We are very house-proud,” said one young woman.

“So should I be,” said Tania, “if I lived in such beautiful rooms. They are fit for princes and princesses.”

She thought of Russian princes and princesses who were living in the garret rooms of many cities.

“Oh, we don’t want people like that here!” exclaimed the young woman. “We’re Social Democrats, you know.”

Dr. Seligmann laughed and turned to Tania.

“Some of us have a sense of class consciousness, you see.”

In some of the rooms there was the sound of music. The voice of Tetrizzini warbled like a bird from one of these apartments. Caruso’s deep-chested notes filled another room where a young mother was washing her baby in a tin bath. A boy of sixteen was studying his books to the music of Franz Lehar, provided by his gramophone.

“In Vienna,” said the Jewish doctor, “we can’t be happy unless we have a little melody and a lot of noise.”

He paused outside another door.

“This is my own stronghold,” he said. “There’s not much to see, but I could make you a good cup of tea, which I think you need, after this walk round the Goethehof.”

Tania wanted tea like a parched traveller, but she hesitated to accept this invitation.

“You are too kind to me,” she protested. “Why should you be so kind to a girl like me whom you met only in a crowd?”

The Jewish doctor smiled into her eyes.

“Are you suspicious of me?” he asked. “Do you think I am enticing you into my lair for immoral purposes?”

Tania's face flushed. For a moment she had wondered why this man should ask her into his rooms. She had read many novels in which innocent maidens were beguiled by wicked and designing men. But, then, she was not an innocent maiden. She had walked through revolution. And this intellectual-looking man, who happened to be a Jew—it was really no fault of his own—had kindly eyes, she thought. There was no guile in them and no wickedness. Besides, she had no conceit about herself. She was not beautiful like Olga. She had rat-tailed hair and high cheek-bones. She was not alluring to the male sex.

“I was only surprised by so much kindness,” she told him. “Why should you take this interest in me? I am only a Russian girl who asked you questions in the street.”

“I know!” he said. “I'm not in the habit of asking strange young women to see the Goethehof or take tea with me. I can't quite understand it myself.”

He seemed to be puzzling over this problem, and then laughed.

“What does it matter? We're both interested in life. Shall we discuss that affair over a cup of tea? My sister will be pleased to meet you. She accepts my friends, even if I don't happen to know their names.”

“My name is Tania,” said that girl. “Tania Markova.”

She went into his rooms.

They were better furnished, she noticed, than those of the working people. There were some nice etchings on the walls, and some rugs on the polished boards. In the corner of the sitting-room was a small piano, and against the walls were many shelves crowded with books.

Tania's eyes leapt to the books.

“What hundreds of books!” she exclaimed in a voice of awe and wonderment. “How much you must know, if you have read them all! How wonderful to be a student and a scholar.”

“Medical books, mostly,” he told her. “I have to go on learning.”

“And you have a piano!” she said. “Do you play it?”

“Most Jews have music at their finger-tips,” he answered carelessly. “My sister is rather good. We have pleasant evenings together, and are excellent comrades.”

Tania's eyes filled with tears.

“How happy to have a home like this!” she cried with emotion. “I have a brother named Michael who is a musician, but we have no home of our own.”

We are exiles and wanderers, like tramping gipsies. We don't know what will happen to us."

The young doctor answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

"None of us know that. It's not a safe kind of world for any of us. And we are all exiles."

"You are an exile?" cried Tania, with astonishment.

He had a little smile about his lips.

"I mean intelligent people like ourselves. We're the exiles of a lost civilization in a world of barbarism and stupidity. Sit down, won't you, and make yourself comfortable. My sister won't be long now."

"Vienna seems to me highly civilized," said Tania. "I can't understand why you call yourself an exile."

"Vienna used to be civilized," said Dr. Seligmann, getting busy with some tea-things. "It used to be a happy city, I am told. People felt safe. They had a love of art and music, and ideas and good manners. They had no hatred in their hearts. They were careless and laughter-loving. They were tolerant of other races and religions. We Jews found a home here and were not afraid. Now that is all changed."

"What has happened?" asked Tania. "Why has it changed?"

The Jewish doctor lit a spirit lamp under a copper kettle, and watched its flame while he answered:

"The War happened—that great stupidity which killed civilized ideas and human kindness. You may have heard of it?"

He looked over at Tania with an ironical smile.

"I lived through it," said Tania, "but only as a child."

"It destroyed the work of a thousand years," said the young doctor, waiting for his kettle to boil. "It killed all the efforts of mankind to reach a higher stage of intelligence. Now we are back in the jungle. You've seen our young men in Vienna marching about with Swastikas on their arms and hatred in their eyes. They have the mentality of Red Indian braves. They think it fine to kill a Jew or a Social Democrat. And here in this community house are young men who spend their Saturday afternoons learning to shoot in a rifle-range. They belong to an organization called the Schutzbund. They are getting ready to defend Social Democracy against the Heimwehr lads. They go about glaring at one another and knocking one another about in cafés and clubs. I have to stitch up their silly young skulls, and one day I shall be caught between two fires when I'm trying to staunch their wounds.

As an unbelieving Jew, I regret the hark-back to mediaevalism. I believe in beauty. I believe in intelligence. I believe in the brotherhood of man. Therefore I am an exile from a lost civilization. Also I talk too much! My sister tells me that from time to time, but I go on talking.”

“It’s the sign of a civilized mind,” said Tania, who was also a talker when she had a chance. “Conversation distinguishes us from the beasts.”

The young Jewish doctor laughed.

“For a few moments I am going to stop talking,” he said. “I’m going to serve you a very good cup of tea, as I think you will admit. And I hear the click of my sister’s key in the door. She will be surprised by this tea-party.”

She was not very much surprised. She was a tall girl with very black hair—as black as Tania’s—and full red lips and pleasant, sensible-looking eyes.

“Having tea?” she asked, as though it were quite usual to see her brother entertaining a strange girl.

“This young lady has come from Russia,” said her brother, as though Tania had only that very moment come from Russia.

“A good place to come from,” said his sister, taking off her hat. “But I should like to go there and have a look at it.”

“We’re talking about life,” said Dr. Seligmann.

His sister looked amused. “That means that you’re doing all the talking.”

He admitted that. It was a habit of his.

Tania introduced herself.

“I am Tania Markova. I have a family in Vienna. We are refugees of the old régime. I talked to your brother one day when we were watching a procession of the Heimwehr.”

The doctor’s sister raised her hands.

“It must have given you a bad idea of Vienna,” she said, rather bitterly. “So many hooligans are not pleasant to see in the mass. In case my brother forgets to tell you, I am Rachel Seligmann. I work in a babies’ clinic.”

“How marvellous!” exclaimed Tania. “I should like to work in such a place. I should like to study the beginning of life. I think I should be devoted to babies, because they have all the promises of humanity in their little bodies and souls.”

Rachel Seligmann was amused.

“They soon get spoilt,” she said. “All the promises are broken, I’m afraid. Still, I must say, I love all my little Social Democrats.”

Tania stayed for another half-hour. She made friends with this brother and sister. They asked her to come again, and she went again, but kept this friendship secret from her Aunt Seppi and Uncle Rudi. It would have shocked them very much to know that she was becoming friendly with Jews in the Goethehof—one of the strongholds of Social Democracy which they regarded as an evil institution, a danger to the world, and a disgrace to Vienna.

Michael was angry when she told him of this adventure. He thought she had been very indiscreet. Olga thought she had gone mad.

XXX

OLGA was happy in Vienna until one night when she became unhappy and wept because a cold wind blew all her dreams away.

She had the gift of laughter, and that went a long way in Vienna, where there is no ill feeling against the gaiety of youth. She was also beautiful—her mirror told her so and didn't lie—and that brought her many advantages in a city where there is still homage to pretty women, as in all other cities.

She had that homage even from Uncle Rudi, who delighted to kiss her hand, and sometimes, when Aunt Seppi was not in the room, her cheek. He directed his conversation to her over the dinner-table, and always reserved the titbits for her when he did the carving of meat, which was painfully small for healthy appetites, and especially Olga's appetite, which was that of a young leopardess. He told her stories of Vienna before the War, as far back as the days when he was a dashing young cavalry officer.

"All the beauty of the world came here," he told her. "In the height of the season Vienna was the gayest city in Europe, crowded with lovely ladies who were kind as well as lovely. Kings and princes and grand dukes came here with their mistresses—magnificent creatures, some of them——"

Aunt Seppi intervened when he launched into anecdotes of that kind.

"I don't think your conversation is very edifying, my dear. Olga and Tania are very young, and in any case I'm afraid you forget yourself."

"Not at all, my love," said Uncle Rudi irritably. "Those are the only things worth remembering, now that we live in poverty and all the gaiety has gone out of life. I can only live in this unpleasant present by looking back to a more gracious past."

"I'm afraid you were a bit of a rip, father!" said young Karl, when this particular conversation was in progress. "Judging from some of your anecdotes, I should say you were certainly the Don Juan of your time. Was all that before or after you married mother?"

Baron Frankenstein reproved his son for impertinence.

"I have no secrets from your dear mother," he said severely.

"In that case," said Olga audaciously, "Aunt Seppi must be very forgiving."

“I am being mocked at!” said Baron Frankenstein, with sudden good humour again.

He patted Olga’s hand as it rested on the table by his side.

“Because I have always had a sense of chivalry and an eye for beauty,” he told her, “I have the family reputation of being a libertine. It’s an infamous libel.”

Perhaps it was his sense of chivalry which made him prefer the conversation of a young girl like Olga to that of the elderly dames who came into his drawing-room. On the other hand, it may have been his eye for beauty. In any case, Olga preferred her uncle’s old-fashioned flatteries to the gauche and sulky love-making of her cousin Karl, who was like a bear with a sore ear when she flirted a little with young men of more elegance and more mature minds.

He was even jealous of Prince Starhemberg, who came to tea once or twice and made himself polite, and laughed heartily at his own jokes.

“I can’t see why you want to make eyes at that fellow,” said Karl rather rudely, after that tea-party.

“He made eyes at me,” said Olga. “He is very attractive to himself.”

She had something like a scene with this boy, late one night, after amusing hours in the Prater. They had dined at one of the cheap little restaurants in that everlasting circus. Karl had invited two of his fellow-students who were very shy and rather silent, though Olga did her best to entertain them. At the next table was a young man whom she had once met in a railway carriage. His name was Franz von Schwarzenberg, and he was a traveller in boots and shoes. She recognized him at once, and he rose instantly from his own table, where he was dining with a small party, and came over to her and bowed over her hand.

“How nice to meet you again!” he said. “How do you find Vienna?”

“Enchanting,” she told him.

“Would your friends permit me to dance with you?” he asked, after some further conversation.

“Have they a right to forbid me?” was Olga’s answer, though she saw that her cousin looked very sullen at this intrusion of a stranger.

She danced in a little crowd of students and their girls, who left their tables for the purpose. Some of them trod on her toes, but she thought the pleasure was worth the pain. Some of them stuck their elbows into her ribs, but that was part of the game.

“This place is very *bürgerlich*,” remarked Franz von Schwarzenberg, smiling down upon her. “This is the paradise of the little shop-girls and their boys.”

“Good enough for me,” said Olga. “I haven’t the luck to be a shop-girl.”

He danced charmingly, she noticed, unlike Karl, who had heavy feet and big boots. She felt like gossamer in his arms.

“I have one ambition tonight,” she confided to him.

“Why not fulfil it, then?” he asked.

“My cousin over there thinks it would be very vulgar. But now and again I want to be vulgar. I want to ride on one of the roundabouts. I have chosen a horse with blue and white spots.”

Franz von Schwarzenberg laughed over her shoulder.

“We’ll ride together,” he said with enthusiasm. “We’ll ride into fairyland. And then, very likely, we shall be sick. Are you willing to risk that?”

“Fairyland?”

“Being sick.”

She risked it. It was very naughty of her. She gave the slip to Cousin Karl and his boy friends after dinner. Deliberately she lost them in the crowds, and found Franz von Schwarzenberg waiting for her by the horse with the blue and white spots.

“I’ve reserved our places,” he told her. “My horse is blood-red with a white tail. It looks like Pegasus with scarlet fever.”

A little shop-girl dismounted from the horse with the blue and white spots as the roundabout slowed down and the blare of music fell flat and died away.

“Let’s mount our fiery steeds,” said the young man who sold boots and shoes.

“I’ll race you to fairyland,” said Olga.

She mounted the wooden horse, showing her stockings rather higher than was quite discreet. She wore a frock of sprigged muslin, lent to her by Cousin Sophie. People seemed to like the look of her. They stood smiling at her, because of her bright, excited eyes. An elderly man raised his hand to her and said, “A good gallop!”

It was impossible not to laugh, she found. It was like being a child again, after red revolution and escape from Russia. She laughed with little squeals

as the wooden horses went faster and faster.

“I believe I’m going to fall off!” she cried as they increased their speed.

Franz von Schwarzenberg on his blood-red steed put one arm round her exactly as she had seen the shop-boys with their arms round their girls, exactly as some of them were doing now.

“That’s safer!” shouted her companion. “How do you like fairyland?” It was necessary to shout because of the thunderous music.

“It’s ridiculous and delightful,” she cried. “But I’m beginning to feel sick. That will spoil everything, including my borrowed frock.”

“Courage!” shouted Franz von Schwarzenberg.

It was all very vulgar. It was all very funny. It was all very exciting, as they whizzed round to the blare of music from a hundred brass pipes playing the ‘Beautiful Blue Danube’ with frightful stridency. Olga became giddy. Her hair became disordered. Her face lost its colour. She felt rather unwell.

“And now what?” asked Franz von Schwarzenberg when he lifted her down after this ride.

Olga’s eyes were still dancing. Her head was swimming. She put both hands to her bosom.

“Now I must be a respectable young woman again,” she said. “I must find my cousin and his boy friends at all costs.”

“There are some very amusing side-shows,” said young Schwarzenberg. “What about the Man Monkey, or the Veritable Mermaid?”

“You tempt me,” confessed Olga, “but I mustn’t play truant any more.”

She played truant again. Failing to find Karl and his friends, she visited the lair of the Man Monkey, who scratched himself continually, and gazed at the Veritable Mermaid in her glass tank, and even went on to the performing fleas and the Bearded Lady. She had her fortune told by a gipsy who bade her beware of a dark young man and foretold that she would marry a blue-eyed gentleman with great riches. She had her portrait cut out in black paper, and watched Franz von Schwarzenberg destroy a large number of bottles in a shooting-range.

“I haven’t had such a good evening for years,” he told her. “Let’s go and dance again. You dance like a wood-nymph.”

“Have you ever danced with wood-nymphs?” she asked.

“In my dreams,” he said.

For a young man who sold boots and shoes he had a romantic disposition. He also had an audacity which was reprehensible. He pretended that the way behind some wooden booths was the short way back to the central gates, where, no doubt, they would meet her party. It was a way which was dimly lit and deserted.

“I don’t quite like this way,” said Olga with sudden suspicion. “It’s only used by the show people, I should say.”

“It’s quiet,” said the young man. “It’s a good place for a kiss. Do you mind if I kiss you?”

She didn’t mind very much. He was an elegant young man, and had given her a merry time. She owed him some reward.

“You’re very beautiful,” he told her. “I want to hold you in my arms. I want to kiss you most tremendously.”

“Well, don’t make a fuss about it,” said Olga. “A kiss is a kiss, I suppose.”

It was. He held her tight in his arms and kissed her lips. It was not unpleasing, she found, but he was inclined to let it last too long.

He tried to hold her, but she slipped away from him and ran. He caught her up outside the restaurant where they had dined a long time ago.

“Why not forget your friends?” he asked, panting a little after this love-chase. “Why not come home with me and go on laughing?”

Olga laughed then.

“It might be amusing,” she admitted, “but I have been well brought up. I once had an English governess named Betty Browne.”

Schwarzenberg could not see any sense in these words. He wanted to take her to supper at a bright little place he knew in the Kärntnerstrasse. They would dance again.

Further discussion on that point was cut short by the appearance of Olga’s cousin, Karl, who inquired very fiercely why she had disappeared like that. He had been searching for her all over the place. He had been horribly alarmed.

“But, my dear boy,” cried Olga, very calmly and untruthfully, “it was you who disappeared and left me in the lurch! I couldn’t find you anywhere. Fortunately I met Herr von Schwarzenberg, who protected me from all dangers to youth and innocence—or nearly all.”

“Good evening,” said Schwarzenberg very politely. “How lucky we have found you at last!”

On the way home by tram-car, Karl was sulky again. In his father's sitting-room, where Olga asked him for a cigarette before going to bed, he was angry and foolish.

"You gave me the slip," he said fiercely. "I asked you out for a pleasant evening and you went off with that impertinent puppy who grabbed you from our table. I don't believe you knew him at all."

"An old friend of mine," said Olga. "I knew him before I had the pleasure of meeting you."

Karl was still hot with anger and jealousy.

"It was beastly mean of you," he said savagely. "You flirt with every ass that comes along. You're utterly heartless. You have the heart of a French *cocotte*."

Olga went very white for a moment. She was a Russian. Perhaps this boy had forgotten that. He remembered it when she gave him a stinging slap across his face.

"That's to teach you manners," she cried.

The boy staggered back against a little table, and overturned a vase.

For a moment his face flushed painfully and there was an angry light in his eyes. He made a step towards Olga with his fist clenched, as though to return her blow. Then his hand dropped to his side, and he spoke in a broken voice.

"I beg your pardon, Olga. I had no right to say those things. I am deeply sorry. It's because I love you so much that I'm very jealous of you."

Olga forgot her temper, and felt sorry for this boy. She hadn't meant to slap him so hard.

"My dear Karl," she said, "I like to be loved—especially by a cousin—but you have no right to be jealous, and, anyhow, you mustn't call me bad names. If I told Michael he would hit you harder than I did."

The boy pushed the hair back from his forehead and answered in a low voice.

"You treat me like a schoolboy," he said. "You forget that I'm a university student and therefore a man, with a man's passions."

Olga laughed very lightly, and touched his arm with a sisterly gesture.

"My poor boy, you deceive yourself! A university student is still only a schoolboy, with a different kind of cap. It's very naughty of you to think of love and passion. You're much too young."

Karl flushed again, and his anger returned.

“You humiliate me,” he said bitterly. “Ever since you have been in my father’s house you have laughed at me and refused to take me seriously. You have made me suffer excruciating agonies. You don’t understand the torture of a man’s heart and soul when he passes sleepless nights because of a burning passion of love for a woman who mocks at him.”

Suddenly his eyes filled with tears, and he turned away from her with a suppressed sob.

Olga was startled. She was a little frightened. She had had no idea that this boy felt like that about her. It was very absurd, but rather touching.

“My poor dear!” she cried. “You mustn’t talk like that. It’s frightfully foolish of you. And you mustn’t mind my teasing you so much. I’m a Russian girl, and Russian girls are older than Austrian boys—years and years older at the same age. If you like you may kiss me—a nice, cousinly kiss—a kiss of forgiveness and comradeship.”

She went nearer to him and held out her cheek.

But the boy did not accept her kind invitation.

“I don’t want to kiss you as a cousin!” he said fiercely. “I want to kiss you as a lover. I want to be treated as a man, instead of like a schoolboy who doesn’t wash behind the ears.”

“Oh, Karl!” cried Olga. “You make me laugh at you. I can’t help laughing.”

She laughed because of those words about a schoolboy who doesn’t wash behind the ears.

Karl looked at her with a kind of fury. He breathed hard and his face went pale. Suddenly he turned and went out of the room, and slammed the door behind him.

Olga had had a very exciting evening. On the whole she had enjoyed herself vastly.

XXXI

THAT interlude in Vienna, so full of happiness for the two girls and their Austrian mother, came to an end abruptly with a domestic crisis. It was like a bolt from the blue, though Baron Frankenstein, who was called Uncle Rudi, tried to break the effect of it by his usual courtesy and charm.

For some days Olga had noticed that he was more silent than usual, and a little worried. For some days he refrained from telling his anecdotes of pre-War Vienna. He had gone about the house heaving deep sighs, and had retired to his own study more often than usual. Aunt Seppi, too, looked anxious and troubled, though she refused to admit that anything was the matter when questioned by Anna Markova, her sister.

Then one evening it all came out. Michael had been playing his violin, to Tania's accompaniment. Olga had gone to the theatre with a young man named Franz von Schwarzenberg, who had called for her. Karl, who had been in a black humour for some days, was drilling with a detachment of the Heimwehr and wouldn't be home till late.

It was after Michael had played the 'Tales of Hoffman' that his uncle suddenly cleared his throat, fluffed up his moustache, and spoke very nervously.

"I think we ought to have a little council of war, my dears," he said, getting up from his chair and standing with his back to the sideboard, above which hung a portrait of one of his ancestors in a silk coat and powdered wig.

Tania swung round on the piano-stool, and Michael lowered his bow.

"What exactly does that mean, Uncle Rudi?" asked Tania. "Are we going to fight anybody? Has France declared war on Austria?"

She was not speaking seriously, and did not anticipate any tragic affair. While playing for Michael, her thoughts had been busy with her afternoon's experience. She had gone to tea again with her two Jewish friends in the Goethehof. Rachel Seligmann had taken her round to see the children's clinic, and she had been very much impressed. Rachel's brother had spoken very frankly about the prejudice against Jews in Austria and other countries. He admitted that many Jews were just as unpleasant as many Christians, and even a little worse, because persecution for two thousand years had necessarily resulted in certain secretive qualities and an inferiority complex which made them objectionable at times when they had their chance of

power or wealth. Their trade as money-lenders had been forced upon them, because, in the Middle Ages, they had been unable to join any of the Guilds. Tania had been very much interested. Now she turned her attention to her Uncle Rudi.

He seemed to have some difficulty in explaining his meaning.

“I’m afraid that I’m going to spoil a very pleasant evening, my dears. But we must take stock of the situation. Things can’t go on as they are—to my very deep regret. I feel humiliated and overwhelmed by the necessity—the unavoidable necessity—of approaching a most unpleasant subject. In fact, I have no courage to do so. This is one of the most painful moments of my life.”

Tania’s mother looked at her brother-in-law with a sudden fear in her eyes.

“Has anything happened?” she asked sharply.

Baron Frankenstein crossed the room and took one of her hands and patted it.

“It has been a great joy to have you here,” he said. “Seppi and I have found it a delightful privilege to share our home with you and your dear family.”

Aunt Seppi was crying, and it was the sight of her tears that told Michael, standing there with his violin under his chin, and his bow lowered, that their time in Vienna had come to an end. His heart gave a lurch. His hand trembled when he took the violin from its rest under his chin and placed it on the top of the piano. Once again he would have to walk the roads of exile with his mother and sisters. Vienna had only been a night’s lodging in the wilderness.

“We have to go, sir?” he asked, in a voice which sounded harsh.

“No, no!” said Baron Frankenstein. “Nothing on earth would make me refuse food and shelter to members of my own family—my dear wife’s family. I’m still an Austrian. I may have lost everything else, but I hope to God that I still remain an Austrian gentleman.”

“My dear,” said Aunt Seppi, mopping her eyes, “I beg of you to break the news.”

“Have you had bad news, Uncle?” asked Tania.

Baron Frankenstein gave a little groan.

“It’s nothing,” he said. “It’s a trivial affair! I have expected it for a long time. It makes no difference.”

It was Aunt Seppi who had to tell the family.

Baron Frankenstein had lost his pension. A large number of officials of the old Empire had been put off the list of those receiving State support. It was forced upon the Austrian Government as a condition of receiving a new loan guaranteed by the League of Nations.

“We have nothing,” said Aunt Seppi. Her plump, good-natured face was blotchy with tears. “We have nothing left but this house and furniture.”

“I fear Karl will have to leave the University and take some kind of employment, poor lad,” said Baron Frankenstein.

“Then we must go?” asked Tania. “You can no longer afford to look after us?”

She rose from the piano-stool. Her face was very pale; her dark eyes became very luminous from a deep inward emotion.

“There will always be a roof over your head, my dear,” said her uncle huskily. “As far as food is concerned, I’m afraid we shall be on short rations. I may say I’m afraid we shall all go hungry.”

“We must go,” said Michael. “We’ve stayed here too long.”

Anna Markova, who was Austrian born and had been happy to come back to Vienna, became very white. She rose from the sofa and put both hands on her breast.

“You have been so kind,” she said, “and I have been so happy. I shall be very sorry to leave Vienna.”

Aunt Seppi was sobbing.

“It’s a question of what we can do,” said Baron Frankenstein. “There’s no question at all of your leaving us, Anna, or any of you. I put that out of my mind entirely. But we must look around. We must find work. At my age it’s not going to be easy. I can’t add up a row of figures, or even count my change. I was educated as a gentleman. That is a very poor education for commercial life! But perhaps Michael may earn something for the family pot. Perhaps you young people may bring in enough for a meal now and then. If we have to starve, we will starve together! We will face new privations with courage. That is an Austrian quality. It is also, I admit, a Russian characteristic.”

Michael spoke from his place, which was by the piano.

“I haven’t a dog’s chance in Vienna. I’ve worn my boots out trying to find a place. We must move on, Tania. We must go to Berlin or Paris.”

Tania looked at him with tragic eyes.

“Berlin and Paris are overcrowded with refugees,” she said.

There was a sudden silence in the room. Everyone was thinking of the future, which looked very bleak. It was Tania who broke the silence again.

“I can get a job in Vienna, thanks be to God.”

Michael looked at her with a kind of wonderment.

“You? What kind of a job, Tania?”

“I have been offered a place in a *Kinderklinik*,” said Tania. “It would be the beginning of a career. I could, perhaps, keep myself.”

Tania’s mother was astonished. So were Uncle Rudi and Aunt Seppi.

“But how could you have heard of it?” asked Anna Markova. “Who has offered you that place? Why did you not tell us before?”

Tania deferred detailed information. She told them only that she had become acquainted with a young doctor and his sister. It was the sister who worked in the *Kinderklinik*.

“Oh, Tania!” cried her mother. “It would break my heart to leave you in Vienna if the rest of us have to go.”

Tania’s eyes filled with tears, but she answered bravely.

“Isn’t that what happens in life, mother? Isn’t it the law of life that one day a family must go separate ways? The young birds must leave the parent nest.”

It was then that Olga came back from the theatre. She came into the room in an evening-frock made for her by Aunt Seppi out of a silk gown which had seen better days—the pre-War days of Vienna when Aunt Seppi had been beautiful and gay. It was cut low and revealed Olga’s pretty shoulders. She had tucked a flower into her bodice—a rose which matched the colour of her cheeks.

“I’ve had a wonderful evening,” she said. “The play was very romantic.”

Suddenly she was aware of a strange silence and a sense of tragedy. Why was Michael’s face so white? Why was Aunt Seppi in tears? Why did her mother look at her with anguish?

“Has everybody been quarrelling?” she asked. “Is anybody dead or dying?”

Baron Frankenstein went over to her and kissed her on the forehead.

“It’s all my fault. I was foolish enough to tell these dear people that I’m not quite so rich as I used to be. They’ve taken it too seriously. They think that I’m a monster of cruelty and want to turn you all out into the street!”

It was Michael who spoke next. His voice was quiet and matter-of-fact.

“Uncle Rudi has had his pension taken away from him, Olga. He can’t afford to keep us any more. His generosity and kindness to a horde of Russian refugees have already been beyond all words. We shall have to support ourselves. We shall have to leave Vienna.”

The rose colour rushed out of Olga’s face.

“Leave Vienna?” she cried. “No, I refuse to leave Vienna. I’m very happy here. If I leave Vienna I lose my chance of happiness.”

Franz von Schwarzenberg had been very charming to her that evening. He had made love to her with his eyes. His touch was a caress when he helped her to take off the silk jacket which Sophie had lent her for the evening. Between the acts they had had amusing conversation. He had told her that he wanted another ride to fairyland on a painted horse with a beautiful lady by his side. He had searched vainly for a quiet place in the theatre where he could kiss her again. He had kissed her in the doorway of Uncle Rudi’s house before ringing the bell, which indeed he had refused to ring until she commanded him to behave less foolishly and give up the absurd idea that she could stay on the doorstep like a servant-girl with her sweetheart.

If she left Vienna now, she would have to abandon a very nice lover.

XXXII

THERE were other councils of war, family discussions, delays, hopes, disappointments, before any definite decisions were made by the Markov family.

Michael searched Vienna again for an engagement with his fiddle, until he was sick of it, spiritually. He offered himself as a shop-walker, as a bank messenger, even as a railway porter. He was refused, sometimes in a kindly way, sometimes roughly. There were too many out-of-work Austrians—and too many Russian refugees. He met his fellow-exiles on the same quest. One of them—it was Paul Vorontzeff, who had been aide-de-camp to General Kornilov—was starving in a garret and very near death. To him Michael gave his last Austrian shillings, with a generosity for which afterwards he cursed himself—he had to borrow from young Karl for tramway fares and a new pair of soles to his boots, and a razor-blade which would shave the hair off his face.

Tania had gone into the *Kinderklinik* before all these delays had proved fruitless, and was earning enough to keep herself so long as Uncle Rudi could give her a roof over her head. Tania, then, would stay in Vienna, whatever happened. It was a pity, to Michael's mind, that she owed this good fortune to a Jew whom she had met on the kerbstone.

Something happened which seemed like the hand of fate reaching out to them, and Michael's mother claimed that her prayers had been answered. It was a letter from Vera Sokolova, who was dancing in the Russian ballet in Berlin.

Tell Michael [she wrote in this letter to Olga] that our director has need of a second violin in his orchestra. I have put in a word for him. If he comes quickly he will get this place, which is being kept open for him, and I shall be glad to see him when I am dancing, as I used to in the Petits Champs. We are a merry company, and life in Berlin is amusing, apart from its tragedy for many Russians and many Germans. Germany, of course, is on the edge of ruin—if not over the edge—and its people are all arming against one another. But we see very little of all that. Tell Michael to come.

“It’s the hand of God,” said Michael, who once had proclaimed a disbelief in God.

Anna Markova rose and clasped her hands.

“We must go at once,” she said, as though about to start. “It’s a great chance, my dear. Olga and I will find something to do in Berlin while you are working.”

Michael stared at her, astonished by this eagerness to leave Vienna, where she had been happy. He was astonished and deeply moved by this proof of love. But he wouldn’t hear of such a sacrifice.

“No, mother,” he said very firmly. “You are staying here. I will send back part of my salary. Never again will I see you in dirty lodgings. You belong to Vienna. I shall go with Olga.”

Anna Markova touched his hair and pushed back the lock which had fallen over his forehead.

“You’re talking nonsense,” she exclaimed. “Do you think I’m afraid of cheap lodgings? Do you think I can let you and Olga look after yourselves?”

“I refuse to let you come,” said Michael, almost sternly.

Anna Markova smiled and held his hand.

“I’m coming, Michael. It’s no good arguing. I happen to be your mother, you know. Have you forgotten that, by any chance?”

“Mother!” cried Michael. “You have suffered so much. I want you to be happy. I want you to be safe. Olga and I are young enough to put up with hardships and squalor. You have earned a rest.”

Anna Markova put her hand lightly over her son’s mouth.

“There’s no sense in a word you say,” she told him, and he knew that she would come with him, even if she had to walk to Berlin.

It was Olga who was uncertain and difficult, until one evening when she came into Michael’s bedroom and asked a question, with a kind of defiance.

“When are we going to Berlin, brother?”

He was taking off his boots, and looked up at her with raised eyebrows.

“Didn’t you say you wouldn’t come to Berlin?”

Olga shrugged her shoulders.

“That was yesterday. Today is another day. Now I want to go to Berlin—and the sooner the better for little Olga.”

Michael glanced at her again, and was startled by her look.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “Why do you look so queer?”

Olga sat down on his bed and leaned her head against his shoulder and began to weep very bitterly, to Michael’s alarm and distress.

“Hush!” he said, a dozen times. “Tell me, what’s your trouble, little Olga?”

She mopped her eyes and tried to compose herself. Presently she laughed a little at her own weakness.

“It’s a very old trouble. It’s happened a million times to girls like me. It will happen a million times again. I make too much fuss about it. I am, of course, an egoist.”

Michael was bewildered. He was also frightened. He had an idea that something very terrible had happened to Olga. She was rather beautiful, and beauty, he thought, was very dangerous for a girl like Olga.

“For God’s sake tell me!” he cried.

“It’s nothing much,” said Olga. “Franz was only playing with me. Now he’s playing with another girl. She’s an Austrian, and quite nice to look at. It’s little Countess Baarenfels, who came here to tea one afternoon. They were engaged before I met him that evening in the Prater. He forgot that for an hour or two. Men are like that, aren’t they?”

“I’ll break his neck!” said Michael, dropping one of his boots on the floor. “Do you mean to say he has left you in the lurch without a word?”

Olga seemed inclined to defend the fellow.

“Oh, we had a few words! He said that he’s bound in honour to marry the Baarenfels girl, but he didn’t see why we shouldn’t have a good time before he settled down as a married man. I was foolish enough to be rather cross with him.”

Michael was more than cross. He was white with fury.

“Does he think you’re a little drab?” he asked. “Does he forget we’re Russian gentlefolk? Does he dare to insult us like this?”

He decided to go and thrash this insulter of Russian women, and put on one of his boots again as though intending to do it at once.

“He’s gone to Prague,” said Olga. “You can’t punch his nose just yet. In any case he wouldn’t take it meekly, and he’s quite athletic.”

“I’ll keep something waiting for him,” said Michael with a clenched fist.

Olga fluttered her eyelids.

“One must be reasonable,” she said. “I led him on, you know. I made eyes at him. After all, he gave me a lot of amusement and some pleasant hours. He was a very nice lover while he was inclined for love-making.”

Michael was scandalized. Certainly, he decided, he would thrash that fellow Schwarzenberg before he left Vienna.

There was no time to carry out that decision. Michael left Vienna before Olga’s faithless lover returned from Prague. With him went his mother and Olga. Tania was left behind, and in the hearts of the Markov family there was a dreadful gap because Tania was to be cut off from them. It was the first breaking up of their family comradeship since the escape from Russia.

On the platform where the train to Berlin waited for them and many other passengers, Olga gave her cheek to her Cousin Karl.

“Thank you for loving me,” she said.

Karl blushed to the roots of his hair, and then turned pale.

“I shall always think of you,” he answered huskily.

Tania and Olga clung to each other.

“Be good, Olga,” said Tania. “I shall pray for you.”

“I shall need your prayers,” said Olga. “Beware of Jews and Social Democrats, my little one!”

Uncle Rudi kissed Olga’s hands a dozen times. Aunt Seppi and her daughter Sophie wept copiously. It was all very emotional because they were Russians and Austrians.

Michael carried a bag on his shoulder, and with his right hand gripped his fiddle in its case, as he strode along the platform to a third-class carriage.

His face was pale, but there was a secret gladness in his heart to be leaving Vienna, where he had been living at his uncle’s expense, and at the prospect of Berlin, where an engagement was waiting for him.

There was another reason why he was eager to get to Berlin. Vera Sokolova was dancing in the Russian ballet there. He would play music for her dances. He would be able to guard her from bald-headed vultures who hovered around the stage door. He would see her beauty again.

In the corner of a third-class carriage Anna Markova tried not to weep. After all, she had Michael and Olga. Whatever hardships were in store, they would be with her. She was a Russian refugee again. Once more there was no roof over her head. She had left Tania behind. It was, of course, a little sad.

XXXIII

OLIVER ALDEN, who was now a special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*, was not allowed to enjoy the peace of his old cottage with oak beams and low ceilings for more than a few weeks at a time. Because of his knowledge of languages he was sent to Geneva to attend the Council meetings of the League of Nations, upon which, at that time, millions of people, in whose souls there were still the unhealed wounds of a World War, put their faith as the best hope of humanity to establish peace and order and a decent sense of security for the common folk.

Alden, like his fellow-journalists of all nations, found himself involved in endless arguments and discussions upon the Treaty of Versailles, the question of German reparations, the French policy of arming and financing Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and other States hostile to Germany, and the menace of world revolution instigated by Russian Communism. He smoked innumerable cigarettes in the corridors of the League and interviewed the representatives of many nations who were all propagandists of self-interest. He became unduly excited, like other members of the Press, by rumours which had no truth in them, by 'crises' which passed almost as quickly as they arose, and by the never-ending fears of new wars and new plunges into ruin by nations not yet recovered from the world conflict. It was all very interesting, and Alden's articles seemed to be liked by the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*—that dark Highlander with an Aberdeen accent—who sent him messages of congratulation and put his name prominently in the columns of his paper.

Something of Alden's own spirit of tolerance and hatred of war came through his messages. There was a human and hopeful note in them which seemed to appeal to his readers in England, who had already got beyond the exultation of victory and the campaign of hate, and looked apprehensively at the state of Europe, which was like a cauldron of boiling passions stirred by fear.

Unemployment was spreading like a plague. World trade was stagnant. The new nations, carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, were arming heavily, putting up high barriers on their frontiers, and indulging in the madness of national egotism, more intolerant to their own minorities than their former rulers had been to them. Germany, exhausted by defeat, was being pressed to pay reparations of astronomical figures beyond the resources of the richest nation on earth. She had already defaulted, and

France was threatening 'to put the bailiffs in', as old Briand said one day between two whiffs of a cigarette. Hungary, dismembered and mutilated, with millions of her people under alien rule, vowed that she would never accept this peace of injustice and one day would rise against it. Austria was only kept alive by international loans. How could England ever get back to prosperity if all her markets were closed, if poverty and hunger lowered the purchasing power of the world, and if Germany—once a good customer—were thrust into the mud of bankruptcy by French insistence upon a slave tribute?

Alden stated all these problems simply and sincerely, without bias or prejudice, as they arose from month to month. He was trying to clarify these things in his own mind and to get nearer to the underlying principles and truths, by which he might give some kind of guidance to British opinion and help forward the chance of peace and happiness for the humble folk of his own and other countries.

It wasn't easy when everything was in a state of flux and all the nations seemed to be lurching to disaster. It wasn't easy to encourage hope, and a little idealism, when all around him was an atmosphere of cynicism, fear, bitterness, and despair.

Over the café tables in Geneva and Paris he had conversations which seemed interminable with French journalists and politicians who had only one thought in their minds—to keep Germany down, and to prevent as long as possible any German revival of strength. Alden could see the fear in their minds. They had been victorious. They had disarmed their enemies. They had made a peace of humiliation. But they were still afraid. Nothing gave them any sense of security against the Germanic tribes. None of their military alliances with Poland and other neighbours of the German folk, none of their ties of comradeship with Great Britain, not even their diplomatic supremacy in Europe, dictated from the Quai D'Orsay, relieved them of this fear complex which was an obsession in the soul of France.

The secret of French mentality was expressed candidly one evening on the terrace of the Hôtel Beau Rivage by a French journalist of international reputation with whom Oliver Alden was drinking coffee.

"England," he said, "is essentially hostile to France. You fought Germany because you disliked the idea of a supreme power in Europe with possession of the Channel ports. Now you are intriguing against France and undermining her position because you dislike the thought of French hegemony in Europe. It has always been like that. England is an old harlot who sells her favours to the highest bidder and then betrays them."

“I’m an Englishman,” said Alden. “I can’t pass that.”

“We’re talking frankly,” said the French journalist. “As I see it, France has been betrayed by Great Britain and the United States—the two Anglo-Saxon peoples who talk high platitudes with complete hypocrisy and act always for commercial reasons. Neither of you respect your treaties or pledges, except when it pays you to do so. I am talking frankly again, my dear sir, as one journalist to another.”

“I have an idea that England keeps her word and her bond,” said Alden calmly.

The French correspondent shrugged his shoulders.

“It was that imbecile President Wilson, and that charlatan Lloyd George, who prevented old Clemenceau from establishing our frontier on the Rhine, by a guarantee of defending France in case of a future German aggression. Wilson was repudiated by his own people, and on that excuse Great Britain withdrew her own guarantee. Isn’t that betrayal?”

“Great Britain had nothing to do with the American repudiation of Wilson,” said Alden.

The French correspondent had his attention distracted for a moment by a pretty lady who came out of the Hôtel Beau Rivage on to the terrace. She was the wife, or mistress, of an Italian diplomat.

“Germany has defaulted in her reparations,” said the French correspondent after this glance at beauty. “We shall, of course, invade the Ruhr and seize the sources of German industrial wealth. Will Great Britain march with us? If not, it’s a clear proof of treachery. *Perfide Albion!*”

“If France marches into the Ruhr,” said Alden, “it will lead to very great dangers—to France. It will be stirring up a new cause of hatred, and one day will lead to another war, which France can’t afford, because she is drained of her best blood.”

The French correspondent looked at Alden thoughtfully.

“I will speak truthfully,” he said. “As one journalist to another, I will reveal my secret convictions. France will never be able to keep the Germans down for ever. I admit that. German women are in the habit of having children. French women have mostly given up that custom. *Madame ne veut pas d’enfants*. France will grow weaker and weaker, and Germany, one day, will grow stronger and stronger. I see that. It’s inevitable. The Germans are dynamic, primitive, brutal, efficient, and industrious. They are the barbarians who overthrew the might of Rome. They are still barbarians, and will overthrow the last strongholds of Latin civilization. I don’t delude

myself. But we must postpone that evil day as long as possible. We must keep Germany weak as long as possible. That is why we must use their default on reparations as an opportunity for crippling them. It's a question of playing for time—a quarter of a century—half a century at most. I shall not be alive then!”

Alden was impatient with this point of view. It seemed to him the policy of despair.

“All that is a short-sighted view,” he answered irritably. “Why not make peace with them? Why not arrange a *modus vivendi* between the French and German peoples?”

“That can never happen!” exclaimed this distinguished correspondent. “There can be no peace between barbarism and civilization.”

Alden asked another question, with a faint smile of challenge.

“Why not fulfil the ideals of the League—all nations co-operating for general security?”

The French correspondent gave a cynical laugh.

“A dream! An illusion! A copy-book ideal from the maxims of President Wilson—that pedagogue, that preacher of moral platitudes and puritanical insincerities. This League, my dear *confrère*, is a mirage in which we all pretend to believe because it pleases the sentimentalists and the pacifists.”

Alden sighed, and presently rose from the table.

He had heard that kind of thing before. He was to hear it again, as time marched on, in the lobbies of international conferences at Cannes, Genoa, and other pleasant places where diplomats gathered to shape a new world, but only succeeded in arranging another formula to disguise the differences of opinion between the nations, and the advance of chaos threatening the stability of the economic structure of Europe which somehow held together by a few threads.

It was all very bewildering. The economists were hopelessly at fault in all their statements and prophecies—except one named Keynes, who had written a book called *The Economic Consequences of Peace*, which Alden read with profound attention and the conviction—which he could not check by any knowledge of his own—that here was a truth-teller. It showed very clearly the impossibility of extracting those astronomical reparations from Germany upon which the French still insisted. But how could one reconcile the bankruptcy of Europe—the rising tide of unemployment, the deficits in national budgets, and the falling rates of exchange in all European

currencies—with the wealth and luxury which still seemed to prevail in the pleasure places of Europe?

Alden was staggered by this luxury life, of which he had glimpses sometimes in Paris, in London, and on the French Riviera, where he stayed for a time with his father and mother, after one of those international conferences. There was an ever-increasing tide of tourist traffic from the United States. Those people who had become fabulously rich while the rest of the world had spent all their wealth on war, came surging over to see Europe on quick trips. They spent their dollars recklessly, contemptuous of all this paper money in France and other countries which they could buy as cheap as dirt. They made Paris an American city, invading all its hotels and restaurants, and cabaret shows. American millionaires, not so pressed for time as the ordinary tourists, bought villas on the Riviera and gambled nightly in the rooms at Monte Carlo.

That was not so difficult to understand. They were the dollar lords of life. They had found the secret of wealth. They had all the gold of the world. Bewilderment arose in Alden's mind when he saw the French crowds in Nice spending money as though they controlled the printing-presses which turned out these paper notes; and English crowds in Cannes, Antibes, Monte Carlo, and Mentone, staying at the palace hotels, renting the villas, haunting the gambling-tables, watching tennis tournaments, driving down from Paris in big cars, dancing with *gigolos* in all the cabarets; while in England millions of men were out of work, and trade was dwindling, and fleets of merchant-ships were lying up idle and unwanted, and income tax was penalizing in its effects upon the old aristocracy and the landed gentry, who were selling their pictures and their homes to pay for it. Even Germans were escaping out of their cage to take the sun in pleasure haunts where their language was not popular, so that they spoke among themselves in lowered voices.

XXXIV

“MANY people have grown rich out of the War,” thought Alden, “though masses of men and women are near starvation. It can’t last. This is only a *danse macabre* of the war profiteers.”

He had been lunching with his father and mother in the Hôtel du Cap d’Antibes. Through glass windows was a golden sea and a glimpse of islands which reminded Alden of Prinkipo and the Bosphorus, so that for a moment his memory went back to those Russian refugees who had escaped from Red Terror. There was a girl named Olga Markova whom he remembered for her beauty. He often thought of that boy Michael and his family, whom he had rescued from the quayside of Sebastopol. What were they doing now? he wondered.

This room in a palace hotel on the Riviera was crowded with people who had been sunning their bodies round the swimming-pool. This sun-bathing craze and this habit of nudity had taken possession of the post-War world, at least in its pleasure resorts. Some of the women were still in their bathing-wraps with little caps to cover their hair. Their arms and legs were bronzed. After lunch they would bathe again and lie in the sun again, and then dress for dinner and motor away to Nice or Monte Carlo, and spend hours at the gaming-tables or dancing at the Negresco.

“All this is very pleasant,” said Alden’s father, taking a sip of brandy out of a glass in which there was room to wash. “I suppose that is the best that life can give—sunshine, pretty women, and the beauty of Nature. See that girl with the red hair? They tell me she’s a famous film star.”

Oliver’s mother tapped her husband’s hand. “I don’t like these frequent allusions to female beauty! Remember your age, my dear!”

Sir Henry Alden smiled round the corner of his cigar.

“I shall never be too old to admire pretty women, especially when they have such nice legs. But let me remind you, my love, that I have cause for retaliation! What about your passion for dancing with foreign *gigolos*?”

Lady Alden laughed without any sense of guilt.

“It’s very good for the health. And I have a most distinguished *gigolo*! He’s a Russian prince and has the most perfect manners.”

“What’s his name?” asked Oliver.

“Prince Andreyev. They say he’s a cousin of the poor dear Czar.”

Oliver thought back to his days in Constantinople. There had been a Prince Andreyev on Prinkipo. He had been keen on Olga Markova.

“I think I know him,” he told his mother. “He has the reputation of being an amorist.”

Lady Alden was not alarmed.

“I find him romantic, but rather expensive,” she confessed.

Oliver went one evening with his father and mother to the Negresco at Nice. It was a gala night, and a crowd of Americans and English were getting merry with balloons, throwing paper streamers at fellow-guests on the dancing-floor, and blowing squeakers like children at a Christmas party. Middle-aged American mothers delivered themselves into the arms of the *gigolos* and danced like their own daughters. English colonels and their wives performed fox-trots with solemn enthusiasm. Young girls, slim as boys, in knee-short frocks, powdered their pretty noses over the dining-tables, and slipped away to dance with young men, who looked bored with this form of pleasure with the enormous boredom of post-War boys.

Oliver watched all this with a smile which was slightly cynical, and he felt aloof. This dancing mania had taken possession of a world which was crumbling and cracking beneath their feet. Beyond the luxury of the Hôtel Negresco there were millions of starving people in Europe. Reports were coming through of a famine in Russia. The peasants in Hungary were crying out for bread. There were three million unemployed in England.

“Don’t look so grumpy, my dear,” said his mother, during the evening. “Your father and I are enjoying ourselves quite nicely.”

They were certainly enjoying themselves. Oliver’s father had had a good dinner, and some excellent champagne, followed by the best brandy of the Hôtel Negresco. He was pleased and amused when a pretty young woman with bare shoulders flung a streamer at him. He answered the challenge by wreathing her in a paper serpent. He laughed heartily when an American mother put some confetti down his neck. He jogged round the dancing-floor with the wife of an English general who had hailed him from a far table.

“It’s a great thing to keep young, old boy,” he said to Oliver after one of these adventures.

Oliver’s mother waited for her favourite *gigolo*, who was Prince Andreyev. He came up presently and made his bow with smiling eyes.

“You will spare me a dance—yes?”

Lady Alden raised a finger at him.

“I’ve been waiting quite a time for the invitation! I thought you had deserted me for the pretty little flappers.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Prince Andreyev. “I’m not interested in baby girls. I prefer to dance with ladies of more grace and dignity, if you will allow me to say so, dear lady.”

“I love you to say so!” answered Oliver’s mother, delivering herself to this elegant young man.

Oliver watched them go round the room. He remembered the Russian now. He had often come over to Constantinople from Prinkipo, to sell a jewel or two before giving a party at the Pera Palace Hotel. He was looking prosperous in evening-clothes cut by a French tailor. He had the figure of a Greek athlete, with a magnificent torso and a thin waist. He danced perfectly, with a lithe grace, and he looked more distinguished than any man in the room, though undoubtedly he was despised as a *gigolo* by all the English colonels and American business men whose wives competed for the attentions of a Russian prince. He had failed to notice Oliver Alden, who had once taken rations to the refugees on Prinkipo.

Oliver went across the floor and spoke to him between two dances. He had just relinquished Lady Alden, who had pressed a scrap of paper into his hand. It was, as Oliver saw, a ten-shilling note.

“Do you remember me, Prince Andreyev? We met in Constantinople, when I was a naval officer.”

Prince Andreyev stared at him, and then seized both his hands.

“My dear friend! How could I forget? You were the generous saviour of Michael Pavlovitch Markov and his family. They worshipped you.”

“And now?” asked Alden. “You are doing well?”

Prince Andreyev laughed and made a grimace.

“I’m earning a little money as a *gigolo*. That is not very happy for a Russian Prince. I dance with old and ugly ladies who wish to get the thrill of youth again. That is a service for which they pay me. You see this note? It is half an English pound. In a little while I dance again with a thin and scraggy woman who is old enough to be my mother. Then she give me the other half of an English pound. It is a form of blackmail. If she give a whole pound at once I do not come back. You see the system?”

“That was my mother,” said Oliver.

Prince Andreyev was not disconcerted.

“She is very charming! I hope I give her pleasure.”

“A great deal,” Alden admitted with a faint smile.

Prince Andreyev offered him a gold-tipped cigarette.

“We Russian refugees,” he said, “make a gamble with fate. Some of us get American dollars and English pounds by humiliation and indignity. We do not afford to quarrel with that. You have a proverb, ‘Beggars are not choosers’—yes? We are beggars with titles which please the English and Americans, who think it fine to tip a Russian prince. But, my dear friend, they will soon get tired of us! We are too many in Europe. For those of us who make a little money in this way, there are many who make nothing at all, or have to creep into any hole which offers the chance of daily bread. In the kitchens here are friends of mine. There are many little restaurants along this coast where Russian ladies wait as servant-girls upon makers of boots and owners of drug-stores. There are many poor girls in the capital cities who sell themselves nightly to support their families. That is the way of a refugee. We are the children of a lost world. All this is a foolish pantomime in which we play the clowns with broken hearts.”

He did not look like a man suffering from a broken heart. He looked handsome, gay, and elegant.

“Perhaps there are compensations now and then?” suggested Alden.

Prince Andreyev admitted that he found consolations which made him forget his tragedy at moments.

“There is always a little love! There are always dear women who keep one amused with life. I have at the present time six little love-affairs which keep me amused.”

“Only six?” asked Alden, as though astounded by this moderation.

Prince Andreyev laughed.

“It is a life of tact,” he confessed. “I have to be a diplomat. Some of my customers are very jealous. But excuse me. I see the impatience of my next partner, who is the wife of an American millionaire. I cannot afford to neglect her, if you understand?”

He gripped Alden’s hand with a comradely gesture and spoke two words in Russian.

“*Das vedanya!*”

XXXV

IT was during those weeks on the Riviera that Oliver met another Russian friend. It was Sacha Dolin, who once, in a restaurant in Constantinople, had lifted the veil for a moment from the mystery of Russia and the defeat of the White Armies.

Oliver had gone over to Mentone and was walking above that old town with its narrow streets to the hill country beyond, where little walled towns are perched like eagles' nests on high rocks. On a narrow pathway leading to one of these places, called Castelmar, an artist was at work. His easel was straddled across the pathway and he was busy with the view in front of him, which built up a perfect composition of huddled roofs, a ruined castle, an open gateway, and a high wall, above a fall of rocks with deep shadows beyond the glare of sunlight.

Oliver stood beside him for a moment, unable to pass, and watching the artist's technique. He was not using a brush, but shoved on colour with a little trowel, like a bricklayer. It was a good bit of work, strong and vivid, and almost brutal.

The artist gave a deep groan, as though disgusted with his labour, and then turned, to see Alden standing by his side.

"Excusez moi, je vous en prie!"

Then suddenly he looked as if he had seen a ghost.

"Pas possible!"

He thrust his easel on one side, overturning his painting, which lay face downwards on the rocky ground, and seized Alden's arms, drawing him close and kissing him on both cheeks.

"What are you doing here?" asked Oliver, after recovering from this demonstration.

Sacha Dolin, who spoke in French, gave the necessary explanation.

"As you see, I am trying to paint again! Now and then an American or English tourist passes this way. As a matter of fact, he cannot pass, because my easel bars the way. He stops. He looks at my painting. He is interested to see that strange animal, a painter, at work in the open air. He is astonished that I do not work with a brush. We talk. I say I am a Russian refugee who once painted pictures for the Imperial Court. That is a lie, but it pleases them. It's because they think I was a Court painter that once in a while they

offer to buy my picture for a few francs—thirty francs, forty francs, fifty francs—as much as they will spend on a meal in the restaurant up there. More often they do not offer to buy. I forgot to tell you that. Nevertheless I earn enough to keep alive and to get drunk now and then.”

He had been doing this for three months only. Before then he had starved in Paris, getting help now and then from friends who could afford to give him a meal. Presently he found a job. It was not in Paris but in Armentières.

“I’ve heard of that place,” said Alden. “Many British soldiers died in Armentières. They made a song about it—‘Mademoiselle of Armentières’.”

Sacha Dolin nodded.

“That’s true. It was one of the War villages, blown off the map by high explosives. I myself have dug up the bodies of English soldiers buried beneath piles of masonry. That was my work. With many Russian comrades I was a labourer in Armentières. It wasn’t a bad life. Our pay was enough for food and drink. But my physique wasn’t equal to its strain. I became very ill and nearly died. It was only my infernal egotism which kept me alive when I should have been better dead.”

Oliver looked at this man whom he had first met in Constantinople. He was deeply bronzed by the Mediterranean sun, but his bearded face was thin and haggard, and his workman’s overalls hung loosely about his body. In his eyes was the profound melancholy of a stricken soul.

“Keep alive,” said Oliver. “That painting of yours was very fine before you smudged it on the stones. We need artists more than labourers in this post-War world.”

“No!” cried Dolin. “There’s no truth in that. This post-War world has no place for art. There’s a revolt against beauty. I think we agreed upon that in Constantinople.”

“I refuse to believe it,” said Oliver. “The soul of beauty is all about us here. Nothing can kill it. Men will always worship it.”

Sacha Dolin laughed.

“I see you are still an idealist,” he declared. “You still believe in the dream that has gone.”

“What about a little lunch?” asked Oliver, postponing that argument.

It was possible to get lunch in the little hill-top town. It was a good lunch, with a chicken roasted on a spit before the eyes of those about to eat it. A party of Americans was there, thrilled by the romance of this ancient hostelry. They wrote large numbers of picture-postcards addressed to Detroit

and Chicago, Grand Rapids, and other places far away. Oliver Alden and Sacha Dolin talked about life and art. They went on talking until the Americans had gone. They talked until it was time for dinner, and after that Dolin suggested moving to his room above a wine-shop. They might talk there at their ease without disturbance from tourists who made too much noise and interrupted serious conversation.

Oliver went to Sacha's room. It was an attic below old rafters in which spiders were spinning their webs. There was a truckle-bed on which Oliver sat smoking his pipe. Stacked against the wall were many painted canvases. Sacha Dolin kicked them out of the way when he sat on the floor with his back to the wall and his hands clasped about his knees.

"The people downstairs," he said presently, "are very kind to me. When I have no money they send up food. Once I lay on that bed for a week—*qui dort dine!*—I thought, 'This time I will die. I will starve myself to death because life is ridiculous.' But at the end of a week Madame Vergnier downstairs brought me up a wing of a chicken, and all my fine resolutions to die were instantly destroyed by the smell of that cooked bird. So the strength of our will-power is weakened by our animal appetites. Another tragedy of mankind!"

"You talk too much of death," said Oliver. "You are too damned melancholy, my friend."

Sacha Dolin looked at him like a child reproved. "Perhaps that's true! And yet sometimes I am very humorous. In Armentières I made my comrades laugh. They thought I was a comical type. I laughed quite a lot myself. That was when I had the luck to get drunk. Presently, if you will make me drunk, I will laugh with you. We will have a gay time talking about art and beauty."

Oliver went down and fetched up two bottles of Moulin-à-Vent as a help to laughter. But before Sacha Dolin laughed, he wept. He wept with his arms flung against the wall and his head against his arms, when he spoke of his wife Lydia, who was lost to him somewhere in Russia.

"She comes to me sometimes in this garret room," he said. "The other night I woke up and saw her quite clearly by my bedside. She was as lovely as when I knew her first. She held out her arms to me—my young wife with whom I was happy—when we were like two children in springtime. I called out to her. I said, 'Lydia, is it you?' And then she disappeared, and I bled at the heart, and cried out in agony, and wept very foolishly, as now I weep."

"I'm sorry," said Oliver. "Have another drink, old man."

Later in the evening Sacha Dolin laughed.

XXXVI

THERE were many friends of the Markov family in Berlin, and some of them were earning good money in German marks—it seemed good at this time—in various ways of employment. The Germans were friendly to Russians of the old régime—at least, those Germans of the upper and middle classes who had a dread of Communism. They believed this was a deadly menace to their own country because of distress in the ranks of poorly paid labour and a creeping paralysis of unemployment which put bitterness and despair into the hearts of young men who found themselves thwarted at the very threshold of life without a chance of work or wages.

Michael walked the streets of Berlin with his head up and a new sense of happiness in his heart. He was a wage-earner. His salary as a second violinist in the orchestra of the Russian ballet enabled him to provide a decent lodging for his mother and Olga. Presently he was able to buy some new clothes off the peg at Wertheim's, including an evening suit in which he looked distinguished, according to Vera Sokolova, who had obtained this engagement for him.

“You are magnificent,” she told him, when he presented himself for the first time at her apartment in a block of flats near the Kurfürstendam an hour before the curtain rang up for the ballet. “You are becoming dangerously handsome, Michael, my friend.”

Michael kissed her hand and spoke emotionally.

“I owe everything in the world to you. But for your words on my behalf I should still be in Vienna, trying to find work in a city without hope. I have come to give you a thousand thanks.”

He was shy of her. She looked more beautiful even than he remembered her in his day-dreams. She wore a little silk coat trimmed with white fur over a pleated frock which came above her knees as she sat curled up on a sofa in this large room with big windows which was filled with the scent of many flowers. She held his hand for a moment when she answered him.

“No thanks are needed, Michael. We are friends of childhood. It's the duty of Russian refugees to help their friends. Isn't that true? Tell me about Tania and Olga.”

He told her about Tania remaining in Vienna, where she had found work in a children's clinic. He told her about Olga's love-affair with Franz von Schwarzenberg, who had behaved so disgracefully.

Vera laughed a little at that episode.

“Poor Olga! She is trying her wings. One day she will fly away with her true mate, now waiting for her somewhere behind the veil of fate.”

“She’s very rash,” said Michael gravely. “She flirts instinctively with any good-looking ass.”

Vera smiled at Michael’s grave face.

“She has the mating instinct,” she answered. “She is not devoted to a career which absorbs a woman’s energies and replaces that natural desire—as it does with me. I’m a dancer. I can’t spare the time or strength for any love-affair. I’m like one of the Vestal Virgins dedicated to the shrine of ideal beauty. To have the ambition of becoming a *prima ballerina* is to give up all other pursuits and joys, at least for several years. It’s a life of sacrifice, Michael. Hard work! Hard work! Hard work! Very little food, my friend. Very little fun! One delivers oneself to the consuming flame of self-expression.”

Michael uttered a faint groan. Those words undermined his secret hopes. They told him plainly that passion must be postponed. He would still be a lonely lover.

“I understand what you mean,” he said. “You have the terrible passion of an artist. It’s the terrific urge of genius which makes all other things in life secondary—even to love and the joys of life. I shall never be anything but second fiddle in an orchestra while you reach up to the stars and forget my existence.”

Vera laughed at his gloom.

“Let us both reach up to the stars,” she cried. “You have a great gift, Michael. You have music in your soul.”

Michael shook his head.

“Not at my finger-tips. And meanwhile I have to earn enough to provide food and lodging for my mother and sister. That absorbs all my ambition. I shall still be second fiddle while you are *prima ballerina* with all the world at your feet.”

Vera answered with sudden gravity:

“The world is cracking beneath our feet! I am dancing on a volcano covered only with thin planks. I hear things in Berlin which frighten me sometimes.”

Michael raised his eyebrows.

“What kind of things?”

Vera Sokolova leaned forward, with her chin cupped in her hands and her arms on the back of the sofa.

“There are terrible forces and passions seething below the surface in German life, and everywhere there is despair because of defeat in the Great War and a lack of hope in any future for Germany. They’re afraid that France will push them further into ruin.”

“How do you hear these things?” asked Michael suspiciously.

She heard that note of suspicion in his voice. She saw his eyes rove round her room and rest upon the bouquets of flowers, and a little smile touched her lips.

“I have some German friends,” she told him. “They send me flowers, you see! Now and then I take supper with them at the Excelsior and the Adlon, which must be very expensive for them.”

“They make love to you, no doubt,” said Michael, with sombre eyes.

Vera nodded cheerfully.

“Yes, they make a little love to me. I let them kiss my hand. That’s not very much in return for their suppers.”

Michael’s face flushed.

“I don’t like to think of you taking supper with those bald-headed Germans. One day they will want more than the privilege of kissing your hand.”

Vera saw his jealousy and anger, and stroked his hand with the tips of her fingers.

“They’re not all bald-headed! Some of them are young and good-looking. There’s a German prince—a German ex-prince—who is devoted to me. He’s very intelligent for a German prince. We talk seriously about world affairs. He’s inclined to be a Socialist and thinks that capitalism is an outworn system. He is very much moved by the sufferings of the working-classes, and thinks that there will be a general collapse in Europe, and perhaps a period of anarchy. He says that if the French under that stubborn old man Poincaré thrust Germany deeper into ruin, there will be no chance of recovery in Europe.”

“What else does he say?” asked Michael coldly. “Does he ask you to become his mistress?”

Vera slapped his hand lightly.

“That’s my private affair, Michael. And I have already told you that I have no time for love-affairs. I’m a dancer.”

Michael laughed without good humour.

“I haven’t heard that dancers are immune from the ordinary human passions,” he said ironically.

Vera rebuked him by her next words.

“My dear Michael, have you come here to be sulky? Is that how you thank me for getting you an engagement?”

Michael’s face flushed instantly, and he was very humble.

“I beg your pardon. I am behaving abominably. It’s because I love you and worship your beauty.”

“You must love me with comradeship, my dear,” said Vera. “True comradeship is without jealousy.”

Michael bent down to her and put his arms about her and spoke in a low, deep voice.

“I love you with passion. I am a man who needs woman’s love. I am a Russian. I am your lover.”

Vera Sokolova let him hold her in his arms for just a minute. She let him kiss her lips for just a second, or thereabouts. Then she raised her head and thrust him away, gently but firmly, with both her hands.

“My poor boy,” she said. “All this is very foolish and very unwise. We can’t afford to risk any passion. I want to be a *prima ballerina*. You have to keep your mother and Olga. We must love each other with a spiritual comradeship.”

She rose from the sofa and smoothed back her hair, which was looped over her ears.

A little maid came in, and Michael took his leave.

In a little while he was in his place in the orchestra of the Russian ballet. Vera was dancing as second to Karsavina, who was *prima ballerina*. Michael, as second violin in a full orchestra, played the music of ‘*L’Après-midi d’un Faune*’, in which Nijinski had danced before he went mad. He could hear the patter of feet above his head and the swirl of dancing-frocks and a little panting of breath. The German audience made demonstrations of applause.

“Vera is on her way to the stars,” thought Michael. “I shall never follow her.”

In spite of moments of jealousy because Vera had friends of whom he knew nothing, Michael was happy at this time. He was doing a job again. His mother was earning a little money too. She was teaching Russian in the

Berlitz school of languages. It was hard work which kept her out in the evenings, but she liked it and was glad to be earning something.

Olga had obtained a small part in a film which was being produced in a studio at Starcken—not far from Berlin—which was once a Zeppelin shed. She had to get there early and returned late, very tired but high-spirited. She had obtained this work through Paula, the daughter of Countess Kovaleska, who one night in Sevastopol had given Michael a stick of milk chocolate which had made him sick. Now she was earning a fantastic sum in German marks as one of the beauties of the screen in a company financed by German money.

XXXVII

MICHAEL became aware of that sense of despair which had invaded German minds at this time. It was as though they were waiting for something dreadful to happen—something which would lead to the deep abyss. Besides this darkness which was perhaps in the older minds, there was a kind of fatalistic spirit among those of younger years. As a refugee who had seen the downfall of the Romanov Empire and the plunge into chaos of all civilized life in Russia, Michael was astonished and distressed by this general apprehension of impending ruin. It was rather frightening, as Vera had said. It was also more than a little bewildering.

There was no outward sign of ruin—not much, even, of poverty—in Berlin, unless one searched for it. Down the Friedrichstrasse and the Kurfürstendam there was a feverish night-life in which some of his fellow-refugees took part as cabaret singers or dancing-girls. Only now and then did Michael see that side of life in Berlin, upon which he turned his back with disgust, shocked by the sight of Russian girls exhibiting their nudity to the lascivious eyes of elderly Germans, or ex-officers of the Imperial Russian Army acting as waiters in such places.

Money—this German paper money—seemed to be cheap and easy to get by those who had the secret. Stinnes and Thyssen and other great industrialists seemed to be piling up fortunes, though everywhere there was talk of bankruptcy and penury. Financial adventurers entertained their little ladies at the Adlon and the Excelsior—Vera Sokolova went to those places with her German friends—and clothed them in furs and plastered them with trinkets. Even the bourgeoisie seemed fairly prosperous, at least to the extent of having some margin for amusement.

The cinemas and café-concerts were crowded. Thousands of people went on summer nights to pleasure gardens, where they drank light beer and listened to light music and watched the parade of boys and girls. On summer half-holidays the whole population of Berlin seemed to surge out of the city and go to lakes within a tramcar-ride—the Wannsee and the Pfaueninsel—where they bronzed their bodies in the sun and bathed in the swimming-pools.

How was it possible, then, that Germany should be afraid of impending disaster? What was this dark illusion in the minds of intelligent people, who spoke of a slip into the bottomless pit?

One of those who spoke like that was a young German student of the Berlin University. He was the son of the family with whom Michael had found lodgings in the Prinz-Wilhelmstrasse. Sometimes he came up to Michael's room to have a chat while Michael practised his violin with muted strings, lonely because his mother was at the Berlitz school and Olga had gone off after breakfast to the film studio at Starcken.

One day this boy sat on the edge of Michael's bed and spoke with boyish frankness as usual.

"It's a great thing to play the violin," he said.

"You think so?" asked Michael, smiling over his instrument. "You wouldn't say so if you knew how often I have paced the streets searching for an engagement. I envy you for being able to study seriously and take up a career of science."

"I'm studying biology," said this fair-haired lad whose name was Siegfried Hauptmann. "That is to say, I'm wasting my time. There are thousands of fellows like me who take their degrees and then can't find any work to do. In Germany there is no hope for my generation."

Michael laid down his violin.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, with a kind of impatience. "You all talk to me like that, and I find it very discouraging. And I see no sign of it in public places. I see a happy and prosperous people."

Siegfried Hauptmann thrust the fingers of his right hand through his straw-coloured hair, which he wore rather long.

"Then you see a mirage," he answered. "There's no happiness in Germany. There's no prosperity, except among a few profiteers and financial jugglers. In millions of German homes there's a poverty which becomes intolerable. The labouring classes are underfed and are becoming sullen and revolutionary. The Communists are arming on one side. On the other is the Stahlhelm—ex-soldiers—who want to kill all the Communists. We're working up for a fine revolution."

Michael laughed harshly.

"What good will that do you? I have seen a Revolution. It did no good."

Siegfried Hauptmann shrugged his shoulders, which were broad and well shaped, like those of an athlete.

"Is anything any good? Humanity strives to find a way out of misery. Every way is only an old experiment which has failed. Nevertheless they go on trying, and fighting, and killing one another in order to reach happiness

or to escape from intolerable wretchedness. Personally I believe there may be something in Communism. It seems to me a reasonable creed with some possibilities.”

Michael glanced at this boy—so typical of the German folk with his blue eyes and straw-coloured hair—and answered gravely.

“I saw something of Communism. I wouldn’t recommend it. I saw only murder and slaughter and disease and famine and untold human misery.”

Siegfried Hauptmann was not impressed.

“You are a White Russian,” he said carelessly. “You have the prejudice of your caste. But I regard these things with a mind which sees that the old system has been smashed and can never be set up again. It was a mess, anyhow, filled with injustice and inequalities. It led to the World War for which my generation has to pay. In Communism there may be a chance for fellows like me. We should all become partners in the State. We should get bread—and perhaps a few circuses—in return for service. We should all start equal and draw the same pay for whatever job we did. I can’t see anything wrong with that, although my honoured father regards it as a blasphemy because he once happened to get a decoration from the Kaiser.”

Michael laughed and then groaned.

“It’s a blasphemy to me,” he said. “My father was a Russian of the old régime.”

“You are young enough to accept new ideas,” said Siegfried.

Michael’s lips twisted to a smile. He was not yet old enough to have any certain faith or philosophy. He was always groping for the truth with the bewilderment of youth.

“I’m Russian enough,” he answered, “to think out the problems of life without prejudice. There are many Russian refugees of the old régime who have liberal ideas. Sometimes I think that the English have found the ideal form of government, but then I don’t know much about it, except that once I’d an English governess, and read an English history-book.”

Siegfried Hauptmann, student of biology in the University of Berlin, laid down the law with the self-confidence of his age.

“The English have no philosophy of life, but they adjust themselves to events as they happen. That is, perhaps, their genius. I would like to go to England and study their social life. I would like to go anywhere out of Germany, which is a madhouse without any keepers.”

XXXVIII

MICHAEL did not take this young man very seriously. He gave more serious attention to the prophecies of an older man who impressed him very much—for whom, indeed, he came to have a reverence.

Michael heard him playing a violin upstairs one day and was astonished and excited. The man, whoever it was, played like a great master. He drew tremendous tones out of the body of his instrument and had a marvellous technique. He was playing a fugue of Bach's, and gave it a glory and majesty which thrilled the soul of a second violinist at the Russian ballet. Then he played a Hungarian folk-dance with a light-hearted rhythm and a sense of humour that was exquisite.

Michael crept upstairs and listened intently, with growing astonishment and admiration.

"Great God!" he said inside himself. "That is how one ought to play the violin. That is how I shall never play it."

Presently he went downstairs to find Frau Hauptmann, the landlady of this apartment-house and the mother of Siegfried. She was in her private room and was surprised when he burst in after a sharp knock.

"There is someone upstairs," said Michael, "who is playing the violin like an archangel."

"Why not?" asked Frau Hauptmann calmly. "It's Heir Rosenthal, of course."

"Rosenthal!"

Michael spoke his name as though it were divine.

"Why does he stay here?" he asked. "Why is he in these lodgings?"

Frau Hauptmann was huffed by that question.

"They're quite respectable, I hope, Count Markov."

"Yes," said Michael. "Certainly. But Rosenthal! He is the greatest violinist in the world. He could stay in palaces."

Frau Hauptmann gave a little laugh as she sat at her desk doing her accounts.

"He prefers to stay here where no one finds him out. He stayed here years ago as a young student, when my mother-in-law kept this house,

which is very old-established. He has his old room upstairs. He likes its quietude.”

“Rosenthal!” said Michael in an awed voice. “Rosenthal! It is astounding. I have often played his compositions. I never dreamed then that I should live under the same roof with him.”

It was a few nights later that he met this great man on the stairs.

Michael was about to pass him, and then stopped and spoke with emotion.

“Herr Rosenthal! Pardon me. May I have the great honour of a word with you?”

Rosenthal was a man of about fifty, with a clean-shaven face and grey hair turning white at the temples. He looked more like a soldier than a musician, except that he had dreamy eyes and a fine, sensitive mouth which softened to a smile as Michael spoke to him.

“With me?” he asked with mild surprise. “Why should it be an honour, my dear young man?”

“I am a Russian,” said Michael. “I play the second violin in the Russian ballet. I have your melodies in my heart.”

Rosenthal laid a hand on Michael’s shoulder and spoke in a friendly voice.

“I am always glad when people like my little things. It’s kind of you to tell me. Have you rooms here?”

“Underneath your own, sir,” said Michael. “I heard you playing and crept up to listen outside your door. Forgive me.”

Rosenthal laughed and answered good-naturedly:

“Come in next time. Why stay outside the door?”

It was the beginning of a friendship which Michael prized. Many times he ventured to knock at Rosenthal’s door when he had an hour to spare from his work in the orchestra, and always Rosenthal called, “Come in,” and seemed glad to see him for a talk about music and sometimes about life. Now and then he suggested a walk, and they went together into the Thiergarten and after a short stroll sat on a seat and talked as they watched the passing of young students and German business men with black satchels, and sweethearts going hand in hand.

Rosenthal was giving some recitals in Berlin before going to Munich, Dresden, and other cities. In the autumn of that year he was booked for a tour in the United States, which he seemed to dread.

“I am a shy man,” he said once. “I hate publicity. I fear I shall find the United States very disturbing to my temperament. There will be great crowds, and I hate crowds. I shall have to be polite to large numbers of people speaking a strange language, and I prefer a solitary life in which there is no need to be polite! I am a bundle of nerves and shrink from social entertainment which other people enjoy. It was the War, of course. It shattered my nerves and I haven’t recovered. What a confession of weakness!”

Michael was very indignant as well as pitiful.

“It was terrible that you should have had to fight. Supposing your hands had been hurt—or your bow arm? What a frightful thought! How damnable!”

Rosenthal smiled at this outburst of wrath.

“There was no exemption for fiddlers in the World War. Indeed, I volunteered to go. I am a Jew. Germany has been kind to her Jews. I owed a debt of gratitude to the Fatherland because I am a German as well as a Jew.”

Michael had forgotten that Rosenthal was a Jew. This reminder caused him a moment’s uneasiness. Like many Russians of the old régime, he had a dislike of Jews. But this man was a genius. He was a great master. The whole world was in his debt for the gift of melody.

One day when they were talking he began to speak Russian, and Michael was astounded.

“You speak Russian marvellously!” he exclaimed.

Rosenthal smiled.

“I was a prisoner of war in Russia for two years. I learned to speak Russian, and I learned to be hungry. We had very little to eat. It wasn’t a good time. Many of my comrades died of typhus.”

“You have suffered much,” said Michael sorrowfully.

Rosenthal drew some notes of music in the gravel at his feet.

“Perhaps that is why people like my music and weep sometimes when I play to them. So many of them have suffered even more and hear the cry of their own souls when my bow speaks to them of life’s cruelties and tears. Then I try to cheer them up again by little folk-songs full of gaiety and human kindness. I try to lead them away from their own wretchedness, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin who took the children to fairyland in time of plague. Europe is plague-stricken again. The soul of Germany has sunk into despair. I’m afraid of what is going to happen.”

“What do you expect to happen?” asked Michael. “These Germans seem to me not too badly off and not too miserable.”

Rosenthal shook his head.

“The German gods have fallen from their altars. All their pride has been taken from them. They have to pay a perpetual tribute beyond their strength as the price of their defeat. Germany is lurching towards the great gulfs of ruin. Her youth has no hope ahead. That is the worst doom that can happen to any people. When youth loses hope all is lost. The Treaty of Versailles was not a contract of peace but a sentence of death. It has created an immense sense of injustice in the German mind. The reparations demanded by the victor nations amount to a slave tribute which presses heavily upon German labour and the very poor. Out of bitterness and despair will come anarchy and civil war, unless some great leader arrives with a trumpet-call to the old German spirit. France is too vindictive. If French statesmen had been a little generous there might have been a new comradeship across the frontiers between the younger generations. I see no hope for Europe. Sometimes I am tempted to believe in the pessimism of Oswald Spengler, who has written a book called *The Decline of the West*, which is a very terrible treatise. Civilization is slipping towards downfall and destruction. Human intelligence is unable to control the forces of decay. I fear that barbarism will return and the beast come out of the old jungle again. I am a Jew. I am afraid. We Jews—the best of us—have given something to the world in intelligence and science and beauty which will go down in chaos. As a German I am also afraid, because these people to whom I belong are drifting back to a belief in brute force as their only way of escape from intolerable conditions. They are arming in secret bodies. I hear things which make me shiver. Underneath the surface of this German life there are cauldrons of passion. There is no strong leadership for a people who need discipline. There is no idealism among a people who have lost their faith. The future of Germany is dark.”

In the Thiergarten, groups of German folk of the middle classes were passing on their way from work. The young business men with their black satchels looked strained and anxious. Students in college caps looked shabby and underfed and despondent. But the little shop-girls flitting down the paths between the trees were laughing and chatting with one another very cheerfully, and one of them stopped to meet a young man who kissed her on the lips, not caring if all the world should see.

Rosenthal turned and smiled at Michael.

“There are always young lovers,” he said. “I will go on playing for them. Sometimes I get too pessimistic. I will make new songs for the boys and girls who will one day help to make a new world.”

One evening Rosenthal asked Michael to play something to him. “No, no!” cried Michael, flushing deeply. “I daren’t play before you, sir!”

“I insist!” said Rosenthal. “Why should you be nervous of me, my dear young man? I’m just a fiddler, like yourself, with a few more tricks and a violin which has a good belly.”

Michael played to him—a Chopin melody arranged by Kreisler, and then a Russian folk-song.

“I enjoyed that,” said Rosenthal. “You played that Russian dance with your spirit. Its rhythm was in your body and senses. One day you will play the violin, my son!”

All the colour left Michael’s face. These last words stabbed him.

“A thousand pardons!” he said. “I play like a clown. As a violinist I am an imbecile.”

He grasped his violin by the neck and swung it up as though to smash it against the wall and break it to bits.

Rosenthal rushed to him and held him by both arms, and spoke breathlessly.

“You misunderstood me! I always say the wrong things. What I meant to say was that you must learn a few more tricks. I will teach them to you. I will teach you all I know. We will work together. Are you too proud to work with Rosenthal?”

Michael was abashed. It was noble and generous, this offer that was being made to him. It was too good, almost, for belief.

“To play the violin,” said Rosenthal, “one needs a sense of melody, which you have. All the rest is technique, and infinite patience, and never-tiring industry; and then an instrument which has a soul and a belly. Take that instrument of mine and make it sing.”

“I dare not!” cried Michael, very pale. “I’m not worthy to touch it.”

“I command you,” said Rosenthal severely, like a colonel addressing a subaltern. “I’m going to be your master. You must obey me.”

Michael held the violin of the great Rosenthal as though it were a holy thing.

“Play a simple melody,” said Rosenthal. “Try its tone.”

Michael played Rubenstein's "Melody in F".

He was astonished at the sounds he made. Here was a tone which he had never produced before. Its vibrations seemed to go all through his body.

"Good!" said Rosenthal, with a light of pleasure in his eyes. "That bit of wood has a singing heart. People think I play the violin rather better than some others. It's that bit of wood which does the work. The man who made it was a great carpenter."

"You have put your own soul into it," said Michael. "It vibrates with your own genius."

Rosenthal laughed, not displeased by this adoration.

"A little co-operation between a carpenter and a fiddler," he said gaily. "You must play on it sometimes. You will give it new vibrations. And I'll teach you a few of my tricks, which people call technique."

Michael studied under a great master, and was an ardent disciple, knowing his supreme good fortune.

XXXIX

ANNA MARKOVA, the mother of Michael, forgot her unhappiness at leaving Vienna because of her joy in earning a little money by teaching Russian in the Berlitz school. It was an old friend of Moscow days—Professor Vorochevsky—who had obtained this engagement for her. He himself was a teacher of Oriental languages in the same institution, making enough to help his wife and daughters, who were doing needlework for German dressmakers, but not earning very much.

“You will find this work very hard and tiring, my dear Anna Markova,” he told her. “I warn you that it is a great strain which sometimes becomes nearly intolerable.”

It was true that the work was hard. There were hours when Anna Markova’s head ached as though it were splitting, and when she felt so tired that she became dizzy and faint, and had to use a strong effort of will to prevent herself from slipping off the chair where she sat opposite some young German who was learning elementary exercises in Russian for business purposes. But on Friday evenings there was a little envelope filled with German marks waiting for her in the secretary’s office. That was her reward, worth all this toil, she thought. She was as proud as a little shop-girl getting her first week’s wage when she opened this envelope at the end of her six days’ teaching and spread them out on the table in her sitting-room before Michael and Olga.

“Look!” she cried gaily. “It’s the first money I have ever earned in my life. I feel enormously rich!”

The sum of money in those paper marks amounted to less than she would have spent on a rose-tinted ice at the Hermitage restaurant in St. Petersburg when she was the young wife of an officer in the Russian cavalry, but it made her feel as rich as the wife of Croesus.

“You will be able to buy presents for us,” said Olga, laughing. “I shall expect a pearl necklace, little mother.”

“We will have a banquet at the Adlon,” said Michael. “That is to say, there is enough here to tip the hall porter at the Adlon for allowing us to pass through the swing doors.”

Anna Markova took up the notes hurriedly and put them back into the envelope.

“I’m going to save up for a rainy day,” she said nervously. “I’m not going to indulge in any Russian extravagance.”

Michael laughed at her apprehensions.

“No more rainy days!” he assured her. “I’m second violin in the Russian ballet. Rosenthal is teaching me to play like a master. We’re going to be vastly well-to-do. I will clothe you in purple and fine linen. I will scatter rose-leaves before your feet. I will hang precious jewels round your neck.”

“Why not?” asked Olga. “It’s true I’m only one of the crowd in a German film studio. But do you think I’m going to stay in the crowd? Certainly not! With a face and figure like mine the road to fortune is not a long one. I shall be a star. I shall earn a salary beyond my knowledge of arithmetic. I shall bathe my beauty in a gold bath filled with champagne and precious spices. You will all live at my expense in *hôtels de luxe* where the waiters will bend their backs when I raise my little finger.”

Michael jeered at her for capping his own extravagance.

“Meanwhile you work sixteen hours a day, and sometimes eighteen, for twenty German marks.”

“Sixteen hours of happiness, and sometimes eighteen,” said Olga. “Pretty gentlemen give me gold-tipped cigarettes. Poles, Jews, and Germans kiss my hand and tell me their life histories while waiting to go on the set. We have two princesses and four countesses in my crowd, so I keep good company.”

Michael allowed himself a little brotherly candour.

“I’m not sure that princesses are more virtuous than peasant-girls, but I hope for the best, Olga.”

“What is your idea of the best, little brother?” asked Olga, with childlike eyes.

Anna Markova had warned Olga of the dangers which might be encountered by innocent girlhood in a film studio, and Olga had listened demurely and assured her that everything was most respectable and most virtuous in the movie world as far as she had seen it at Starken.

“Any kind of naughtiness is impossible in the presence of the Countess Tolstoy,” she told her mother. “She keeps a sharp look-out on the younger girls.”

“I’m delighted to hear that, my darling,” said Anna Markova.

She felt reassured also about Michael, who was quite different now that he had an engagement. Moodiness had gone out of his eyes. He was in high

spirits sometimes. He had found new happiness in getting lessons from Rosenthal. His only cause for grievance was the difficulty of seeing Vera Sokolova, who was always working, even when she was not dancing in public.

“God is very good to us,” said Anna Markova in her secret heart, and she saw no inconsistency in hoarding up her German marks for a day when God might not be so favourably disposed towards a family of Russian refugees, or might try them again by tribulation. She had a little tin box—she had bought it one day in the Friedrichstrasse—in which she kept this paper money, which she had to press down tightly when some months had passed. She felt like a miser when she touched them and sometimes counted them over. This money might be needed one day for her grown-up children. It meant lodging and food and boots and clothes. It meant all the difference between insecurity and independence.

She economized over every little thing in order to increase her pile of paper money. Sometimes during the lunch hour she felt she might eat a little more than a slab of cake with a glass of milk, but she denied herself any greediness of that kind. She walked to the Berlitz school rather than spend ten pfennigs on the omnibus. She was a little foolish in wearing a pair of boots which let the dampness through their soles on rainy days, but she could not bring herself to spend nearly a week’s wage on a new pair.

Only once did she yield to a moment’s temptation to extravagance. It was when she bought Michael a silk tie for his birthday. It cost a terrible lot of money, but it suited him wonderfully, and he hugged her for it.

Berlin, after all, was better than Vienna for a family of Russian exiles.

And there was good news of Tania. She was taking evening classes at the University after her working-hours at the clinic. She was very happy in this opportunity for study. One day she hoped to get a degree in medicine. Meanwhile she wrote often about her friendship with Dr. Seligmann and his sister, who were very good to her, though she had to keep this secret as far as possible from Uncle Rudi and Aunt Seppi, who still disliked Jews and Social Democrats. Karl had become keen on the Heimwehr, and marched about with that private army of Prince Starhemberg.

Tania sent her heart’s love to her mother and Michael and Olga, whom she missed terribly.

“Pray for me, little mother!” she wrote in a postscript.

There was no need of that reminder. Anna Markova prayed for all her children, and worked overtime to increase her hidden hoard of German

marks.

XL

OLGA was much amused with life in the film studio at Starcken outside Berlin. Owing to the comradeship of Paula Kovaleska, with whom she had played as a child in Petersburg and Moscow, she had been engaged as one of the crowd for a picture called *The City of Temptation*, which was Constantinople as she had known it before the coming of Mustapha Kemal. It dealt with the life of Russian refugees like herself, and with Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and other foreign types, including a young English naval officer, who was the hero of this drama and the rescuer of the Russian heroine after tragic adventures.

In the vastness of a studio which had once given shelter to a giant Zeppelin, and beyond a barrier of canvas walls and a tangle of wires and cables, was a scene of Constantinople, where the steps go up from the Galata Bridge, so realistic, so exactly like the actual scene, that Olga gave a little cry of astonishment when she first stood looking at it with her arm round Paula's waist. The old Turkish houses and booths had been made of plaster and so well painted that they looked as if they had stood there for hundreds of years. Turks, sitting on the rumps of lean donkeys, came up the steps. Tall negroes, wearing the red tarboosh, shouldered their way through the crowd of veiled women, Greek girls, Kurdish porters, and ragged children. A Russian girl—it might have been Olga herself—was followed up the steps by a young Turk who liked the look of her.

“This is like a dream!” whispered Olga. “It's a wonderful illusion. I have been up those very steps a thousand times.”

Paula Kovaleska was amused by this excitement of a novice.

“It's not too bad! As you say, it's like a dream. So is all this life in the film world—a mad dream through which one wanders with a sense of unreality. One waits about for hours and hours, and days and days, for no reason that I've been able to find out. Nobody knows what they have to do, or when they have to do it. After waiting for ten hours in idleness, we have a sudden call, and get shouted at in five different languages. Strong lights blind our eyes. We get pushed about, and the camera-men go mad, and the producer screams through a megaphone. It's all very absurd, but at the beginning one earns twenty marks a day, with the chance of earning twenty thousand marks a week, if one attracts the favourable attention of the

producer or the gentlemen—they are mostly Jews—who provide the money for this madhouse.”

“Do you happen to know any of those gentlemen?” asked Olga. “I should like to be introduced.”

Paula Kovaleska pinched her arm and laughed.

“There’s a beak-nosed old man named Schwartz. He’s a millionaire in German marks. He lives in a big house near Unter den Linden, filled with lovely pictures and tapestries. They say he keeps a harem, but that may be one of the stories made up by Peter Loring, who likes to make us laugh.”

“Who is Peter Loring?” asked Olga. “I should be very glad if he would make me laugh.”

Peter Loring was the young English actor who was playing the part of the naval officer and gallant young hero of the film picture.

It was not long before he made Olga laugh. He was a jaunty young man who had been an airman in the World War, when he must have been no older than a schoolboy. He had the pink complexion of a new-born babe, and red hair, and blue eyes. Slightly plumper than a hero should be, he wore a tightly fitting naval uniform which occasionally shed a button and gave him an excuse for visiting the dressing-rooms of the prettiest girls, with appeals for needle and thread to repair the damage. He put on a naval jauntness which wilted at times under the strain of long hours and insufficient warmth. The studio was as cold as death, in spite of charcoal fires upon which Mr. Peter Loring put bricks to act as foot-warmers for himself and shivering young women. He had a dressing-room of his own, but was glad to share it with parties of Russian girls, whom he invited to take tea with him if they agreed to wash up afterwards. On these occasions he regaled them with chocolate biscuits, English cigarettes, and tunes on the mouth-organ, which he played very well. With an impudence only possible to an Englishman, he insulted the German producer, was late for all his calls, addressed the Countess Tolstoy as “Auntie”, and commanded Paula Kovaleska to kiss him on the forehead when he had a headache. He was a great success socially in the film studio at Starken, and Russian girls thought him adorable. To Olga Markova he was a new type of humanity, and she revised her opinion of Englishmen, of whom previously she had met one other, who was Oliver Alden of Constantinople and the British Navy.

“I had no idea that the English knew how to flirt,” she confided to Paula Kovaleska. “Mr. Peter Loring is certainly a flirt of very amusing audacity. If he didn’t make me laugh so much, I should be cross with him.”

“He’s not to be taken seriously,” said Paula Kovaleska. “He is just a naughty boy.”

Olga gave a little squeal of laughter.

“He put his arm round my waist yesterday and kissed me behind the ear. It was in the presence of the Countess Tolstoy, who threatened to box his ears.”

Paula enjoyed this good joke, and assured Olga that Peter Loring had no sinister intentions.

“He kisses all of us. He says he wants to be mothered.”

“I don’t understand,” said Olga. “Why doesn’t he fall in love with one of us, without kissing the whole crowd?”

“It’s the English sense of humour,” explained Paula.

XLI

It was some weeks later in history when Olga met a young man in the studio who was more dangerous, perhaps, than Peter Loring, the English actor. His name was Hermann Schwartz, and he was the son of the millionaire in German marks.

He wore the most elegant clothes, and always carried a pair of light gloves, spotlessly clean. He looked like a young German officer, with square shoulders and hair cut very short above a clean-shaven face, with a monocle which was sometimes in his left eye and sometimes dangling from a black cord.

Olga had never met a man before who wore a monocle. It gave her a curious little thrill. When he smiled at her she felt rather shy, as though this eyeglass gave him a power of seeing right through her. He had smiled at her when he appeared for the first time in the studio with his father. She had been introduced to him by the Countess Tolstoy, and he had bent low and kissed her hand in the Russian way.

“That is a charming name,” he said. “Olga Markova. Many Russian names are beautiful and—if I may say so—many Russian girls.”

Olga had drooped her eyelashes before his look of admiration. She had felt like a little shy schoolgirl in the presence of this young German whose father paid her wages.

He had come to see one of the scenes in this drama of Constantinople and stood watching it for half an hour as it was played on the set under the glare of many lights as strong as sunlight. Presently he turned away and saw Olga standing alone behind some scenery where her eyes were sheltered from the painful light.

“Very trying, that light,” he said. “It’s almost blinding.”

She agreed, and told him that they had to put drops in their eyes sometimes before they could see again.

“It makes me frightened,” he said. “I should hate to be blind. It would be terrible not to see beautiful things any more—beautiful girls like you, for instance!”

“You think I am beautiful?” asked Olga simply, with an appearance of being very much at her ease, although her heart gave a little jump.

“The most beautiful girl here,” he said. “You ought to be one of the stars, instead of playing in the crowd.”

“I agree,” said Olga, with a tiny smile at the corners of her lips. “That, at least, is what I hope will happen one day.”

Hermann Schwartz, this good-looking young German, looked her up and down as though she were a piece of sculpture in a gallery.

“I might help you in your ambition,” he said. “My father pays for all this. It’s a hobby which seems to amuse him for some reason, though I have an idea that it will probably ruin him. Before that happens I might be of use to you. I will tell my honoured father that you ought to have a leading part in the next production.”

“And do you think your honoured father will pay any attention to what you say?” asked Olga in a tone of innocent inquiry.

Hermann Schwartz laughed for a moment.

“Well, I can’t say he takes my advice as a rule. But as far as women are concerned he gives me full marks for taste. Besides, he has an eye for beauty himself. It is a family characteristic. You must come and see his pictures one day. He has a very fine collection of old masters.”

Olga was delighted at the idea of going to see his father’s pictures. Unfortunately, as she explained, she had to wait long hours in the studio and then get back to Berlin, where she lived with her family.

“Oh, I’ll put that all right,” said young Schwartz. “I’ll fetch you out to supper one night in my car. We’ll go to the Adlon, which is always amusing. Then you can come round to our house near Unter den Linden.”

“I’m a working-girl,” said Olga. “I earn twenty marks a day and don’t want to lose them. Mr. Wassermann, the producer, is a strict disciplinarian.”

Hermann Schwartz took a gold-tipped cigarette from his case and tapped it against a finger-nail before lighting it.

“Mr. Wassermann knows which side his bread is buttered,” he said. “As this is my father’s show I shall take you out to supper whenever you care to come, and your twenty marks will be quite safe, I assure you.”

He seemed to be contemptuous of that twenty marks, and repeated the figure with a kind of pity.

“Twenty marks! How frightful that a girl like you should have to work for twenty marks a day. It’s tragic! It’s silly!”

Olga reminded him that she was a Russian refugee. To some of these girls—her friends—twenty marks a day was a little fortune. It was much

better than starvation. Some of them had starved.

Hermann Schwartz raised his hands for a moment.

“Terrible!” he said. “I hate to think of it. But when will you have that little supper with me?”

She had “that little supper” with him a week later. It was a very elegant affair at the Adlon. They were surrounded by men and women in evening-clothes, so that she felt shabby in her cheap frock bought off the peg at a shop down the Friedrichstrasse.

Hermann Schwartz commented on her frock.

“You ought to wear something better than that,” he said. “You look charming in it, but I should like to see you in a frock like that English girl is wearing over there, showing your pretty shoulders.”

“It’s a nice idea,” said Olga, “but it can’t be done on twenty marks a day. I’m sorry I look like Cinderella. You shouldn’t have asked me to sup at the Adlon with you.”

“I should like to play the fairy prince for once,” said young Schwartz. “I should like to take you to a little dressmaker I know. She would make you look ravishing. She would send the bill to me.”

“Do you make a hobby of that kind of thing?” asked Olga.

He smiled at her through his monocle.

“I’m very generous when I get the chance,” he said. “I am a kind-hearted man. It’s more blessed to give than to receive. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to rescue beauty in distress.”

“I am very glad to have met you,” said Olga demurely. “When I am in distress I shall call for help. At the present time, however, I am earning twenty marks a day.”

It was annoying to Hermann that this Russian girl, with whom he desired private conversation, discovered several of her friends in the restaurant of the Hotel Adlon. One of them was Vera Sokolova, who was having supper with a young German prince and the *prima ballerina* of the Russian ballet—the exquisite Karsavina.

Olga excused herself for a moment and ran over to Vera’s table and talked for a few minutes—much more than a moment—to this little group, after the German prince had been introduced to her and had kissed her hand. Hermann was still more annoyed when Olga returned and informed him that they were invited to join her friends.

“But I want to talk to you,” said young Schwartz rather sulkily. “I had an idea that we were amusing each other rather well.

“No one has ever refused to take a place at table with Karsavina,” said Olga.

It was impossible to refuse, and Hermann Schwartz clicked heels to a German prince and to two ladies of the ballet, who ignored him entirely after this introduction.

“I have a surprise for you, Olga,” said Vera. “I see it coming across the room looking very handsome.”

It was Michael Pavlovitch Markov who came across the room, searching the faces at the tables. He walked stiffly, with his head held straight and a lock of hair falling over his forehead. He was in the evening-clothes with a tailcoat which he wore in the orchestra. It was a little too short in the sleeves for him, so that his wrists showed.

Michael had caught sight of Vera, and came towards her with his grave face flushed for a moment.

“This is no place for a second violin,” he said. “It’s too grand for me. I am not as well dressed as the waiters.”

“You look very noble, Michael,” said Vera, holding out her hand to him.

He was astounded to see Olga, and for a moment looked disconcerted. He was not reassured when she introduced him to Mr. Hermann Schwartz, of whom he had not yet heard.

But it was Michael and not Hermann Schwartz who took Olga home to her lodging.

“Who is that man in the monocle?” asked Michael, on the way home. “He looks to me like a swine.”

“Oh, the contrary,” said Olga. “He looks like a German officer of a crack regiment.”

“That, perhaps, is the same thing,” said Michael angrily. “What is his game with you, may I ask?”

Olga gave him a good character.

“He is very kind and generous. He likes the company of intelligent young women. I think he may be useful in my career. In any case he paid for my supper, which he can well afford, as he is the son of a millionaire in German marks.”

She laughed at Michael’s gloomy apprehensions, and would not promise to avoid the man with the monocle to whom he had taken such an

unreasonable dislike. She did not avoid him. She was pleased when he sent flowers to her dressing-room. She was quite willing to continue intelligent conversation when he came round to see the progress of the film picture. But she was rather embarrassed one day when a little box was brought to her dressing-room with his card attached.

Inside the box was a string of pearls. She gave a cry at the sight of them because of their beauty. But she hid them when Paula Kovalska and two of the other girls came off the set to change their clothes.

XLII

ON an autumn afternoon Oliver Alden was giving tea to a lady in the low-beamed cottage near Puttenham to which he had returned with a sense of peace—without security—from one of his missions abroad as special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*.

The lady was Betty Browne, with whom he had just been playing a round of golf, refusing to accept a stroke a hole from an opponent whose approach shots filled him with admiration and despair. It was when he had poured out her second cup of tea that the telephone-bell rang on his writing-desk.

“That’s the telephone,” said Betty Browne.

“I know,” said Alden. “Two lumps of sugar this time?”

“Yes, please. Aren’t you going to answer that call from the outer world?”

He didn’t want to answer it. He was feeling very comfortably tired. There was a pretty good fire burning on his hearth. The village lass who looked after him had toasted some buns. Betty Browne required no effort at entertainment. It was like having a nice sister at the tea-table to take off the edge of loneliness but not to demand polite attentions. Everything was good. This room looked good with a flicker of firelight on the old prints on his walls and on the brass candlesticks on the mantelshelf above his deep old hearthside. Presently, after those toasted buns, he would put on a pipe. That telephone was an outrageous intrusion upon private life. Probably there was a news-editor at the end of it. Probably he had the wind up about some ridiculous rumour.

It rang again insistently.

“Better answer it,” said Betty. “It may call you to the golden gate of Samarkand. If I were a journalist I should be frightfully thrilled every time that bell tinkled, because I should have an idea that I might be sent to some exciting place where history is being made.”

Oliver Alden said all that might go hang.

“I’ve had enough of history. I’ve lost all my young idealism attending international conferences which are supposed to promote world peace but only succeed in revealing the worst passions of national egotism. How about one of those buns?”

“They look jolly good,” said Betty, taking one with careful fingers. “But that bell is still ringing. How do you know that you’re not being asked to start at this very moment for Pernambuco or Jerusalem, or the Cape of Good Hope?”

“Not in these trousers,” said Oliver, who as a matter of fact was wearing plus-fours.

The telephone-bell refused to be silenced. A special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle* groaned slightly, raised himself with an effort from a deep chair, stalked over to the telephone as though he were going to hit it, and said, “Hullo!”

Presently he said something else.

“Oh lord! Must I? Oh, well, I suppose so. Wait for the *visa* in Berlin? That’s right. Yes, I’ll start tomorrow.”

He shoved down the receiver, came back to the tea-table, and took another toasted bun.

“I suppose you’re off to Paradise tomorrow,” said Betty. “And you look as sulky as a dog at being ordered off to some heavenly place to which I’d give my ears to go. That’s the injustice of life! Those who want to go have to stay at home. I’m one of ’em.”

“Pour yourself out some more tea,” said Oliver. “And that’s a pretty good cake which I can recommend.”

“Going to Paris again?” asked Betty, pouring out some more tea. “Any good offering my services as secretary or typist?”

“I’m going to hell,” said Oliver. “There won’t be any fun in it, and I’m half-way through a novel which I wanted to finish.”

“Do you travel first-class?” asked Betty. “Will you have a return ticket? Hell, did you say?”

Oliver took his pipe out of his side pocket and began to load it thoughtfully.

“Russia,” he said.

“Russia?”

Betty Browne stared into his eyes. She knew Russia in time of revolution. She had had incredible adventures in that country. She still dreamed of them.

“Reports of a famine on the Volga are coming through,” said Oliver. “As they come from Riga they’re not to be believed. But the *Morning Chronicle*—may it die a thousand deaths—wants me to go and have a look at things.

That's what the news-editor said. 'We want you to go and have a look at things, old man.' That's the kind of thing a news-editor would say."

"Any chance of coming as an interpreter?" asked Betty. "You needn't let them know you speak Russian rather well. I'm serious this time."

Oliver glanced at her with a sudden glint of amusement. It would make things more amusing if he could take Betty Browne with him. He always found her intelligent and reliable. She was the most reliable female he knew. She would walk through any trouble with the same imperturbable cheerfulness and common sense. Also she had the gift of humour and could see a joke round the corner of a brick wall.

"I'd like you as a travelling companion," he assured her. "But the *Morning Chronicle* wouldn't stand for it. They're very austere in their morals and very strict in the matter of expenses. If I could put you down as a camel they might pass you. I understand that war correspondents used to find camels would cover a multitude of *et ceteras*."

Betty Browne did not press her claim, but she was excited at the thought of Oliver going into Lenin's Russia. She loved the Russian people in spite of all their cruelties and all their ignorance. She loved Russia and its endless plains. She had wandered through that land like a gipsy with Olga and Tania and their mother.

"Russia!" she said presently in a low voice. "I would walk there barefoot to see what is happening inside. One can't believe a word that comes from Riga."

"I'm afraid horrible things are still happening," said Oliver.

Betty nodded as though that were a matter of course.

"Of course. They're beginning all over again. It's like an ant-heap turned up by a giant boot. Do you think there's anything in Lenin's philosophy? I daren't ask that question in my father's vicarage, but I often wonder whether some form of Communism won't be forced on the world as the only way of self-preservation. Perhaps the modern world can't afford aristocracies and landed gentry and protected capitalists and private profit. We seem to be in a pretty good mess even in this tight little island."

"About three million unemployed," said Oliver gloomily.

Betty stared into his wood fire.

"I have an idea that we're all moving towards some new state of society, whether we like it or whether we don't. The machine is making human labour old-fashioned."

“It’s all a mystery to me,” admitted Oliver. “I’m a simple sailorman.”

“Do you think Lenin has really found out the secret in advance of the new world which is coming?”

Oliver laughed uneasily.

“I hope not! I don’t like the look of that new world. I’m an incurable individualist. I like my private life below my own beams.”

He looked round the room of his cottage with the fire burning on the hearth, the flicker of its light glinting upon its brass. The autumn afternoon was nearly dark now, and this room was lit only by those little flames from dry wood.

“Yes,” said Betty, seeing his glance round the room, “we should lose a lot under Communism. But perhaps it’s selfishness which makes us hate to give it up. This is better than a communal lodging-house, but aren’t we wallowing in self-indulgence?”

Oliver was ready to defend his position.

“I want to go on wallowing. If anybody tries to invade this cottage and pinch my brass warming-pans I shall shoot him. If they take away my warming-pans, they take away my life.”

Betty laughed, and it was always nice to hear her laugh, because she had a deep-throated way of doing it.

“Well, then,” she said, “that’s that! No Communism unless we have brass warming-pans and toasted buns, and a cottage where literary gentlemen can talk nonsense at their ease.”

“Exactly,” said Oliver. “That’s liberty. That’s life, as men have attained some standard of civilization by the struggle of their souls. And I hate leaving this little paradise of my own to go to that cold hell called Russia. The news-editor of the *Morning Chronicle* is a slave-driver without mercy on his slaves. May God be unkind to him. Let’s talk about something pleasant. Let’s talk about golf.”

Betty Browne talked about Berlin. Her beloved refugees were there.

“You must call on them,” she told Oliver. “You must take a letter to them. I shall have to go and write it.”

She wrote the letter after supper in her father’s vicarage. Inside it she put a little roll of crisp notes. She had been saving them up for some time—her earnings as a governess to two children in the neighbourhood. In the darkness of a damp night she walked to Oliver’s cottage again, half a mile or less from the vicarage of Rodsall.

The special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle* was in his sitting-room before open bags into which he was shoving too many clothes.

Betty gave a little cry of horror at this disorderly attempt at packing.

“You want somebody to look after you,” she said severely. “All this is a disgrace.”

She went down on her knees and folded up his pants and vests, and packed his bags with a genius of economy that stirred his admiration.

“I believe I do want somebody to look after me,” he admitted humbly. “It is not meet for man to live alone.”

Betty raised her head, and their eyes met, and for some reason her face became a little flushed and her eyelashes fluttered.

“I hope you’ll have a good trip,” she said presently before leaving him with her letter inside one of his boots so that he might be expected to see it.

“Take care of yourself and give my love to my Russian exiles. Tell them that I think of them often.”

“Think of me sometimes,” said Oliver. “Send me good vibrations.”

“So long!” she said at his garden gate before she disappeared into a wet darkness which was an English country lane on an autumn night.

XLIII

WHILE OLIVER was waiting for the visa from Moscow which would be sent to him from the British Embassy in Berlin, he passed several days in that city, and had time to renew his friendship with those Russian exiles whom he had first met with Betty Browne on the quayside of Sebastopol.

It was, however, by accident that he met Michael on his second afternoon in Berlin. He had had a long talk with the British Ambassador, Lord D'Abernon—that shaggy giant in loose clothes, like an English country gentleman about to have a look at his crops, instead of an astute and far-seeing diplomat with a genius for finance and a passion for art. The conversation had not been encouraging. The Ambassador did not disguise his anxiety about the state of Germany, nor about French intentions to adopt 'sanctions'—it was a new word in the international vocabulary—if Germany refused to pay reparations in which already she had seriously defaulted. The French used the words 'refused to pay'. The truth was that Germany was staggering beneath an impossible burden of debt, and that millions of her people were under-nourished because they were working in conditions of slave labour while their Government—a weak Government—endeavoured to secure gold credits abroad for payment into the reparations account. Lord D'Abernon was afraid of an economic collapse in Germany which would lead to the ruin of Europe itself and general anarchy.

Oliver Alden, once a naval man and now a journalist, was not strong on economics, but there was no need of any mathematical or financial genius to grasp the truth of this situation. Curiously enough, France, surely the most intelligent nation in Europe, seemed incapable of understanding this political arithmetic. Its newspapers were duping the French people into the belief that Germany was deliberately defaulting on her tribute, while French politicians had only one idea—to keep Germany's nose well into the mud and to prevent any recovery of the German folk.

"A short-term policy," thought Oliver, as he walked through the Thiergarten. "Nothing will keep these people down for ever."

He studied the faces of the passers-by. Some of them had an anxious, haggard look, he thought. But they all seemed intent upon some purpose of their own, hurrying through the gardens—that noble park in the centre of the city—in order, perhaps, to earn a few more marks.

Two people were not hurrying. They sat together on a stone bench in the Siegersallee below the statue of Frederick the Great. One of them was a young man who was talking earnestly in Russian to an elderly man who seemed to be drawing notes of music in the earth at his feet. Something in the young man's face arrested Oliver Alden. He had seen him before as a Russian soldier in a shabby tunic and black top-boots. It was young Michael Pavlovitch Markov, to whom he had brought rations on the island of Prinkipo.

"Good afternoon," said Oliver in Russian.

He was abashed by the recognition and its consequences.

Michael sprang up and stared at him as though stupefied, and then flung himself at the Englishman and kissed him a dozen times on both cheeks.

"My comrade!" he cried in Russian. "My dear friend! The saviour of my family!"

"A truce to this fondling, my lad!" said Oliver, blushing like a schoolboy. "I'm an Englishman. I only like to be kissed by pretty girls in private."

Michael seized him by the arm and presented him to the elderly man.

"Herr Rosenthal, this is the noble Englishman of whom I have told you more than once. He saved my family from the Bolsheviks. He has been infinitely generous."

To Oliver he gave a good character of the elderly man on the stone bench, who looked up with a little amusement and then rose and took off his hat.

"This is Herr Rosenthal," said Michael. "The great Rosenthal. He is my master. He is very kind to me."

The name of Rosenthal was vaguely familiar to Oliver. He remembered having seen it on the placards outside the Albert Hall in London. He had read something in a German newspaper that very day about a great violinist named Rosenthal who was giving some recitals in Berlin. He liked the look of this man of fifty, as he seemed, who had a handsome, Jewish-looking face and dark, thoughtful eyes in which there now was a smile.

"I am very happy!" said Michael. "I have both my best friends. I believe in a good God. What are you doing in Berlin, may I ask, my dear Lieutenant?"

Oliver explained that he was no longer a lieutenant but that dangerous animal called a journalist. He also mentioned that he was on his way to

Russia.

“Russia?” cried Michael. For a moment his face became pale and the light died out of his eyes. “Is it possible that anyone will put his head into that tiger’s cage? You are going into Red Russia? No, that’s impossible. It’s too dangerous. It’s too terrible.”

“I shall be all right as an English journalist,” said Oliver. “If I can escape typhus . . .”

Michael stared at him gravely and then spoke with emotion.

“That’s true! As an Englishman you can go into Russia and come out again. As a Russian emigré I shall never see my country again. If I went back I should be killed like a rat. And yet, if it weren’t for my mother, I think I should go back one day. I feel this exile very bitterly sometimes. I want to breathe Russian air. I want to see the flat fields again. I want to walk into a Russian village and talk to my own folk. I am, after all, a Russian.”

He looked very Russian then, with his broad forehead over which a lock of hair fell, and something about the cheek-bones which told of his Slav blood.

“I bear tidings from Betty Browne,” said Oliver. “I carry a letter from her to your mother.”

Michael laughed, and his eyes lighted up again.

“Miss Browne! As a boy I used to say I would marry her! I love her still as a good comrade. She walked with us through the Revolution. She made a joke of all dangers and hardships. She nursed me when I was sick.”

“She’s a good companion,” said Oliver. “England will be all right as long as there are Betty Brownes.”

He went with Michael to his lodging in the Prinz-Wilhelmstrasse, which was comfortable and not too badly furnished in a heavy German style.

“I regret that I am alone,” said Michael apologetically. “My mother is teaching Russian at the Berlitz school. Tania, as you know, remained in Vienna, where she is working in a children’s clinic.”

“And Olga?” asked Oliver. “That beautiful sister whom I remember on the island of Prinkipo?”

Michael smiled, and then shrugged his shoulders.

“She comes home very late sometimes. I am slightly anxious about her. She is acting in a film studio some miles out of Berlin.”

“She finds it too tiring?” asked Oliver.

Michael answered nervously.

“Not exactly that, but the film world is rather dangerous for young women like my sister, who is not bad-looking.”

There was a hint in Michael’s voice that the pretty Olga was having adventures which might lead to trouble, and, anyhow, were not approved of by this young man who had grown older and more handsome since Oliver had last met him. Otherwise he was cheerful, and seemed to be content with life in Berlin. He spoke especially of his great good fortune in having the friendship of Rosenthal, who was not only a great master but had a noble mind.

“He’s a Jew,” said Michael, “but I find him very much inspired by the spirit of Christ.”

“He also was a Jew,” said Oliver.

“We forget that,” said Michael. “We hate the Jews. There are good reasons perhaps why some of us do so. Many of them are objectionable—like many Christians. I dislike the financial Jews whom I see here in Berlin, vultures making money out of the decay and downfall of the German nation. I dislike the Jews who control the haunts of vice in the Friedrichstrasse, and in other places. But so does Rosenthal, the Jew, though he explains what causes have produced these types—centuries of persecution and oppression. Rosenthal himself has a very wonderful philosophy.”

“Tell me,” said Oliver, loading his pipe and listening to this young Russian who wanted to talk.

“He thinks that the mission of mankind is to rise as far as possible above its animal nature and to reach the ultimate beauty of thought, which, he says, is the spirit of God. God, he says, expresses Himself in perfect rhythm and harmony. I listen to him with reverence, though he goes beyond me. Meanwhile, I am learning how to play the violin. He is teaching me. You must go to hear him.”

XLIV

OLIVER went to hear Rosenthal and was much impressed. Not so much by his technique and the mastery of his instrument—that was beyond Oliver's range of judgment—but by his personality. As he stood on the platform, rather shabby and rather shy, he looked at his audience with a kind of humorous benevolence. His face bore the marks of suffering. He had been through the War, said Michael. He had been a German prisoner in Russia. He had seen many agonies and had shared them. Something of that seemed to speak through his music, which seemed to put a spell on these Germans who were listening to him.

Oliver was sitting next to a young woman, who turned and spoke to him after one of Rosenthal's melodies.

"He is wonderful, don't you think? I found the beauty of that last piece almost painful. It made me weep."

"His violin has a very fine tone," said Oliver cautiously.

The young woman, who, perhaps, was a teacher of music, became ecstatic about the tone which Rosenthal drew out with his bow.

There were many German Jews in the audience. They applauded Rosenthal with frenzied enthusiasm which seemed to amuse him and even to bore him a little. He held up his hand as though to check their clamour and beg for peace.

Oliver devoted another evening to the Russian ballet, and was more excited by this other form of rhythm because he could understand it better. It was, he thought, the seventh heaven of the ballet, perfect in its grace and melody.

There was one girl who danced as second to Karsavina. She was very young, and every movement she made was exquisite. She danced with the spirit of Greek poetry. In one of her dances she was a Greek maenad and a creature of nature in the springtime of the world. She was Spring.

Oliver searched his programme. He had seen this girl before somewhere. He had seen her—he remembered suddenly—in the Petits Champs at Pera. She had danced in a tiger skin. Drunken sailors had clapped with their rough hands. She had danced to Greeks, Armenians, and Turks. Vera Sokolova. Yes, he remembered that name. He remembered that Michael had spoken about her with some shyness and emotion. That young man was playing in

the orchestra. Oliver could just see his profile and the lock of hair falling over his forehead. He was playing second violin.

Oliver met him, after the ballet, at the stage door, when he came out with the collar of his overcoat turned up. It was, of course, inevitable that he should kiss his English friend on both cheeks. Other people were waiting at the stage door. One of them came out of a powerful-looking motor-car and stood waiting. He wore a fur-trimmed overcoat, and the door-keeper bowed profoundly and addressed him as 'Highness'.

"That's a German prince," said Michael. "He is waiting for Vera Sokolova and will ask her to take supper with him at the Excelsior or the Adlon. Tonight he will be disappointed, because Vera is coming round to my lodgings for the pleasure of meeting you. She will command him to take her in his car and then tell him to leave her. He will obey because he is enslaved by her beauty, poor wretch!"

"That's as it should be," said Oliver. "Princes and peasants must all do homage to her. She is the spirit of loveliness."

Michael's eyes lit up with joy.

"How good of you to say that, my dear friend! I will tell her. I am her lover. That's to say, she keeps me at arm's length and lets me love her from afar—as far as the orchestra which plays below her feet. But we must hurry, my dear comrade! My mother is impatiently expecting you."

It was nearly midnight when Oliver bowed over the hand of the Countess Markova, whom he had first seen sitting like a poor gipsy woman among the piles of baggage on the quayside of Sebastopol, with terror in her eyes. She still looked frail and worn, but terror had gone out of her eyes and she looked different.

"She is a pretty woman," thought Oliver. "I had no idea of that. She looks younger, but rather ill."

She held Oliver's hand between both her own.

"We never forget you," she told him. "We remember you in our prayers. You saved us all from a dreadful fate. And we are still very much in your debt."

"No, no," said Oliver, abashed by these emotional words. "I did my duty as a naval officer. It was my job at the time."

He looked round for the beautiful Olga whom he had seen barefoot on the island of Prinkipo.

Anna Markova guessed his thought.

“Olga will be here soon, I hope,” she said. “She has very uncertain hours, and friends of whom we know very little.”

Oliver heard a note of anxiety in her voice, and the whisper of a sigh.

It was an hour later before Olga appeared and dropped a little curtsey to him. She looked very charming and fragrant in a frock of green silk cut low on the shoulders.

“I’m so sorry I’m late,” she said. “Life is very difficult, isn’t it?”

Michael was angry with her, but tried to hide his ill humour unsuccessfully.

“Surely you haven’t been all this time in that filthy film studio?” he asked.

Olga’s lips had a little smile.

“Well, not all the time,” she admitted. “But one must eat now and then.”

“You have had supper already?”

“At the Excelsior,” said Olga. “Have you any objection, little brother?”

“It depends on your company,” he answered in a low voice.

Vera Sokolova came in and brought laughter with her. She was a gay thing, thought Oliver. She was all spirit and flame, he thought. In this German lodging she moved with a swift grace which had some magic in it.

Other friends of the Markov family dropped in. Among them were Countess Kovaleska and her daughter Paula. Two or three men kissed the hands of Anna Markova. One of them was a taxi-driver in Berlin, and apologized for his leather coat. Another was Prince Igor Narishkin, who was a shop-walker in the house of Tietz. Presently Rosenthal came in quietly and talked to Oliver for a few minutes.

“These people,” he said, “are walking the hard road of exile. If one heard all their stories one’s heart would bleed. They are victims of their own ancestors, who kept the Russian people in serfdom and sent Cossacks to beat them down if ever they tried to claim a little liberty.”

“Are they doing well in Berlin?” asked Oliver.

Rosenthal did not answer the question at once, but glanced towards Michael, who was talking with Vera Sokolova.

“That’s a good picture for an artist,” he said. “Youth. How lovely is youth! And how sorry one feels that the dreams of youth are followed by disillusionment and the hardships of reality.”

He looked back to Oliver and answered the question.

“Berlin has been a sanctuary to many of these exiles. They earn some German marks. They keep their heads above water. But how long is it going to last?”

“How long?” asked Oliver.

Rosenthal lowered his voice.

“It depends on France. If they seize the industrial machine of German life because of our failure to pay reparations there will be no money for music and dancing. If there is any dancing it will be a *danse macabre*. The Dance of Death. I am sorry for the younger folk, who have a right to life.”

He moved away to receive a cup of coffee from Anna Markova.

It was later in the evening when Michael told his friends that his English comrade was going to Russia.

This announcement had a curious effect upon the company. They became very silent for a few moments. It was as though a ghost walked.

“You will see Moscow again?” asked Vera Sokolova presently.

“Yes, I shall go to Moscow,” said Oliver.

“Does one go to Red Russia and come out again?” asked Prince Igor Narishkin.

“I hope to come back,” said Oliver, with a smile.

“Bring me back a handful of Russian earth,” said the young man who was a taxi-driver in Berlin. His name was Konstantin Gorbatov.

“I have a sister somewhere in Russia,” said another man.

There was silence again. The ghost walked again.

“Our Russia is dead,” said Countess Kovaleska. “There may still be a country called Russia, but it is not ours. We shouldn’t know it again.”

She looked round this German room in a middle-class lodging-house, and suddenly wept.

XLV

IT gave Alden a strange thrill when he crossed the frontier into Soviet Russia, at a place called Sebesch, and saw soldiers of the Red Army with cloth caps going to a point like Assyrian helmets, and grey overcoats, too long in the sleeves for most of them, and rifles with long, sharp-looking bayonets. He had seen soldiers of the Red Army before, but they were dead. They were lying in the snow along the railway from Archangel during the Kolchak campaign. They were not in uniform then. These fellows were alive and quite friendly to him when they found he spoke a bit of Russian. An officer examined his passport with extreme care and was polite if a little sulky when he handed it back.

"I see you're an English journalist," he said. "It's the first time I've seen one pass this way. We've had a few Americans who have gone back to tell lies about us."

"I hope to tell the truth," said Alden meekly.

He had to wait at Sebesch for two hours, and had plenty of time to study a crowd of Polish peasants who were being held up for passport examination or some other formality. They were in a bad state, having made a long journey on cattle-trucks. On the sidings several of them were laid out on the ground, and there was no need to ask what was the matter with them. Alden knew. He had seen that malady before. Typhus.

He examined the railway carriage in which he was going to travel on a broader gauge than the line through Germany and Poland. Probably it was crawling with vermin. Probably he would get typhus. His career as a journalist might be very brief.

His inspection of the seats and bunks reassured him somewhat. They looked clean.

He had three fellow-passengers. They were Americans, and cheery young men who played poker most of the way for millions of roubles like those stuffed into his own handbag and worth next to nothing beyond the Russian frontier. They greeted Alden with great friendliness, guessed he was a Britisher, and were interested to hear that he was a newspaper-man.

"What's your line of business?" asked Alden.

One of them gave the information.

"We're on the A.R.A."

These mystic letters meant nothing to an English journalist late of the British Navy.

“American Relief. There’s a famine raging on the Volga, according to report. The United States proposes to feed Bolshevik babies while anxious for the early death of Bolshevik parents. We’ve been feeding hungry babies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, the devastated districts of France, Vienna under the blockade, Belgium in time of war, and other starving populations which at the moment I’ve forgotten. Herbert Hoover began it for the Red Cross. Colonel Haskell is carrying on the glad work in Russia. If you ask me if there’s any sense in it I’m not going to tell you. It’s my job. Take a hand at poker, won’t you?”

Alden took a hand at poker and won sixteen million roubles in the course of a long journey in a train which travelled slowly across an interminable flat plain, stopped frequently while the *provodnik* and the engine-driver went away to get fuel for the engine, and finally panted into Moscow ten hours after scheduled time.

Alden saw for the first time that city of which he had heard so much from Russian officers in the Caucasus and Russian refugees in Constantinople. They looked back to its pre-War life as a city of romance. The Grand Dukes and the aristocrats of St. Petersburg had come here for their pleasure in summer-time. It was the heart of Russia, they said. ‘All things roll down to Moscow’ was an old Russian proverb.

Alden hired a *droschke* with a lean horse which staggered along a road strewn with loose cobble-stones and with deep ruts which nearly wrenched off one of the wheels. The driver was in a ragged fur coat and a shaggy fur cap. Once he raised his cap and crossed himself. It was when he drove through the gateway leading to the inner city, in a great wall with fan-shaped battlements. There was a little shrine at the side of the gateway. A Russian refugee named Sacha Dolin had mentioned it once to Alden. It was the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, very old and very famous. Even the Czars had to alight here and say a prayer before passing on to the Kremlin.

On a wall immediately opposite, Alden saw some Russian words carved deeply into a stone. He read them.

RELIGION IS THE OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE

He was astonished that his *droschke* driver—an elderly man—should doff his cap and cross himself in Red Russia.

He drove into the Red Square, a great open place below the walls of the Kremlin—walls which reminded Alden of those in Verona, with those curious fan-shaped decorations and long stairways leading up to stone shelters for the guards of the walls. It was a fortress and a city, crowded with churches, Government offices, palaces, and barracks, all enclosed and invisible behind those high walls.

Monsters and madmen had lived there. In this square outside the stones had run red with the blood of their victims. Mystical-minded men had worn the Imperial Crown inside those palaces. Now and then an idealist had broken his heart there. The last Czar had stayed here in a war which had ended for his family in a cellar among his murderers. Now a little slant-eyed man named Lenin had taken their place. Somewhere in that vast collection of buildings, as Alden passed, he was sitting at a deal table arranging a new system of life for a hundred and sixty million human beings over whom he had absolute power, and leaving to others—a man named Djerjinsky—a quick way of death, by a bullet in the back of the head, for those who didn't like that new system or who had belonged to the old.

A party of Red soldiers marched through the square. Among them was a group of haggard men, mostly young, unkempt and unshaven, and in rags.

“Who are they?” asked Alden, across the shoulder of the *droschke* driver. The man shrugged his shoulders.

“Prisoners. *Bourjoi*. People accused of counter-revolution. Who knows? They will all be shot, of course.”

Alden looked into the eyes of one of the men who were going to be shot. There was death in them already. He was a young man, not unlike Sacha Dolin, that refugee who had been in Constantinople, and was now in France.

“It's queer,” thought Alden as he drove through Moscow, “how I have become mixed up with Russians and Russian life. I wonder if there's any meaning in it. Things don't happen without a meaning. One seems to be guided, somehow.”

He was billeted in a house opposite the Kremlin. It was a fine house, once belonging to the Sugar King of Russia, immensely rich. There were carpets on the stairs, and gilt-backed furniture, and good pictures on the walls—one by Greuze. It was one of the few houses in Moscow, as Alden learned later, which still had carpets on the stairs and any kind of comfort. Many of them were riddled with bullets and shell-holes. Many of them had no banisters because they had been used for fuel. Their rooms were overcrowded—one family to a room, or two families with curtains between. Many of the houses were uninhabitable because the roofs leaked, and the

pipes carried no water, and there was no light in them, and all their woodwork had gone.

At the gate of this house Alden had paid off his *isvostchik*—the *droschke* driver. He had given him a million roubles, and the man had burst into tears and protested that on such a fare he would perish and that his horse would starve to death. Alden gave him five million roubles, and refused more, in spite of the man's pleadings and curses.

The front door of this mansion in Moscow was unlocked with a rattle of chains, and, after his entry, locked again by a grim-looking man who seemed to expect him. In the background was a peasant-looking girl with a shawl over her head and slippers on her feet.

"The Foreign Office," said the concierge, who was also, it seemed, his gaoler, "has sent instructions about you. Katinka here will show you to your room."

The girl in the slippers traipsed upstairs in front of Oliver, with the heels of her slippers flopping on the polished stairs. She led the way down a corridor, and Alden was astonished to see six Chinese mandarins with long pigtailed—he thought this fashion had been abolished—and their arms folded below silk robes, pass him gravely and without salutation. He was even more astonished, at the end of another corridor, to see a coal-black face staring at him from behind a crimson curtain. There was a passage with many small doors. Out of one of them came a man in his shirt-sleeves with his braces hanging down and a sponge in his right hand. As he passed Alden he squeezed some drops of water out of the sponge and spoke very pleasantly in English with an American accent. "The devil is dead."

"This," thought Alden, "is a strange house. Is this a nightmare, or have I gone mad?"

The slatternly girl showed him into a spacious drawing-room with gilt mirrors and a grand piano. In the centre of it was an iron bedstead.

"Here you sleep," said the girl in Russian. "I come if you ring."

She came sometimes if he rang, but mostly not.

The mansion in which Alden was billeted was the guest-house of Soviet Russia. The six mandarins belonged to the Far Eastern republic with whom Moscow was in friendly relationship. The negro was a propagandist of Communism in the Soudan. The man who said the devil was dead, with extraordinary optimism, was an American journalist named Frank B. Staresmore, who wrote for a newspaper syndicate. He had been in this house for more than a year and found that it suited him, owing to some very good

wine in its cellars for which he paid an extravagant price—put down in his expenses account to the newspaper syndicate under the heading of *et cetera*—in good American dollars. Having approached the penultimate bottle, he was deciding to return shortly to the United States.

Alden found him friendly and illuminating, and they wandered into each other's rooms a good deal.

"Everything you will hear from Russian officials," he told Alden, "is just propaganda. I'm inclined to think they believe in it themselves. They will tell you a hell of a lot about all they are doing for education, hygiene, babies' clinics, industrial development, and other advanced ideals for the happiness of the proletariat. What it really means is that a lot of young Bolsheviks in the Kremlin are preparing paper schemes for their master, Lenin, and think that when they have written them down all is well, and an act has been accomplished. Nothing, of course, gets done.

"There's no education, because there are no teachers—most of them have died—no fuel in the school-houses, so that the children would freeze to death if they came to them. No paper. No books. No pencils, and no food in the bellies of the children—not near enough, anyhow. They talk about hygiene. The hospitals are crowded with typhus patients who die like flies. There are no medicines, no soap, no anaesthetics, no blankets for the beds. The patients sleep four in a bed to keep themselves warm. On the Volga twenty-five million people are threatened with starvation. There were two bad harvests. The Red Army seized the grain for their own use or for feeding the cities, and the peasants have no reserves. Lenin—that master mind—has the sense to see that the whole of Russia will become a graveyard if he insists on the iron law of Communism in too much of a hurry. The peasants won't bring their produce into the light—or the markets—if they don't get paid for it. So the markets are being allowed again, and private trading is no longer a crime against the State. Lenin has proclaimed what he calls the New Economic Policy, or *Nep*, as it's called here. It amounts to a retreat from the pure gospel of Communism. Even shops are opening here and there, and one or two restaurants where one can get quite decent food. We'll dine in one."

"I can't understand the system at all," admitted Alden to this friendly American journalist, after a few days in Moscow.

"What's your trouble?" asked Mr. Frank B. Staresmore, lying at full length on a sofa covered with green silk in the style of the French Empire.

"I thought Communism had abolished class distinctions," said Alden, "and made everybody equal in duty and reward."

Mr. Frank B. Staesmore waved a cigar and said the mystical word “Poppycock”.

Alden described what he had seen in Moscow. He had seen some very smart kommissars in excellent boots and new tunics. Some of them were sitting at that moment in a little tea-shop on the other side of the Red Square, eating pastries and talking to young women not too badly dressed. Outside in the Red Square haggard-looking men—peasants and labourers—were dragging sledges or pushing hand-carts. Their boots were not excellent like those of the kommissars. They had no boots, and their feet were tied up in rags. They were certainly underfed.

“Communist officials are creating a new bourgeoisie,” said Staesmore, “or, if you like to call it so, a privileged bureaucracy. They have first call on food and clothing. They see that they get anything that’s going. At the moment not much is going—outside Moscow. St. Petersburg—Leningrad, rather—is a cold hell.”

“This money,” asked Alden, in a state of perplexity, “what’s it for? Who gets it? What does it buy? I thought every citizen of the State received a certain number of tickets which he presented at a *guichet* in a State store. In return for service to the State he is promised food, boots, clothes, operas, lectures, medicine, and all his needs of body and soul. Isn’t that the idea?”

The American journalist flicked the ash off his cigar.

“That’s the idea. But it doesn’t work! A man has a ticket for a pair of boots. But there ain’t no boots. His women line up for bread and fish and meat. But they get half their bread ration and more often than not no fish. There ain’t no fish. Tickets for the opera—the actors are a privileged crowd—are handed round to the Trade Unionists—another privileged crowd. Opera and the ballet are about the only sure things in Russia today—at least, in Moscow and Petrograd. Everything else is on paper—masses of paper—reams of paper—which don’t alter a darned thing in the situation of reality which is a nation of a hundred and sixty million people menaced by starvation and lacking the elementary needs of life, except in a few districts where the soil is good and the old earth yields its harvest.”

“Then Communism has failed?” asked Alden.

Frank B. Staesmore shifted his position on the sofa.

“No, I wouldn’t say that, sonny! It’s in the experimental stage, and for the moment in retreat. But behind the little propagandists who spout a few tags of Karl Marx and write silly words on bits of paper there are some pretty keen and ruthless minds. They believe in Communism. It’s their

religion. They have the strength of fanaticism. If they can keep the Russian people alive they may get the system going later on. They'll get the peasants into their grip and communize their farms. They'll buy machinery and hire American engineers to show them how it works. They will learn to make their own machines and create a mechanical mind among the younger crowd. Give 'em time! Say twenty years from now. No Russian ever does a thing in a hurry. He has a word. It's *seichas*. It means 'immediately'. That is to say, it means this day next week, or the year after next. Give 'em time, laddy."

"What about the price in agony and misery?" asked Alden. "Is Communism worth all that? To carry out a theory which will lead this people to a kind of industrialized ant-heap, how many are going to die?"

Mr. Frank B. Staesmore, correspondent to an American syndicate, gave an indirect answer.

"I'm not good at that kind of arithmetic. How many people have died in all your European wars? And what has been the net result in human happiness? Man, my dear Alden, is a lousy animal. He is extremely stupid and is slow in learning. He is prone to the hero-worship of bandits and Bohunks. He will torture his fellow-beings to make them happy. 'Be happy, damn you,' he says, when he enforces his theory or his faith. He is gullible and listens open-mouthed to the cheapjacks and the spell-binders. He worships a flag and says, 'My country right or wrong.' He thinks, poor boob, that he has discovered the way to the ideal government when all men shall be happy and equal, and then, when the executioners have done their job, he finds that that particular ideal of government was busted in humanity's early experiments. He produces now and then cunning minds who exploit the masses; and tiger minds who have a taste for blood. He worships devils, believing them to be gods. He volunteers for sacrifice to an ideal which brings honour and wealth to the men who mouthed it and misery and ruin to himself. Man, my dear young fellow, is, believe me, an incurable case. Do you mind pushing that bell-knob? We might split another bottle of wine."

Oliver Alden wandered round the markets in Moscow. Peasants had come in from the country districts and were displaying their produce on wooden stalls. Alden saw no money pass. These peasants didn't seem to like the look of Russian roubles. But he saw one exchange some cheese for a pair of shoes, and another sold some butter for a woollen vest. Officers of the Cheka—the secret police—strolled about, keeping a sharp eye on things.

Staresmore, the American journalist, seemed to know them, and warned Alden to keep his mouth shut in their neighbourhood.

“Some of them speak English,” he said. “They graduated in the Bowery of New York.”

At one end of the market-place there was a line of women peddling small goods on trays which they held in front of them. Alden hated to look at them, and yet looked into their eyes. They were women of the old régime. He could see that at a glance. Their hands were dirty, but they were not peasant hands, rough with the work of the fields. They wore black clothes, shabby and patched, but they were clothes once made by dressmakers in Petrograd and Moscow—when there were dressmakers. There was a young woman there who reminded him of Tania Markova, the sister of that boy Michael. Their eyes met, and the girl’s face flushed painfully as though she were ashamed to be seen by a foreigner standing like this in the market-place. In front of her she had two little baby shoes on a silk cushion, and an ivory crucifix, delicately carved. A peasant woman fingered the baby shoes and laughed and then passed on.

Alden spoke inside his heart.

“God! How pitiful! Imagination can’t get as far as that woman’s experience of life.”

One night at the gate of the Iberian Virgin he bought a few cigarettes from a woman standing under the archway. She was selling sunflower seeds as well as cigarettes. She looked desperately ill, with sharp cheek-bones and drawn skin, and Alden knew by one glance again that she was a woman of the old régime.

He spoke to her in French.

“Are you ill? Can I do anything?”

Her face became livid and she shrank back.

“How did you know I speak French? Who are you?”

“I’m an Englishman. Do you speak English?”

“I dare not talk to a foreigner,” she answered. “Please go away.”

He went away, after giving her a wad of those filthy roubles for a few cigarettes.

XLVI

STARESMORE, who had been in Moscow for more than a year, knew some of these people of the old régime who had failed to escape in time. Some of them were employed as typists at the British Mission, where the representative of Great Britain—a dry little man he seemed—had pity on them. It was like opening the gates of heaven to them. They had English food for tea. There was soap with which they could wash. They hid their broken boots and shoes beneath little tables on which they typed. Here was an outpost of Western civilization to which once they had belonged. Outside, was Lenin's new world, not yet made. The Reign of Terror was not over yet. The prisons were still crowded with women like this and with men who had no crime against them but their names.

As the representative of an English Liberal newspaper, Oliver Alden was allowed to interview two of the leading minds in this new system of human society. One of them was a thin, nervous invalid named Tchitcherin who was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He seemed to live in two rooms and do his own cooking. He received Alden coldly but politely, and spoke very good English, in which he abused Lord Curzon, his opposite number in England.

“That man is made in a mould. It's the mould of the English public-school tradition. His mind is closed up to any idea outside that framework. He is in an intellectual strait-jacket.”

Alden did not argue the point. The man spoke with an amazing knowledge of the political situation in Great Britain. Once or twice his face flushed with anger because of British hostility to Soviet Russia and counter-revolutionary work carried on by the British Government.

He was an intellectual and a fanatic. He belonged to a noble family which he had repudiated for the sake of his Communist ideals. Alden noticed his delicate hands, his little consumptive cough, and a kind of mystical light in his pallid eyes. And yet he did not look or speak like a monster of cruelty. He ignored all the executions and made no mention of the Cheka. He would have looked quite at ease in the Athenaeum or the Reform Club of London.

The other leading mind who opened it a little to an English journalist was a man named Kapek—a flat-faced, bearded man with blue eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses, and a gift of laughter and irony. He seemed to find a

fund of amusement in what he called the hypocrisy of the Capitalist world. He made great play with the contrast between the Peace of Versailles and the ideals proclaimed by its authors. “The millions who died on the battlefields,” he said, “must laugh in their graves for having been the dupes of their rulers.”

This humorist sat in a little room in the Kremlin. It had been hard for Alden to get there. At each gateway within the walls of that fortress city he had been held up by the guards, who would not let him go farther until they received a message by telephone from some inner office. He had been brought under guard to the stairway leading to Kapek’s room. Somewhere here was Lenin, invisible, aloof, seldom seen in the outside world. Down a long corridor little doors opened. A slattern in spectacles came out and emptied some tea-leaves into a waste-paper basket. In another room with a half-opened door, a man in a red blouse was nursing a baby. From one room came the sound of a concertina. It was in the palace of the Czars.

“Of course,” said Kapek, “we shall do everything in our power to injure the British Empire as long as you try to injure us. We have our missionaries—fanatical young men—in India, in Afghanistan, in Egypt, in China. We can make a lot of trouble for the British Empire. You see, I speak frankly as one journalist to another. I am an old journalist, you know. I have walked up Fleet Street.”

He laughed heartily at this reminiscence.

“But why be hostile?” he asked. “Russia and the British Empire are the greatest powers which touch the East. We should co-operate instead of working against each other. One day Russia will think more of Empire than of Communism. We shall become a world power again, and the old Pan Slav tradition will come surging back. The Red Army will have something to say for itself. I should like to see a friendly contact between our peoples and Governments. We need your machines. We can supply your grain. A useful exchange! Russia lies half-way between the East and the West. We are not to be ignored. Why does England put up a wall against us—a wall of hypocrisy and moral indignation? Was it not England which showed the way to revolution and chopped off the head of King Charles I, *pour encourager les autres?*”

He shook hands very heartily with an English journalist.

“Go back and tell the truth about us,” he said. “You will find that we are doing as well as might be expected. One can’t create a new social system in five minutes.”

A week later Oliver Alden went to Kazan with some American officers of the Relief Mission. They were going down the Volga to report upon the extent of the famine. They offered to take Alden and to feed him on their rations.

XLVII

THERE was an opera in Kazan. The company was playing *Carmen*, slightly readapted to show the iniquity of the capitalist system, but with the same music and scenic effects as Alden and his American friends had seen it before. There was a Persian prima donna who played her part with immense *verve*, especially when she danced to the castanets with a swish of skirts.

Alden was interested in the audience. They sat very still and quiet, these people in working-overalls and Russian blouses belted round the waist. Here and there were some peasants who stared at the scenes as though without interest or understanding. In the front seats were local kommissars with their women, and elderly men who looked like officials of some kind and might have stepped out of a play by Tchekov.

“These people,” thought Alden, “don’t look as though the Communist régime had brought them any happiness. One doesn’t see a gleam of joy in their eyes due to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They look a miserable crowd.”

A young girl sitting in the front row had brushed her hair very neatly and put a bit of lace round her neck as a kind of *fichu*. She was with an elderly man who was probably her father, and she had her hand tucked through his arm. Presently one of the officials who was handing round programmes stared at her and then came close and with an angry gesture pulled off the lace *fichu* and flung it on the floor.

“That is bourgeois adornment,” he said sullenly. “Russia is now a Soviet State.”

The girl flushed painfully, and then her face became dead white. The elderly man at her side murmured a few words of apology to the official.

Between the acts Alden went into the passage with one of the Americans to smoke a cigarette. A fearful stench pervaded it.

“Gosh!” said the American. “We’d better quit this salubrious spot or we shall go down with typhoid. Communism may be a great idea, but it hasn’t got as far as plumbing yet.”

“What do you think of the show?” asked Alden.

James Stiles of the American Relief thought the show was like the cat’s whiskers—an expression which seemed to signify approval.

“That Persian prima donna is very alluring, but I wouldn’t like to live with her. It would be like keeping a tigress in one’s parlour.”

They moved beyond the immediate range of the stench which came down the passage, and Alden spoke in a low voice. In Russia at this time most people dropped their voices when they exchanged ideas.

“I shall never hear the music of *Carmen* again without a sense of horror. What we have seen in Kazan today makes one’s blood freeze.”

“I’ll say you’re right,” said Stiles. “If I weren’t a hardboiled son of Kentucky I should have had to vomit. Or I should have shed tears of blood. As it is, I go on smoking Camels and try to kid myself that all this is inevitable as a step of evolution.”

What they had seen was the result of famine on the Volga. They had seen a train-load of peasants arriving from the famine districts. Many of them were dead at the journey’s end. Their bodies were flung on top of one another—men, women, and children—in a station shed.

They had seen groups of children walking like little old men and women, with hands like claws and white, monkey-like faces above their rags. These little people had wandered in from farmsteads where there was no food for them and where their parents lay dying and dead.

Oliver and his friend had seen the homes for these derelict children. Their verminous clothes had been taken from them and burnt. They were as naked as they had been born and huddled together for warmth exactly like monkeys in a zoo. There was no flesh on their bones and their little ribs showed sharply through their skin.

The hospitals of Kazan were crowded with typhus cases and with people dying of diseases due to starvation and weakness. There was no fuel to heat the stoves though snow lay on the ground in Kazan. There was no medicine for fever-stricken patients. The nurses were starving and several had died of typhus in recent days. One of these nurses spoke to Alden.

“This is called a hospital. It’s a house of death. We have nothing to give these poor people. They have reduced our rations again. We simply can’t exist without more bread. If you have any influence in Moscow I beseech you to help us.”

“I am English,” said Alden. “I have no influence.”

She raised her eyebrows under her nurse’s cap.

“You are English?” she asked with astonishment. “How do you come here, then?”

They had been speaking in Russian. Suddenly she spoke to him in English.

“I was once in England. I went to school for a time at Brighton. Now, as you see, I am living in hell. Russia is hell. It is ruled by devils. They have no pity and no mercy.”

Alden murmured something of sympathy. What could he say to this woman of the old régime who was nursing in a fever hospital on the edge of famine?

It was the sight of hungry children which tore at his heart—those wandering and abandoned children walking hand in hand like Babes in the Wood, and lying down to die in the snow like frozen sparrows. From all districts of the Volga around Kazan and Simbirsk and Saratov people were on the move—long lines of peasants trudging away from their own farmsteads in the hope that they might find food in some other place, but finding none. . . .

That night in Kazan after the Opera, Oliver Alden and the young American officers of the A.R.A. sat down to a meal in a house where they were billeted. They had brought their own rations—canned soup and canned meat and cheese and biscuits and American butter.

Alden was hungry, but could not eat. It seemed a crime to eat in this famine-stricken land.

Presently across the snow came the sound of voices and then heavy clumps at the door.

Stiles jerked his head up.

“Who’s that?” he asked sharply. He put his hand down to his hip pocket.

It was the opera company. They had heard of the American visitors. They wanted food.

“We’re starving,” said the Persian prima donna.

One of the singers—a tall, handsome young man—explained the situation politely and desperately.

“Forgive us for this invasion, but we should be extremely glad if you could spare us a little food. We have had to tighten our belts again. That is to say, we never have enough to eat. For three days now we have had half our usual rations, which are never enough.”

The American officers looked at one another and at Alden.

“What about it?” asked Stiles. “Can we give these folk a feast?”

“We shall be gone ten days,” said one of the others. “We can’t afford to exhaust our own supplies. It’s not our job to join the hungry dead. Still, I dare say we can spare a bit.”

They spared a bit. There were fifteen of the opera company and they were ravenous, though they tried to hide their hunger.

“What is happening in Russia?” asked Alden, after this meal. He asked the tall young man who had spoken so politely. The young man stared into his eyes.

“God has abandoned us,” he said. “There is no more to say than that.”

For several hours of the night he said more than that. The others talked. Sometimes they wept. Their voices rose harshly. Once the Persian prima donna screamed with sudden hysteria. Once a man laughed, but that was the only laughter. These people were professional actors and singers. They had come from Petrograd. They had suffered continually from hunger and filth and squalor and ill-health and mental agonies. Many of their people had escaped from Russia. These had been caught. The father of the young tenor had been shot on a charge of counter-revolution. These young girls in the chorus of *Carmen* knew nothing of the whereabouts of their fathers and brothers, or whether they were alive or dead. All through the night they told their stories. Stiles made coffee for them. Two hours later he made more coffee. Alden gave them his last English cigarettes. Stamford Lee, another American, produced with sudden benevolence two bottles of rye whisky; he had been holding on to them as secret reserves. Alden made up the fire at intervals with logs of wood stacked in the corner of the room. Several members of the opera company lay on the bare boards. Others stood about, leaning against the walls. The Persian prima donna sat on the edge of the table, with the light of an oil-lamp gleaming on her raven-black hair. She had a touch of carmine on her lips, and there was kohl on her eyelashes. Her skin was very white, like old ivory. They knew nothing of the outside world, and all they had heard was false. They believed that Europe was going Bolshevik and that there had been revolutions in England and France.

“We are living between two worlds,” said the prima donna. “The old civilization has died and is buried beneath the ruins. The new one has not arrived. Perhaps it will never arrive. Perhaps humanity will die of famines and plagues, as now Russia is dying.”

They departed just before dawn. Several of the Russian men kissed Stamford Lee on both cheeks. Stiles kissed the Persian lady on her encarmined lips and said he liked it. Alden, with the reserve and shyness of

an Englishman, contented himself with kissing the hands of the young women, one of whom spoke to him in English.

“I would kiss your feet,” she said, “if you would take me with you to England. I would give you all my love. I would be your slave, or your servant, or your mistress. You could do with me as you like.”

She had been at school at Eastbourne. Her father had been a bank-manager in Petrograd before they shot him for counter-revolutionary activities of which he was innocent.

She knew that she was asking for something impossible. She did not wait even for his answer, but smiled at him and went out into the snow just before dawn.

The voyage down the Volga was a nightmare which haunted the mind of Oliver Alden ever afterwards. It was the last boat to go down before the ice came. They stopped at small landing-stages beyond which, on higher ground, stood Russian villages with their whitewashed churches. They seemed to be deserted. Now and then a few human beings came down to the landing-stage and pointed to their villages and said, “There everybody is dying or dead.”

With the American officers, Alden went into these villages, driving to some of them across the flat countryside in *droschkes* drawn by lean horses. On the roads were the relics of other horses—skeletons with clean bones. These Russian villages all seemed the same—rows of wooden houses, a whitewashed church, a wooden stockade around them. Nobody stirred in them, though now and then white faces stared out of little windows.

Inside the houses Russian families waited for death. Some of them still had reserves of food. Some of them still had a thin cow in the shed outside. Some of the richer peasants had hidden stocks demanded by the Red soldiers a year ago—two years ago. But in some houses there was no food. The family was lying above the stove where Russian peasants sleep. They stirred when strangers came in. They were dying, and nearly dead.

Famine, following war and revolution, stalked through the rich grain-fields of Russia. God had been against them, it seemed, as well as a Red Army, which had seized the reserves of grain, by orders of the Soviet Government, for feeding the cities. The seed had been burnt by the sun before it had germinated. Young wheat, here and there, had been scorched and parched. There were two droughts.

A bearded peasant with blue eyes spoke to Alden and struck his breast.

“It is the Devil who rules in Russia,” he cried. “God has no pity.”

His fellow-peasants were feeding on dried leaves and on a clay which had a kind of nourishment. The children’s stomachs were swollen. Russian women held them up to show an Englishman. No woman wept because her babies died. They were beyond such tears. Their eyes were dead.

“Certainly there is a famine on the Volga,” said young Stiles.

He was one of those who helped to organize a great adventure of relief by which food was brought to eleven million Russians for a year, all the way from the United States. Great Britain fed four millions. The Red Cross and the Save the Children Fund stirred the world’s charity, in retreat for a time after the strain of war and international hatred. Four millions died. They were the fair-haired, straw-bearded men of the Volga, with children as blue-eyed as themselves, and as fair as themselves, like those Saxon children of whom a Pope, seeing them as slaves in the market-place of Rome, said, “*Non Angli sed Angeli sunt.*”

XLVIII

AFTER their return from the Volga, Alden and Stiles had dinner in one of the small restaurants which had opened in Moscow by permission of Lenin. It was pleasantly and even elegantly furnished. Stiles, who knew something about antique furniture—his father had some good pieces in his American house—remarked that the chairs and tables were eighteenth century and probably French. Alden was more impressed by a collection of miniatures which had been tacked on the walls. They also were eighteenth century, and looked like portraits of the French aristocracy in the time of Louis XV.

Alden and his friend were waited upon by a clean-shaven, middle-aged man who looked haggard and furtive. His clothes had once been of a good cut and cloth, but were threadbare and stained. He wore bast slippers instead of shoes.

Alden tried to get into conversation with him, but he answered briefly and glanced anxiously in the direction of two men in black top-boots and leather jerkins who were at one of the other tables.

Stiles spoke to Alden in a low voice.

“I wouldn’t speak too freely in here, sonny. Those guys are probably in the Cheka. They’re probably keeping their ears open for our conversation.”

Alden nodded and talked about English novels and American short stories. By the time he and Stiles had ordered coffee after a meal which was frugal but well cooked, the Cheka men—if they belonged to that organization of secret police—decided that there was nothing to learn, and left the restaurant. There were no other customers.

The man in the bast slippers swept the crumbs off the table-cloth and seemed to be less apprehensive.

“You are Englishmen?” he asked.

“English and American,” answered Alden. “Are you doing any business here?”

The proprietor of the restaurant, as he seemed to be, laughed in a melancholy way.

“Hardly anything! A few kommissars now and then. A few foreigners who come to Moscow on diplomatic missions. I don’t hope to make a fortune. In Soviet Russia that is not permissible, anyhow.”

He laughed again and then sighed deeply.

“You have some good furniture,” said Stiles, “and my friend here gets a kick out of those miniatures.”

The proprietor of the restaurant explained that they were family relics. They had been down in the cellar during the Revolution. Now, under the New Economic Policy, when private trading was permitted to some extent—a slight relaxation of the strict code of Communism—he had brought them to the light. It was of course extremely dangerous. The authorities might not like these bourgeois decorations. But he hoped that one day a foreigner might take a fancy to them and buy them for a few English pounds or American dollars.

He went away hurriedly as a customer came in.

“That fellow is as frightened as a rabbit when there are dogs about,” said Stiles.

“No wonder!” answered Alden.

The new customer was a man who looked like a mechanic. He ordered a cup of coffee and drank it while he smoked a cigarette. Presently he left again. Stiles ordered some more coffee.

It was brought this time by a young woman in a black dress covered with a little white apron. Stiles looked at her, turned in his chair as she went back with the tray, and then winked at Alden.

“That girl’s a peach. She certainly is a swell looker.”

Oliver Alden, who had an eye for beauty, as previously recorded, was in full agreement with this statement.

“Charming. But there’s a frightened look in her eyes, and a lot of tragedy.”

Stiles grinned.

“You’re quick off the mark for a Britisher. I didn’t get as far as reading secret history in her eyes. But, oh boy, what a pretty mouth to kiss!”

“She’s married,” said Alden.

Stiles was surprised by this information.

“How do you know that? Who told you?”

Alden had seen her wedding-ring.

“Gosh! You’re a man of observation,” remarked Stiles. “You ought to make a pretty good newspaper-man. And as you speak Russian like a native you might get into conversation with the wench and give her my best

compliments. Tell her that I'm a Kentucky boy and if she's tired of her husband or he's been shot in the head by Djerjinsky, I'm willing to make a contract with her."

"She's a lady," said Alden, rather stiffly.

"That's all right." Stiles was amused. "It doesn't shock me, sonny. My grandfather was a slave-owner and a gentleman."

The girl came over to take the glasses from their table. She lingered, and Alden had an idea that she wanted to talk. He spoke to her in Russian, and she was astonished that an Englishman should speak this language so well. Perhaps it made her suspicious of him.

"Why do you speak Russian?" she asked, as though it were an accusation.

Alden mentioned that he had been a naval officer attached to British forces in the Caucasus and elsewhere. He had been much in contact with Russians. Lately he had been in Constantinople.

"Then you have met some of our émigrés?" she asked.

Alden laughed.

"Many of them. Thousands of them."

She put both her hands to her breast as though something had stabbed her.

"Oh!" she cried. "I would like to ask you about one of them. But that is absurd. One among thousands—one among a million—how could you know?"

"One of your family?" he asked.

She nodded, and then seemed frightened again. She had caught a look from the elderly man. It was a warning. How could they tell that this Englishman who spoke Russian rather well was not a Bolshevik who would give them away?

"Excuse me," she said. "I am busy in the kitchen."

It was only after their third visit that the middle-aged man and this girl seemed reassured about the Englishman and the American. There was no reason for reassurance except the look of sympathy in Alden's eyes and the good humour written plainly on the face of Stiles.

On the third evening the middle-aged man in the bast slippers spoke to Alden in a whisper.

“I have some good diamonds. I should be glad to let you have them for one English ten-pound note. Or if you would care to buy my miniatures, you could take them away with you to England, where I think they would be of value. They are my ancestors. They have been in my family for generations. Now I don’t need them.”

He lowered his voice to a whisper which Alden could hardly hear.

“I need English money—or American dollars—for the chance of escape with the young lady here. She is my niece. She has a husband who was with Wrangel. He may be alive.”

Oliver Alden had no money for diamonds. He was getting anxious about the funds he had brought into Russia. There was not much of a margin left.

Stiles thought that he might like to have a look at the diamonds. He might buy a few for his mother in Kentucky.

“We will show them to you tomorrow,” said the man in the bast slippers. “Perhaps if you will stay after any customers have gone . . .”

They stayed after the restaurant had been shut. The pretty lady had not made an appearance. Stiles regretted her absence. The proprietor of the restaurant had put up the shutters and turned out all but one light.

“There are some ladies here,” he said. “They have brought a few things for you to see.”

His face was extremely white and there was fear in his eyes again.

“We put our lives in your hands,” he added. “We trust you because you are English and American. I beg of you to give me your word of honour that you will not mention this affair to any living soul.”

“That is understood,” said Alden, holding out his hand.

“Come into the back room,” said the man in the bast slippers.

He led the way through a swing door. In the back room were six or seven women. Among them was the girl whom this man had called his niece.

“These ladies,” said the man, “are happy to meet you, because you are English and American. . . . This is my dear mother.”

Alden and Stiles bowed to an old lady with white hair, who held out her hand to each of them in turn. Alden, who knew Russian ways, kissed that long, thin, wrinkled hand.

She spoke to him in perfect English.

“My son tells me that you have met a number of Russian émigrés and speak of them with sympathy. We are not so lucky as they. We were caught

here. We have had a very anxious and unpleasant time.”

“This is my niece Lydia,” said the proprietor of the restaurant.

One by one he introduced the women, and one of them bore a name written in the pages of Russian history, belonging to the great nobility.

“We have a few little things which you might be pleased to see,” said the girl who was called Lydia. “Our friends have brought them out of their hiding-places. This must seem a strange adventure to you. To us it is rather a desperate one. It is all so very dangerous.”

There was only one oil-lamp in the room behind the restaurant. It stood in the centre of a table covered with a red cloth. There were a few little boxes on the table and some lace things neatly folded, and two ivory crucifixes and several ikons. Women’s hands opened the boxes. Light flashed from them—little points of light from tiny crystals.

“They look good to me,” said Stiles, bending over them.

“This crucifix is of great value,” said the old lady, touching one. “It is beautifully carved and is very early Italian work—perhaps of the thirteenth century.”

“Priceless!” said Alden, taking it up.

“Many lips have kissed it,” said the old lady. “Many prayers have been breathed round it. It is a holy thing. In this Godless country it remains holy as a symbol of the faith that was once in Russia.”

The man with the bast slippers turned out the light suddenly.

There was a knock at the restaurant door. It was followed by two others, sharp and peremptory.

Alden heard the breath of the women and little rustling noises, and the click of boxes on the table.

“Great God!” said the man in the bast slippers. “The police are here.”

There was another knock at the door, hard and angry.

“Lydia, and Nadia,” said the man, in a sharp whisper, “take these gentlemen into the cellar. Quick. For God’s sake.”

They were in absolute darkness. Alden felt a soft hand touch his own and then seize it. He heard a girl’s voice whisper to him.

“Come!”

She seemed to see in the dark. He was aware of being pulled through a swing door.

“There are ten steps,” she whispered. “Be careful.”

Alden felt the air colder about him. He felt for the steps and he was still held tightly by a woman's hand. He stumbled down with her. Someone else was leading Stiles, who missed the last steps and fell with a crash, but was not hurt, judging from a smothered laugh he gave.

Alden was led into a cellar and the door was shut and he missed the girl's hand.

"Unless they search down here, we are safe," she whispered.

"Dare I light a match?" he asked in a low voice, fumbling in his pocket.

She let him light a match. He lit twenty before he had almost exhausted his box, and the little flames were enough for him to see the Russian girl leaning against the cellar door. Her face was very white. He could see the glitter of her eyes, in which there was fear. She was panting a little. Once when he was about to speak she put a finger to her lips.

Stiles must have been taken into another cellar. Alden was alone with this young woman. For ten minutes they stayed there, very still and speechless. They could hear heavy footsteps on the floor above their heads. Then the footsteps ceased. There was dead silence until a door banged. The footsteps passed across a grating in the street outside.

"I think it must be safe," said the young Russian woman. "They've gone."

Alden lit his last two matches.

"What did they want?" he asked.

"They suspect us because of our names," she told him. "We had better stay here until my uncle comes."

It was while they stayed in the darkness that she spoke to him more freely, as though satisfied that their voices could not be heard.

"The other evening I wanted to ask you something which seemed absurd. It still seems absurd, but yet I want to ask it."

She hesitated, as though afraid of this absurd question.

"Tell me," said Alden.

"Among the Russian refugees, you may have met—by some miracle—a man who belongs to me. He was a painter. He was my husband. I don't know whether he is dead or alive. We loved each other very much. He was with Wrangel when I was caught by the Reds. If he is alive he will be always wanting me. We were great lovers. We never grew tired of each other. We used to laugh together such a lot, and he is a baby; I had to mother him. People who are artists are like that. They can't look after themselves.

Sometimes I dream of him and see him alive. I am almost certain he is alive, because my heart would have died if they had killed him. His name is Sacha Dolin.”

“He is alive,” said Alden, greatly moved. “I know him. He is in Paris. I saw him not long before I came to Russia. He mourns for you and is never happy.”

“Oh!” she cried. “Oh. My dear Sacha! He is alive!”

In the darkness, with no more matches to light, Alden heard her sounds of joy, and her weeping, and her laughter. She was a little mad in that dark cellar because Sacha Dolin was alive.

The man in the bast slippers opened the door. There was a lamp in his hand.

“They have gone,” he said. “They suspected something. I was enormously afraid.”

XLIX

OLIVER entered Russia as a bachelor and left a married man. He married the wife of his friend Sacha Dolin.

The idea was suggested to him by Stiles, who had the American quality of cutting Gordian knots with a clasp-knife or the sharp edge of a ready wit.

“How am I going to get that girl out of Russia?” asked Oliver. “I can’t leave her here. Whenever I think of that fellow Sacha Dolin bleeding at the heart for his lost wife, I feel that I must get her out somehow, even if I risk a Bolshevik prison.”

Stiles thought deeply, chewing a cigar which he had smoked to its bitter and juicy end.

“Marry the girl.”

Alden stared at him, and then laughed.

“Don’t be a silly ass!”

Stiles, who was sitting on the bed in the drawing-room of the Soviet guest-house in Moscow, resented this description.

“Don’t malign my headpiece, Mr. Englishman with an Oxford accent. I’m offering you a first-class idea. Where’s your gratitude? And it’s a darned pleasant idea. I wouldn’t mind being the temporary husband of that dark-eyed lass, even if I had to hand her over at the journey’s end. If I weren’t tied to this A.R.A. I’d take it on myself.”

“Are you talking seriously?” asked Oliver, after two minutes’ intensive thought.

“My father is a Senator,” said Stiles. “Gravity is traditional in my family. I’m known in Kentucky as Serious Stiles.”

“It’s an idea, certainly,” said Oliver.

Stiles accepted the compliment calmly.

“It’s a brain-wave, and dead easy. These Soviet officials are all sentimentalists when they’re not shooting counter-revolutionaries in the back of the head. They’ll be tickled to death to think that you want to marry a Russian woman. They all know your father is a big bug in England. Besides, if you take her away, there will be one less mouth to feed on the daily rations.”

“Then why won’t they let her go anyhow?” asked Oliver. “Why not let me buy a ticket for her and get her passport stamped?”

“Ah,” said Stiles. “Now you’re asking too much. The Communist mind doesn’t work that way. This girl belongs to the bourgeoisie. Her father, from what you tell me, was an officer in the Imperial Army, in attendance on the Czar. They don’t let these little birds out of the cage. ‘A bit of bread and a herring for you, my dear, and if you don’t be civil about it, there are lots of prisons with vacant spaces for the daughters of the old régime.’”

“Then your idea won’t work either,” said Oliver. “It’s illogical.”

“Caesar’s ghost!” exclaimed Stiles impatiently. “Aren’t all Russian minds illogical? Aren’t ours? That squint-eyed fellow at the Foreign Office is always talking about his mammy in New York. But he’s a perfectly good Bolshevik and prepared to defend the Soviet system and all its acts, including the Red Terror.”

Oliver put the idea to Sacha Dolin’s wife. He was timid about it. He stammered as he suggested it, and blushed like a schoolboy, though he had been a naval officer for several years.

“It would be a mere formality,” he repeated several times. “I would hand you over to your husband at the journey’s end.”

“It’s a very clever idea,” said Lydia, the wife of Sacha. “It might perhaps work.”

“I should divorce you instantly,” said Oliver, seeing the humour of this idea, as well as the tragedy to this girl if it failed to work.

“I trust you perfectly,” she told him. “And I will kiss your hands every minute of the journey if I can come with you.”

Oliver thought that would be excessive gratitude. He could see her agitation, her fear of even hoping that the plan might work, her childlike faith in him. There was really no humour in such a marriage—no touch of the French farce about it—but only a desperate attempt at escape from a living death which was this young woman’s state of being separated from her husband by the frontier of revolution.

It was Kapek, that cynical humorist in the Kremlin, who gave the permit for Oliver Alden to marry a young Russian woman and take her across the frontier with him. That was after refusals by subordinate officials, who were suspicious of this love-affair and suspected espionage or a counter-revolutionary plot, and anyhow had the name of Lydia in a book which told her record as the daughter of an Imperialist official and the wife of an officer

who had served under Denikin and Wrangel. From their point of view she was a dangerous young woman, tainted with the blood of the old régime.

Kapek laughed behind his horns when Oliver interviewed him on the subject.

"I'm a sentimentalist," he said; "I have a heart! My former friends in London, Berlin, and Paris think of me, no doubt, as a monster, because revolutions are not made with rose-water. But they little know the tenderness of my disposition! Love? I'm all for it. The mating of young creatures—how joyous and charming—until they get tired of each other and then sue for a divorce. Is the girl's husband dead?"

"Missing," said Alden.

"Presumed dead," said Kapek. "Anyhow, it will be your trouble if he turns up later on. Or perhaps—excuse a moment's cynicism—your good fortune?"

He wrote the necessary chit. Oliver Alden and Lydia, the wife of Sacha Dolin, stood before a kommissar in a dirty little office guarded by a Red soldier.

"You wish to take this man as your husband?" he asked.

"I do," said Lydia firmly.

"You wish to take this woman as your wife?" asked the kommissar.

"I do," said Oliver Alden, after a slight hesitation.

The kommissar, who was a young man in a black coat, breeches and black top-boots, scrawled something on a form, stamped the bit of paper, and handed it to Alden.

"That is in order. It will cost . . ."

He mentioned a vast number of roubles which amounted to six-and-eightpence in English money.

The passport business took longer. It was necessary to alter Alden's permission to leave Russia and include a female companion. There was considerable telephoning to the Foreign Office and then to the Kremlin. After two hours' delay, Alden became impatient of that word *Seichas* . . . *seichas* . . . which means at once. Lydia became white and faint. Once she whispered to the man who was her husband according to Russian registration:

"I am afraid! Perhaps they will refuse to let me go!"

"I believe in Kapek," answered Alden. "He has a heart. He told me so!"

At last the formalities were completed. Alden was permitted to cross the frontier of Soviet Russia with a female companion registered as his wife—the woman Lydia—formerly wife of one Sacha Dolin, painter in Moscow, counter-revolutionary, condemned to death for having served in the White Armies, missing, presumed dead.

Outside the office for the registration of births, marriages, divorces, deaths, and all such affairs, Lydia stooped and tried to kiss Oliver's hand. He would not let her, but took her own hand and raised it to his lips. She became very faint for a moment and he put his arm round her.

“Steady!” he said.

She whispered to him. They were still within a few paces of a young Red soldier with a pasty face and heavy eyelids and a coat too long in the sleeves.

“I have a fear that I shan't see Sacha even now. Supposing I die on the journey? Supposing he is dead before I reach him?”

“Very morbid and foolish thoughts!” said Alden, laughing at her. “Only a Russian would start thinking like that. I'm going to feed you up on the journey. We shall stop in Berlin and I shall feed you on German *Kuchen*. Then we shall spend a night in Paris and I shall take you to dinner at Henri's and order a whole chicken for you. When I hand you over to Sacha you must be looking perfect!”

That gave her another fear.

“I have become ugly!” she cried. “Sacha will find that I have lost my beauty. I shall be a shock to him.”

Alden reassured her.

“I don't want to flatter you, dear lady, but an American friend of mine, who has an eye, agrees with me that you are as pretty as a peach. Sacha won't be disappointed when he holds you in his arms again.”

“Both of us will go down on our knees to you,” said Lydia.

L

STILES, the American, 'threw a party', as he called it, in honour of Alden's marriage. He invited three of his colleagues on the A.R.A. and gave a dinner at the little restaurant which had been opened by Lydia's uncle in fear and trembling lest private trading, temporarily allowed, might be regarded later as a crime.

Stiles, who was young and irrepressible, could not resist the temptation of chaffing Alden about his amazing marriage with a beautiful Russian girl.

"As a temporary arrangement," he said, "I envy you, sonny. And don't forget you owe it all to me!"

"All what?" asked Alden, with a slight irritation.

"Well," said Stiles, "I don't want to talk indiscreetly, but a journey through Europe with a lovely girl who is lawfully married to you according to Russian law seems to me a pretty good adventure. I can see pleasant opportunities in it."

"My dear Stiles," said Oliver Alden, "that kind of stuff belongs to the schoolboy stage of humour. Haven't you grown out of it?"

Stiles winked at one of his American colleagues.

"These English guys," he said, "wear masks on their faces. They don't like our vulgar American humour."

There were two officers of the Cheka dining at one of the tables. Their ears twitched now and then at the free speech of the American officers. At another table sat a young officer of the Red Army whom Stiles invited to join them over coffee. He also invited the two officers of the Cheka, but they refused—reluctantly, it seemed—and left the restaurant a few minutes later, after saluting.

The officer of the Red Army was known to Lydia and her uncle, who treated him coldly but introduced him to the company.

"Nicolai Nicolaiivitch Orloff."

Oliver talked to him and found that he spoke remarkably good English, having had an English governess and spent a year in England before the War. He had belonged certainly to the old régime. It was strange to find him in the uniform of the Red Army.

"You are leaving Russia?" he asked politely.

Oliver nodded. "Tomorrow."

Nicolai Nicolai vitch lowered his voice.

"Will you do me a great favour?"

"If it is in my power."

"My mother is an émigrée. I haven't seen her for three years. If you would find out her whereabouts and take a letter from me, I should be extremely grateful."

Oliver hesitated for a moment. He might be searched for papers at the frontier. With Lydia in his charge he didn't want to get into trouble by carrying uncensored letters. Then he yielded.

"I will take the letter and do my best to find your mother."

"A thousand thanks!"

"May I ask one question?" asked Oliver.

"By all means."

"How is it that you are an officer of the Red Army?"

The young man stared into his eyes and answered gravely:

"If I were not an officer of the Red Army I should be dead. That is one reason. There is another. I am after all a Russian, and the Red Army will one day have to defend Russia."

He left the table for a time and returned with a letter, addressed in French to Madame la Comtesse Orlova.

Oliver put it in his breast pocket. He kept it there until one day in England he discovered the Countess Orlova in a milliner's shop near South Kensington. He delivered the letter with some emotion. The lady looked at it for a second and dropped it to the floor.

"I do not read letters from officers of the Red Army," she said very coldly.

It was at five o'clock on the day following the party given by Stiles that Oliver left Moscow in a train for the frontier. He shared a carriage with Lydia, his wife. They talked for many hours and had a meal together, provided by the Americans who had been so immensely helpful to an English journalist. Lydia was intelligent, charming, and childlike. It was only her gratitude which embarrassed Oliver. Once she made his hands wet with her tears when she tried to kiss them.

"My dear lady," he told her, "if you do that again I shall be angry."

“Then I shall have to do it *again* because you are angry,” she warned him.

They talked about life and revolution and Communism, and Russia, and Sacha Dolin. There was no lack of subjects upon which to talk for hours.

“Now you must go to sleep,” said Oliver. It was well after midnight when he said that.

“I want to keep awake,” said Lydia. “I want to be conscious that I am rushing towards Sacha. I don’t want to sleep and waste those hours of joy.”

“I insist that you tuck in,” said Oliver.

He made her lie down in the lower bunk of a carriage in which there were two shelves which could be pulled out to make into beds. He covered her up in his own rug after she had slipped off a pair of much-worn shoes with broken soles.

“I should be glad if you would kiss me,” she said. “I am for a little while your wife. Sacha will not mind when I tell him.”

Alden did not accept the invitation, and quoted something he had read in a book: “Allah is great, but juxtaposition is greater.”

She did not understand those strange words, and was hurt when he climbed to his bunk without kissing her.

“Do you mind if I smoke a last cigarette?” he asked.

“You may smoke a million,” she told him.

He smoked one, putting its ash in his cigarette-case.

“This is a very strange affair,” he said to himself. “It’s unbelievable, except in Russia.”

Across the frontier, in another train bound for Berlin, he tore up a bit of paper and let its pieces flutter out of the window. It was his marriage-certificate with Lydia Dolin.

“We are no longer man and wife,” he informed that lady. “It gives me quite a pang.”

She said something which made him blush.

“You are still an English gentleman, *sans peur et sans reproche*.”

“My dear lady,” said Oliver, much abashed, “I’ve done nothing at all. It was that American—Stiles—who had the great idea.”

Lydia, the wife of Sacha Dolin, had become one of the exiles.

LI

IN BERLIN, RUSSIAN exiles and German citizens were in a state of panic. An invisible enemy had attacked them. It did not come with machine-guns and high explosives, or with horns and claws, but with a silent stranglehold upon their means of life. Working-men and -women who had been earning wages in paper money which seemed to have definite values to be reckoned in food, and lodging, and clothing, and doctors' bills, and German beer and tram-car fares, became aware that this money—these German marks—were altering in purchasing power. One day German housewives needed more marks to buy yesterday's amount of potatoes or cabbages. Reels of cotton for mending their children's clothes suddenly doubled in price. They needed three times the amount of money to buy a pair of boots which a week ago had cost twenty marks or so. Working-girls going home in the rush hour, storming the trams, found that all the marks they had in their handbags were not enough for the journey to their lodgings and tenements. Something fantastic and bewildering was happening, and while they were trying to understand it, the security of their lives was more darkly menaced. Money had gone mad, and money meant life. Its values altered, and weakened, and dropped into absurdity of worthlessness while the clock ticked on German mantelpieces. The French had entered the Ruhr, and the miners, and engineers, and railway employees, and factory-hands, had downed tools, refusing to work under the threat of French bayonets. That was a bad business, but why should it make money go mad in Berlin?

Foreigners in this city, exchanging their money into German marks for the payment of apartments in the Fürstenhof, or any other hotel, were astonished, and then excited, by this arithmetical madness which was all in their favour. American journalists in the bar of the Adlon accosted the man with the cocktail-shaker and said, "Say, Johnny, how much for a dollar this afternoon?" and found that the dollar would buy four times, six times, ten times, presently a hundred times, the amount of marks they had received on arriving in Berlin. Tourists walked down Unter den Linden and bought many things which they didn't want for the strange experience of buying good things with bad money. They bought malacca canes, cigarette-lighters, picture-albums, silk ties, china ornaments, clocks and watches, for thousands—and presently millions—of marks which, reckoned in exchange with English or American money, amounted only to a few shillings.

A horde of human vultures descended upon Berlin. Many of them were Jews, clever at arithmetic, quick to work out a new system by which they could make profit out of other people's ruin. Many others, who called themselves Christians, had the same knowledge, not possessed by working-men and -women and the humble middle-class folk who saw their savings wither, and could do nothing about it. The human vultures were fattening on the corpse of a nation. They were gamblers with the counters called money. They bought English pounds and American dollars on Monday, in the hope, which was not in vain, that they would be worth thousands of marks more on Tuesday. Crowds of sharp-eyed, tight-lipped men from many nations across the German frontier hung round the doors of the banks and money exchanges, ready to buy or sell German marks as the clock of time ticked on and Germany reeled on her way to ruin.

Somewhere in the background, somewhere in quiet rooms, bald-headed, square-jowled men were watching this whirlwind of paper and giving orders to Government printing-machines. In factories and shops and other places of employment, managers were receiving deputations of employees who demanded an increase in wages to keep pace with the rise in prices. There was no keeping pace with that rise. Prices soared from half-hour to half-hour. Girls were marking new prices in the great store of Wertheim, and before the ink was dry on the little tickets news came on the tape machine that the mark had fallen again. Two thousand to the English pound on Monday. Fifteen thousand on Tuesday. A hundred thousand two weeks later. A million later still. Two million. Ten million. A hundred million. It became fantastic, wild, and maddening. How could any German *Hausfrau* remain quite sane when the wages brought home by her man were worthless, or almost worthless, between supper-time and breakfast? How could men remain quite sane when their big mansions round Unter den Linden were worth no more than a few American dollars if reckoned in exchange values? Debtors who had grabbed at a few dollars or a few pounds could pay off all they owed, amounting to millions of marks, in this trash of German currency. Business was at a standstill, except the merry business of the gamblers. Even the haunts of pleasure and vice shut their doors because the only money they would be paid was the money of the German printing-presses which had at last no reality at all.

Russian restaurants, Russian cabarets, Russian orchestras, were deserted by their German clients. Russian princesses, countesses, dancing-girls, Cossacks, Georgians, and ex-officers of the Imperial Army, who had found some place in German life, some means of livelihood, stared at one another, watched doors which didn't open, grew pale at the advance of ruin, and at

last fled from the madhouse which used to be Germany. Once again they had to strike their tents and tramp along the hard road of exile, nomads in a hostile world.

LII

THE COUNTESS MARKOVA at this time became anxious about the contents of a tin box which she kept in her bedroom. Inside that box, though it only held some packets of paper, were the invisible victories of many small sacrifices and economies, many headaches, many long hours of fatigue. She had been a miser in her eagerness to hoard this paper money. She had denied herself new dresses, midday meals, even cups of coffee which might have lifted the headaches which oppressed her when she had been teaching Russian hour after hour to young Germans in a tiny room of the Berlitz school. She had denied herself many little pleasures which had tempted her a thousand times—to buy a pretty thing for Olga or a present for Michael, to entertain Russian friends in her apartment after working-hours, to help other Russian friends who were in dire poverty here in Berlin. She had been ungenerous, when all her instincts were in revolt against such meanness. It was not very much for her own sake but because she wanted a little store of savings for a ‘rainy day’ which might come again in this refugee life. Michael might need help if ever he were ill. Olga—her beautiful Olga—might be saved from the squalor of dirty lodgings and unwashed underclothing as when they were in Constantinople.

Now the rainy day had come—many rainy days. She couldn’t understand it very well. She only knew that another crisis had happened in their lives.

Michael came back from the ballet with an anxious line across his forehead.

“There was hardly any audience tonight,” he said. “Vera danced to empty seats. If this goes on we shall have to close down.”

He told his mother that some of the girls had been hysterical. They hadn’t had enough to eat. Their wages were not sufficient to buy food now that prices were so fantastic.

Olga came back from the film studio. She had been restless and in a state of nerves for some time so that her mother was worried about her. She had been very impatient sometimes when rebuked for staying out so late and not giving an account of her private life. She resented being questioned. She quarrelled sometimes with Michael, who was inclined to be severe with her. She had fallen into the habit of slipping away to her bedroom and keeping aloof even in the few hours when they might have been together. At other

times, quite suddenly, after these strange moods, she would be unnaturally gay, and laugh too much and say things which hurt Michael, who didn't like her to be too free in her way of speech.

One evening she came home very pale, and then began to weep.

There had been tragic scenes in the studio at Starcken. The crowd had demanded another rise in wages to keep level with rising prices. Some of the men had shouted down the director, who had tried to explain that he had no control over the financial crisis in Germany and was utterly bewildered and distracted.

"Are we to go on working for this waste paper?" some of the men had shouted. "Pay us in dollars."

Only the young Englishman, Peter Loring, had seen any humour in this situation. He had tried to be merry and bright as usual. It was very easy for him. He had English parents. He could get hold of English money.

"Until this crisis has passed," said the producer, "we cannot carry on. Mr. Schwartz is very hard pressed. I am instructed to hand you all your notices. The picture must remain unfinished."

"Old Schwartz ought to be hanged," said one of the camera-men. "What's he done with the money he has robbed from the German people?"

Herr Schwartz had disappeared from the scene. He did not come down to face these people who had been making pictures for him—these people of many nationalities who had given him their genius, their beauty, their hours of toil.

There had been distressful scenes in the dressing-rooms. Russian girls were weeping. One of them had fainted. Paula Kovaleska had cried bitterly until Peter Loring, the young English actor, had fed her on sticks of milk chocolate. In some of the dressing-rooms there were meetings of haggard and frightened men who spoke wildly. They were frightened because they had wives and children in Berlin, which was like a beleaguered city with an invisible enemy at its gates.

"We're caught like rats in a trap," said Gorbatoff, the famous actor of the Mariinski Theatre. "There will be a Bolshevik Revolution in Germany. As Russians of the old régime we shall all have our throats cut."

"What has happened, my dear?" asked Anna Markova, when Olga returned that afternoon looking so pale.

"The worst has happened," said Olga. "My dream of becoming a film star has gone, little mother. The whole crowd has received notice. We are pushed into the streets."

She stood there very white-faced, and then suddenly laughed rather wildly.

“If anybody thinks I’m going to lead a life of poverty again they’re very much mistaken! I’m not going back to misery. I would rather die. I’m young. I’m not going to have my life spoilt. I shall make other arrangements.”

“What arrangements?” asked her mother. “What idea have you in your head?”

Olga laughed again.

“Leave it to me, mother! I shan’t let you go back to poverty. I’m going to look after you. Michael can do what he likes.”

She rushed out of the room and went to her own bedroom and locked the door. An hour later Anna Markova heard her unlock the door and go downstairs. She had gone out into Berlin, alone.

Anna Markova knew that the rainy day had come. It was time to open the tin box and get out her savings. She would change this paper money into French francs or English pounds. Foreign money seemed to be the only safe thing now. With French money they could go to Paris. She had an excellent opportunity waiting for her in Paris. Grand Duchess Marie had written to her from that city, saying that she would be delighted to give her a place in her dressmaking establishment in the rue François Premier. She also thought that she could make use of Olga in her work-rooms. She remembered Olga on the island of Prinkipo. Now she must be even more beautiful, she wrote.

Anna Markova opened her tin box. There, tied up in little packets, was all the money she had saved by her toil. It was really a great deal. She had saved nearly twenty marks a day. Multiplied by three hundred days or thereabouts, it amounted to nearly three thousand marks.

She emptied the tin box and stuffed all this money into a handbag which Michael had given her for a Christmas present. There was hardly room in it for such a lot of money.

“Whatever happens we shall be safe,” thought Anna Markova. “We shall be able to get to Paris.”

She went out into the street and made her way to a Travel Agency in Unter den Linden which had been recommended to her. As a girl she had been familiar with this Travel Bureau. They would be quite honest. It was better to go to this one, she thought. She had always had great faith in their honesty.

There were some English people and a group of Americans in the office. They were on the same business as herself, except that they were changing English money into German. A tall American laughed as he put a great packet of paper into his side-pockets.

“Next time I’ll come with a wheelbarrow,” he said to the young man behind the counter.

Anna Markova had to wait her turn, and that was quite a long time, so that she became tired of standing. At last the young man behind the counter nodded to her and said, “Yes, madam?”

She spoke in English.

“I wish to change some German marks—quite a lot of them—into French francs.”

The young man behind the counter made a strange grimace.

“French francs aren’t cheap today. How many marks, madam?”

Anna Markova undid her handbag and took out her little packets. She felt rich. Her delicate hands trembled a little with excitement.

“I know that German money is dropping very badly,” she said, “but this is quite a little fortune, is it not?”

She blushed shyly at her own words. They seemed rather boastful.

The young man behind the counter added up the German marks and wrote a few figures on a slip of paper.

“I can give you fifteen francs for all this,” he said.

The Countess Markova stared at him, and all colour left her face.

“Fifteen francs!” she cried. “That’s nothing at all.”

“All this is muck,” said the young man. “German money is waste paper. Didn’t you know that?”

She hadn’t known it was as bad as all that. She hadn’t guessed that German money had withered away into nothingness. Michael hadn’t explained very clearly. She hadn’t understood all his arithmetic. She had only known that German prices were going up madly. She knew nothing about foreign exchange and *valuta* and all such mysteries.

“I will keep my German marks,” she said in a faint voice. “They may be worth more later on.”

The young man behind the counter answered grimly.

“I’m afraid not!”

Anna Markova put the little packets into her bag again. It was foolish, she thought, to show any emotion in public—to reveal any cowardice or despair.

“Good afternoon,” she said politely, and walked out of the office with her head held up.

On the stairs outside she stumbled and nearly fell. She held on to the rail of the banisters, feeling faint and dizzy. She had hardly the strength to get back to her lodgings.

She used her latch-key to open the door and walked as far as the sitting-room, and swayed a little and fell face downwards on the floor. No one came to her help. Olga had gone out. Michael was still at the theatre. She was quite alone.

But when Michael came back that night Anna Markova kissed him as usual without any sign of grief. She had hidden a bruise on her forehead by pulling her hair over it.

Michael was deeply distressed about something.

“Bad news, my dear?” asked his mother.

“There will be no more ballet in Berlin,” he said. “We’ve broken up. There’s talk of reassembling in Paris, but that is uncertain. Oh, little mother, I’m afraid for your sake. I’m without work and wages again. Poverty stares us in the face again.”

He leaned against the wall with his arms flung up and his head against his arms.

Anna Markova spoke cheerfully.

“It’s perfectly all right, Michael. We shall go to Paris. I have the promise of work for myself and Olga. You will find another place in a good orchestra.”

She went over to her son and put her arms around him, and he laid his head on her shoulder like a small boy who has hurt his knees and wants comforting.

LIII

OLGA had reached an emotional crisis in her life. During this time in Berlin she had had experiences now and then of *la vie de luxe*, and found it pleasant. It suited her, she thought. She remembered her life as a child in Moscow and St. Petersburg and the Crimea, when she had enjoyed all delights. She had been like a little princess to whom all the good fairies had brought their gifts, until one day the old witch had done her evil work. After that there had been years of misery which she remembered mostly because of their dirt—without soap, without clean frocks, without water for washing, without clean sheets to sleep in, during times of revolution.

She remembered with horror the dirty lodgings in Constantinople and the poverty of those first days of exile, and that remembrance gave an added zest to the pleasure of sitting in the luxury hotels of Berlin, where waiters bowed to her because she was with the son of the millionaire Schwartz, and where she was conscious of admiring eyes as she passed among the people on the terrace or in the lounge.

Paula Kovaleska had given her a few evening frocks, so that she was able to appear in such places without the shame she had felt the first time Hermann had taken her to supper at the Adlon. He wanted to give her more beautiful clothes, but she had refused that offer, many times repeated. She had also returned the string of pearls which he had sent to the studio one day. They had been a real temptation, and it was a wrench to part with them, and Hermann had told her that he was very hurt about it. But she had known perfectly well that she couldn't accept gifts of this kind without paying the price for them.

She knew what he wanted of her. He wanted her to go and live with him, and so far she had refused to entertain the idea. She had told him quite frankly, more than once, that this was contrary to her principles, and in any case quite ridiculous. She was not like one of his pretty little sluts. Her father had been a friend of the Emperor Nicholas. Her mother belonged to one of the famous families of Austria. Did he imagine, she asked him, that she was going to live with him because he took her out to supper now and then? There were many other men who would be glad to take her out to supper. One of them was a very good-looking and amusing young Englishman named Peter Loring, who was always asking her out to supper, and was very well behaved when she accepted his invitations—though

perhaps they laughed too much and excited the attention of elderly people who resented the laughter of youth.

Hermann Schwartz did not make her laugh very much. He was inclined to be sulky now and then. But he was good-looking, well-mannered, and very rich. At least, his father was very rich, being a millionaire with great steel works in the Ruhr. He pampered his son and gave him all the money he wanted, and he wanted quite a lot.

Apart from ill-temper now and then, Hermann was a nice friend to have, and very generous with his father's money. It was nice of him to take her for drives on summer nights after her work in the studios. He had a powerful car which he drove magnificently through the Grünewald, and out to Potsdam and other pleasant places.

She loved this sense of speed, and had perfect trust in Hermann's skill. He had a yacht on the Wannsee, and that was even more enchanting. On Sundays, when there was no work at the studio, she lay on a little white deck, sunning herself after a bath. Hermann was naked to the waist and beautifully bronzed. They raced other yachts, and then joined a party of his friends at one of the refreshment places on the lakeside where there were flowers and trailing plants, and scarlet parasols to shade them from the sun.

Hermann's friends were mostly of his own age, and very kind to her. Some of the girls were perhaps a little vulgar and not quite ladies. But she didn't inquire into their private lives, and shared their laughter. The young Germans were very polite, and clicked heels and kissed hands with great respect. They were mostly sons of Potsdam generals and high officers of the old Army, now living in retreat. Although these young men complained of poverty and hard times, they seemed to have enough money to keep their little yachts and entertain girls. That was one of the mysteries which she didn't understand.

"We're living in a world of illusion," said one of them when she questioned him one day. "All this"—he made a gesture towards the lake with its fleet of white-winged boats—"is a mirage which has no reality!"

"It seems very real to me," remarked Olga. "There is the lake. There are the boats, and here am I eating a rose-coloured ice which in due course will be paid for, I hope, by Hermann."

Hermann was changing in one of the dressing-rooms at the time. Hans Ritter, his friend, continued his conversation.

"All this is just a pretence which is allowed to go on for a little while longer. Meanwhile, Germany is cracking up. The whole structure of German

life is breaking down. When the French give it another push it will disintegrate. This generation of German youth has no chance and no hope.”

“All this is very pleasant,” said Olga. “I hear young people laughing.”

Hans Ritter smiled and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“They don’t understand. They never think. They’re entirely brainless. Unfortunately, I was born with a thinking apparatus. That’s why I am apprehensive.”

“Has Hermann any brain?” asked Olga, in her candid way.

Hans Ritter shook his head.

“None whatever. That is why he wears a monocle. It hides his lack of intelligence.”

“He’s a friend of mine,” said Olga. “I find him kind.”

Hans Ritter expressed his regret that Olga should not have chosen a better type of German.

“Now, I have the soul of an artist.”

Hermann came back from the dressing-room in a white flannel suit.

“What have you two people been talking about?” he asked suspiciously.

“The economic situation in Germany,” said Hans Ritter.

“*Gott in Himmel!*” exclaimed Hermann Schwartz.

He had a flat of his own in the Kurfürstendam. Olga had been there several times after her hours in the film studio, though to avoid family reproaches—Michael was very puritanical—she did not talk about it at home and accepted her mother’s pity for having such long hours of work.

She knew she had been rather irritable lately. She was angry with herself sometimes for being so impatient and highly strung. It was rather a strain keeping Hermann at a safe distance and at the same time accepting his friendship. She had had one or two scenes with him which had been rather too exciting, though she had teased him off. One night in his flat he had made a fuss when she wanted to go. He had asked her to stay with him and had locked the door when she put on her cloak and said, “Now I’m going.”

It had needed quite a struggle to get that door unlocked. Hermann had broken his monocle, and was ridiculously angry when she laughed at this accident. She had found laughter to be her best defence. But that night she had been just a little frightened. There had been an ugly look in Hermann’s eyes, and he had been rather too rough with her. She had to punish him. For

three weeks she had refused to go out with him. She had gone to supper with Peter Loring and some of the other girls.

Now, this afternoon, when she had lost her place in the film crowd, and when Michael was out of a job again, and when Berlin had become panic-stricken because of the downfall of German money, she went to Hermann's flat in the Kurfürstendam.

She had made up her mind about things. She had made up her mind that she could not face poverty again. She would not let her mother go through a new ordeal of hardship. Hermann would be generous if she lived with him. He would give her anything she asked for. She would be able to keep her mother and Michael. It would be a good deed, really. God would not mind very much. He would forgive her for any naughtiness because she was acting with a good purpose. Thousands of Russian girls had had to do the same thing. After all, there was no reason why Hermann shouldn't marry her one day, unless he grew tired of her. He didn't approve of marriage at his age, he said, but he might alter his mind if she were sweet to him. She would make him give up his monocle. It made him look wicked. She would teach him to laugh instead of to smile. She would make him help the Russian refugees. He and she would be very generous and helpful with his father's money. She would use her beauty to make him good and kind. In any case she would sacrifice herself for her mother and Michael, poor darlings. It would really be an act of virtue, she thought, if she went to live with Hermann.

Olga took the lift up to Hermann's flat in the Kurfürstendam. The lift-boy raised his cap to her and smiled. He remembered this pretty lady coming several times before.

"Mr. Hermann," he said, "came in ten minutes ago. He looked upset about something."

He looked upset about something when Olga went into his room after she had been let into the flat by his manservant, who was very polite and friendly as usual.

"Why have you come?" he asked coldly. She hadn't seen him since that night when he had locked the door.

"I've come to stay, if you still want me," she answered.

For a moment he looked startled, and the monocle—a new unbroken one—dropped from his eye to its silk cord. Then he laughed harshly.

"It's too late," he said. "All that kind of thing is over. I'm one of the have-beens."

Olga stared at him with bewilderment.

“What do you mean, Hermann?”

For a moment or two he was silent. Then he answered in that cold, harsh voice:

“My father has gone broke. All his paper-money is worthless. He shot himself last night in his study. I’ve just come back from looking at his corpse. It didn’t look nice.”

“Oh, I’m sorry!” said Olga. “I’m sorry, Hermann.”

This news of death and ruin had shocked her out of the selfishness which she had tried to pretend was unselfishness. Hermann’s face was grey, and his lips were hard.

“I expect I shall have to put up in the *Nacht Asyl*,” he said. “It’s a night shelter for broken men. They don’t allow one to take one’s pretty ladies there.”

He turned sharply on Olga and spoke brutally.

“I don’t want to see you any more. I’ve spent a lot of money on you and got nothing out of it except your laughter. Now you come to play the slut with me because you need help. Go back to your Russian rats. I’ve no use for you. I’ve finished with all that. I have my own troubles.”

Olga’s face flushed scarlet and then went dead white.

For a moment her lips moved, but no sound came out of them. She had dropped a glove, but did not stoop to pick it up. She turned and left him without a word and went down in the lift again.

“Did you find Mr. Hermann upset about something?” asked the lift-boy, grinning at her.

She did not answer this child in buttons, but hurried out into the street.

“I made a mistake,” she said to herself. “I must have been mad. I think I’m still a little mad.”

She went into the doorway of a shop in the Kurfürstendam and began to weep convulsively. A man came out and passed her hurriedly, and then came back.

“Excuse me,” he said, “is anything the matter? Can I be of use?”

“It’s nothing,” said Olga. “Someone is dead. That’s all.”

“I’m sorry,” said the man, hesitating for a moment, and then leaving her after raising his hat.

Hermann Schwartz was dead as far as she was concerned—as dead as his father. She had had a very narrow escape. Now she was going back to misery. She was a Russian refugee again, with Michael and her mother, penniless.

LIV

OLGA and her mother went to Paris, leaving Michael behind in Berlin. It had all been arranged in a hurry, even in a panic. Vera Sokolova had come round one night, saying that she was going to Paris next morning. She wanted them all to come with her, and indeed had already reserved seats for them.

“It’s impossible,” said Michael. “We have no money.”

Vera was not to be put off by that remark.

“I have enough for all of you. A friend of mine bought me some American dollars when there was still some meaning in German marks.”

“They’re your dollars and not ours,” said Michael proudly.

It was easy to adopt this attitude for himself, but not to sustain it for his mother and Olga. Vera, indeed, broke it down by her next words.

“You will pay me back one day, Michael, when I send word to you. Didn’t you make a pact with me one day in a shed on the island of Prinkipo?”

He remembered that pact, though he thought she had forgotten it. He had vowed to come to her even though seas divided them.

“That’s true,” he answered gravely. “My mother and Olga will go to Paris with you, and I am grateful. But I shall stay in Germany for a while. Rosenthal has given me an introduction to the director of the orchestra in Munich. A word from Rosenthal is worth its weight in gold.”

“Oh, Michael!” cried Anna Markova. “I can’t leave you behind. We have always kept together.”

This time it was necessary to separate for a little while, and it was a sad parting. Anna Markova clung to her son on the platform of the German station.

“Come back to me soon, my dear,” she pleaded.

He promised to join her in Paris if he failed to get an engagement in Munich. If he succeeded, he would send for her. They would be happy together again.

“I can’t miss the chance of becoming leading violin in the Munich Opera House,” he told her. “Rosenthal writes in his letter that I play as well as he does. That is a magnificent lie. I wept when I read it.”

Olga looked ill when he said good-bye to her.

“Take care of mother,” he said, “and also of yourself, little sister. Don’t look so unhappy! Paris, after all, is a fine city and kind to Russian exiles. You will find many friends.”

“We’re beggars again,” she said coldly. “We begin all over again. I don’t find it amusing.”

Vera gave Michael her cheek to kiss.

“Reach up to the stars!” she said.

“They’re a long way off,” he answered. “They’re very high.”

He felt like death when he walked back to his lodgings. Death was in his heart because of this parting with his mother and Olga, and Vera. He was alone.

But he had two priceless gifts. They had been given to him by Rosenthal before that great master left Berlin for his tour in the United States. One was the letter to the director of the Munich Opera House. The other was Rosenthal’s violin—that wonderful piece of wood into which Rosenthal had put his own soul. He had handed it over one evening and spoken very simply.

“I am going tomorrow. Take this as a remembrance of our friendship. Think of me sometimes when you play it.”

Michael had refused to take it. It was too miraculous a gift, but Rosenthal had thrust it almost roughly into his hands and laughed at him for refusing to accept his “old fiddle”, as he called it.

“I have another,” he said. “It’s better than this. It’s more mellow. It fits me better under the chin. We understand each other perfectly. This is my secondhand fellow. I’m ashamed to give you such a poor souvenir, and you will honour me by taking it.”

Michael had taken it and kissed it. Now he was going to take it to Munich with Rosenthal’s letter.

The Hauptmann family, who had let their rooms to the Russian exiles, had behaved very generously. Their good nature and sympathy in this time of trouble, from which they had not escaped, made Michael grateful to all Germans. The boy, Siegfried, had come to Michael privately and offered to lend him an English pound note for which he had exchanged his savings before the mark fell to its lowest depths. Frau Hauptmann had kissed him when he went away to Munich as though he were her own son.

“You will always find a room here,” she told him. “And of course you need never pay if it is inconvenient.”

He already owed her for seven weeks' lodging, which hurt his conscience and his pride. He went to Munich with borrowed money, lent to him by a 'cellist in the orchestra of the ballet who was a Jew and had bought and sold foreign money with some financial magic like that of Aladdin's lamp. On the proceeds he had bought himself two new suits of clothes for five dollars. He had given a champagne party at the Fürstenhof. He was making profit out of the downfall of the mark, though Russians who weren't Jews lost everything and had to flee from Berlin. Michael accepted his offer of a loan. It was the first time he had borrowed from the Jews. He hoped to pay him back one day.

It was unfortunate that the Opera House in Munich was temporarily closed because of the economic crisis. It was also unfortunate that the director, to whom Michael had an introduction from Rosenthal, had gone to Budapesth and would not be back for a month or two.

A month or two! Michael had enough money for three nights in Munich and for a return ticket to Berlin. In a month or two he would be dead of starvation if he waited about in Munich.

"I am lost," he said to himself when he strode into a café in the Neuerhauserstrasse, faint for lack of food and utterly dejected by this blow of fate.

It was the Augustinercafé, and rather deserted except for a few groups of men who were talking politics in low voices. They all seemed anxious and distressed. There was no laughter among them.

"Germany is *kaput*," said one of them sitting at a table next to the one where Michael was alone with his elbows dug into the polished board and his head propped on one hand.

"Coffee, please," he said to the stout waitress who stood by his side.

"Anything to eat?" she asked.

He glanced at the bill of fare. If he ate now he would make a hole in his borrowed money. He asked for a *Brödchen* with butter.

There were four men at the table next to him. One of them was a powerful-looking man with a tooth-brush moustache and dreamy eyes into which there leapt now and then a kind of flame when his own words excited him. His voice rang out harshly. Michael could hear his words.

"Germany deserves her present misery. The German folk have put themselves under a Government of slave-minded men who cringe to the French and all our enemies. They are a corrupt and cowardly crowd. They pander to the Jews who are sucking the life-blood of the German folk. There

will be no hope for Germany until we overthrow this gang of bandits who have sentenced Germany to death by accepting the infamous Treaty of Versailles. What we need is the resurrection of the old German spirit. We must chase the Jews out of our country. Youth must reassert its divine right to work and leadership and life. It is I, Adolf Hitler, who dare to say these things.”

He dared to say a lot more, until there were angry murmurs from other men in the café. Suddenly three young men rose and came across with clenched fists. Someone struck a blow. Someone sprawled across a table and smashed some glasses. For a few moments there was a free fight which suddenly subsided when one of the young men—hardly more than a boy—fell senseless with a deep cut across his forehead from a piece of broken glass which made him bleed profusely. It was the man with the tooth-brush moustache who knelt down beside him and staunched the wound, while most of the other men slipped out of the café.

“What’s it all about?” asked Michael carelessly, when the stout waitress came to give him his bill.

The woman shrugged her shoulders and spoke in a low voice.

“There’s no peace in Germany. We’re always having fights here. Young men like to kill one another nowadays—as though that would do any good. It’s all politics. Now German money has gone bad. It’s just filthy paper which has numbers printed on it, meaning nothing. We’ve all gone mad.”

Michael paid two million marks for his cup of coffee and *Brödchen*. That is to say he handed over a dirty bit of paper upon which were the figures stamped across its former denomination.

“You’re not German, are you?” asked the waitress, looking at him in a motherly way.

“I’m Russian,” said Michael, putting Rosenthal’s violin under his arm.

“That’s worse than being German,” said the waitress.

Michael agreed with inward conviction, and went out of the Augustinercafé to find a cheap lodging for the night. He was terribly alone.

LV

THE *Nacht Asyl* in the East End of Berlin was crowded at this time, and Count Michael Pavlovitch Markov was not the only man of title to seek shelter there, as he did on his return from Munich. There was a German Freiherr lying in one of the wooden bunks where a thousand men slept. There were men who had been university professors, doctors, artists, officers of the Kaiser's Army, lawyers, among thieves, dope-fiends, drunkards, and human derelicts of every kind.

Michael had been too proud to go back to the Hauptmanns and ask for free board and lodging. He had been too proud to search out any Russian friends who might remain in Berlin and cadge a little money from them. Perhaps also there was something more than pride which caused him to ask a green-uniformed policeman the way to the *Nacht Asyl* that night he returned from Munich. It was the Russian in his soul which made him go down to this underworld and walk into the depths of its misery. It was a kind of deliberate self-sacrifice, a voluntary nailing to the Cross.

"I can suffer as much as other men," he thought. "I'll suffer to the uttermost and share their wretchedness. In any case, the most miserable of them have not endured the agonies which I passed through in our Revolution, when I was a soldier in Wrangel's army. This *Nacht Asyl* is a place of luxury compared with the places in which I have slept during the time of retreat, or in which thousands of Russian exiles found shelter under the arches of Constantinople. It is good for the soul to go into the depths and see human misery in its lowest form. Was it not Rosenthal who told me that no man may be a great master unless he has shared this suffering?"

All that was very Russian, because Michael was very Russian.

But it was not amusing in the *Nacht Asyl*. It was not luxurious, even for a soldier of Wrangel's army. That night and on other nights, Michael had a sense of horror when he lay among these brothers of misfortune in a wooden bunk which was one of many hundreds in one of the dormitories. The heat and stench of these human bodies almost suffocated him in this fetid darkness. He heard them tossing and coughing, and snoring, and breathing heavily. Now and then some restless fellow groaned, or gave a little whimper in the night. Now and then one of them, dreaming horribly, raised himself with a strangled cry. A boy in the bunk next to Michael's sobbed under his blanket.

It was worse, almost, in waking hours when these men—the battalions of the Berlin underworld—washed themselves and talked among each other, and sat at long benches drinking weak *Ersatz* coffee and munching coarse bread.

They were the victims of the ultimate despair. In the mass there was no hope among them. They were down in the depths and did not make a struggle to rise. Vice and every brand of human wickedness had brought some of them here. Evil was stamped on some of these faces. But most of them were poor, decent fellows who had been caught between the wheels of life in this great city of Berlin. Some strain of weakness in them, perhaps, had prevented their escape. Ill health, lack of food, had made them useless in the labour market. Sheer misfortune, the creeping paralysis of employment, the madness of the mark, had flung them into the mud and slime up to the neck.

Michael spoke with one of them who sat elbow to elbow with him on the bench where they were fed like beasts. He was a youngish man, with a perfectly bald head and pallid skin.

“How long have you been sleeping here?” asked Michael.

“Three months, off and on. I’m a street musician, but the police treat us rough and people have no money to throw away. It’s a poor game, old man.”

Michael was moved by those words “street musician”. Here was a brother artist.

“What do you play?” he asked. “I also am a musician.”

The bald-headed man grinned and showed toothless gums.

“There’s nothing I can’t do on the penny whistle. What’s yours?”

“The violin.”

The bald-headed man made a grimace.

“A horrible instrument!” he said. “It makes noises like a cat being strangled. I like wind instruments. I might have done well with a saxophone, but that’s only for millionaires.”

Every night now Michael slept in the *Nacht Asyl*. He made friends with some of the men. One of them asked him to do a bit of house-breaking with him. Another told him about his domestic affairs. His wife was on the streets but didn’t pass him any of her earnings. A young man—hardly beyond boyhood—fastened himself on to Michael and walked out with him.

His father was a miner in the Ruhr, where they were now on strike against the French, and almost starving. This lad had come to Berlin looking

for work as a labourer. He had tramped to all the likely places, but everywhere the notice was up: *No hands wanted*.

“Better be dead,” said the boy. “But it wants a lot of courage to be dead. I wouldn’t know how to kill myself. I’d be frightened before I could get the job done.”

Michael put his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“It’s a crime against God to kill oneself,” he said. “It’s the most cowardly act of all.”

“God!” said the boy. “Do you believe in that stuff?”

“Yes,” said Michael. “And so do you. Every man must believe in some kind of God, though now and then I have disbelieved.”

“The devil has come to Germany,” said the boy. “That’s what I believe! I believe in the devil. I believe in millions of devils. I see them at night in my dreams. That’s why I shouted out in my sleep. That *Nacht Asyl* is the place for bad dreams. It’s the stench and the heat, I suppose.”

Michael did not disagree. He also had bad dreams in the *Nacht Asyl*. He woke up in a cold sweat with a cry which must have been loud, because several voices cursed him. He dreamed that his mother was being murdered by a French gendarme, who was putting his bayonet through her throat, very slowly and politely.

He became aware that he was giving forth a body odour which was disgusting. He had left his clothes at the Hauptmanns’ and had no change of socks. His linen was getting dirty. There was a three days’ growth of beard on his chin.

“I look like one of the human derelicts,” he thought, catching a glimpse of himself in a metal shop-sign. “That, after all, is true. I also am a derelict. I stink like one.”

Somewhere in his mind was the decision to join his mother and Olga in Paris, but that queer and foolish pride made him shirk going round to his old lodgings to ask another loan from people who were hard-pressed at this time.

“I will earn my own fare,” he said. “I will get to Paris without asking for charity. Meanwhile, I am learning more about life. It will be good for my music. It will be good for my soul. I haven’t suffered enough.”

He was learning about the minds of men who were very low down in the social scale—as low as the mud and slime. He found great qualities of kindness among them. One young man invited him to a meal and shared an

American “nickel” which he had been given as a tip by a foreigner whose bag he had carried to a private hotel.

“A bit of luck,” said this young fellow. “Come and put some food in your belly, old man.”

“You are very generous, my friend,” said Michael, accepting his invitation.

“I’m a Communist,” said the man. “I believe in sharing with one’s comrades.”

Over the table in a cheap eating-house, Michael discussed Communism with one of its disciples.

“We shall have to fight for it, of course,” he admitted. “German cities will run red with blood one day. My blood will mix with it gladly.”

Michael argued against him until he became angry.

“You talk like a steel king,” he protested. “You must be the bastard son of Stinnes or Thyssen.”

“I’m a Russian,” said Michael. “I’ve seen a Communist Revolution. I hate bloodshed and cruelty.”

This German Communist laughed and was good-natured again.

“That’s all right, comrade,” he said. “I’ve a soft heart myself. But what about the cruelty of Capitalism—all its sacrifice of men’s souls and bodies? I’ve seen war and don’t like it, but there’s bound to be bloodshed before social injustice is overthrown. I believe in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

“It’s another name for serfdom,” said Michael. “It’s only another form of tyranny. Lenin and his gang are more tyrannical than the mediaeval Czars.”

“Granted,” said his new friend. “But the object of their tyranny is to establish the brotherhood of man and the coming of universal peace.”

Michael groaned over the wooden table.

“I don’t see how the brotherhood of man may be established by massacres and executions.”

“One has to kill off the bad breed,” said the young Communist. “Then there’s vengeance. I believe in the right of vengeance.”

He had a long score of vengeance totted up against his fellow-men. He wanted vengeance on those who had made the War in which he had fought in France and Flanders—the Kaiser, the Crown Prince, all the generals, all

their staff officers, all the infantry officers and non-commissioned officers. "For all they made us suffer," he said grimly, "I want their blood."

"The brotherhood of man," said Michael, "will never come by hatred. You and I are brothers because you have shared your luck with me. That's love."

"Don't you believe it, comrade," said the other man. "It's the comradeship of the class-conscious. Love is between a man and a woman, and has to do with the senses. Comradeship belongs to the mind."

He stared into Michael's eyes and lowered his voice.

"The day is not far off, comrade, when, the masses of Germany will rise against those who have made slaves of them. I move about a bit, from one night shelter to another, talking to my German comrades. In Germany everything is beginning to crack. The old system is breaking down. There's ruin coming for all the rich and the bourgeoisie, and may God destroy them. Out of that ruin we shall arise. In our hearts, brother, is the gospel of Karl Marx."

Michael was silent. He felt a shiver down his spine. He didn't believe in the gospel of Karl Marx, and yet, talking with these poor wretches in the underworld, he saw their reason for bitterness and despair and hatred and vengeance, and a dream of some kind of life better than this misery into which they had sunk.

"I believe in justice," he said. "I believe in human comradeship."

The man who had shared a meal with him put his hand across the table and held one of Michael's in a hard grip.

"You're one of us, comrade," he said. "You've been a gentleman, I can see that, and it's no fault of yours. Now you're in the mud with me. We're blood brothers."

One morning, after washing himself at a tap in the *Nacht Asyl*, Michael took his violin from the porter's office where he had put it for safety. He went out into the streets and walked a great distance until he came to the residential quarter of Charlottenburg. It was very quiet in one of these streets where there were blocks of flats in the new German style. Michael opened his violin-case and took out the instrument given to him by Rosenthal.

"Rosenthal would weep if he saw me," he thought. "But I must earn my fare to Paris."

He drew his bow across the strings. The tone of this instrument was wonderful. The sound of it again sent a thrill down his spine. He played

Schubert's '*Ave Maria*', and was aware that he played it well. Was he not a pupil of Rosenthal? Did not this violin vibrate to the soul of Rosenthal?

A few people coming out of the flats stopped to listen for a moment or two, and then passed on. His glance met the eyes of a young woman with gold-spun hair. There was great pity in them.

"I play the '*Ave Maria*,'" said Michael inside himself. "May the Mother of Christ touch the hearts of these Germans for my mother's sake."

A window opened, and some bits of paper fluttered down.

Michael stooped and picked them up from the gutter into which they drifted.

"I am in the depths of degradation," he thought. "I'm a Russian count. My father was a friend of the Emperor Nicholas. His son picks up bits of paper from the mud. It's very horrible."

He went from street to street in the quieter quarters of Berlin. Windows opened as he played. Heads leaned out. Paper money fluttered down to him. Some of it was blown away by windy gusts before he could catch it. After eight hours his side-pockets were stuffed with money.

These Germans had an ear for music. They were startled by the sounds that came up from the street. They knew the touch of a man who could play. They were sentimentalists.

When the first lights gleamed behind the window-blinds it began to rain.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" said Michael, when he felt the first spots on his face.

He put Rosenthal's priceless instrument into its case again hurriedly, and with a sense of panic.

Presently he became wet almost to the skin, after he had walked back to the centre of Berlin. He was in Unter den Linden. He walked into a Travel Bureau to change this paper money into a ticket for Paris.

"Will you be good enough to change this into French francs?" he said to a young man behind the counter. He didn't know that his mother had been here one day to change her savings.

He emptied his side-pockets and placed quite a bundle of money on the counter.

The young man behind the brass railings, who had been studying his ledger, looked up and thrust it back at him.

"There's no exchange," he said. "This is worthless outside Germany."

Michael stood there, dejected and very pale. His clothes were still soaking. He could feel a wet patch over his right shoulder. His trousers were splashed with mud. There was a stubbly beard on his chin.

“There is no exchange at all for German money?” he asked in a voice of stupefaction.

“I’ve told you,” said the young man behind the counter. “And do you mind getting out of this office? You’re a bit damp, aren’t you?”

“I’m sorry,” said Michael humbly. “Excuse me.”

He stuffed the paper money—this worthless trash—into his pockets again. It might buy a piece of bread and a cup of coffee before he made his way back to the *Nacht Asyl*.

A young man and woman entered the office downstairs as Michael was about to pass through the swing doors. He stepped back politely to give them entrance. Then he uttered a cry of joy.

“Mr. Alden! My friend! You are, then, back again from Russia?”

It was Oliver Alden, who had arrived in Berlin with the wife of Sacha Dolin. He stared at Michael for a moment without recognition, and was astonished when this man who looked like a tramp put one arm round his neck and kissed his cheek.

It was Oliver Alden who took Michael to Paris. They shared a *wagon-lit*. Lydia slept in another little compartment, after going to bed very late that night as the train rushed through space, because she hated to sleep and miss the consciousness of her great happiness. In thirty-six hours, perhaps, she would see Sacha again. Meanwhile, she was excited at meeting Michael, whom she had known as a boy. There were a million things to talk about with laughter and tears.

It was a pity that Sacha Dolin died before he saw his wife again. He caught pneumonia while painting out of doors in the *mistral* of the Mediterranean coast. They buried him in the little churchyard of the hill-top town above Mentone. They were just burning his pictures and his old clothes and other rubbish when Lydia came walking up the hill with Oliver Alden, astonished by this beauty about her, and with her heart running ahead of her body to meet Sacha, her lover, who had missed her so much.

LVI

THERE were hard times in Paris for many Russian exiles who had found a sanctuary in that city, but France was, on the whole, a kind foster-mother to these children of a lost world. At least she put up no barriers against their invasion and was friendly towards their efforts to find a place in French life. They found places for their industry, their arts, and even for their Russian temperament of fatalism, mysticism, and extravagance, which somehow the French seemed to understand with a certain sympathy.

Paris was overcrowded, of course, with Russian restaurants, cabarets, and night-clubs, decorated in the old Russian style, where Russian food was cooked by women of the old régime and served by men who traded on their former rank as a romantic attraction to bourgeois visitors, until this kind of thing became rather stale, and Russian princes and princesses rather cheap, even to American and English tourists.

These casual onlookers knew little of the life behind the scenes among these adventurers of fate—the courage of women to face the poverty and squalor of French lodging-houses, to endure long hours of toil as sempstresses, waitresses, or shop-assistants, the humiliations at which they had to laugh unless they wept, the fight with pride and bitterness, and the desperate struggle for life itself among men who had been used to luxury and laziness in the old Russia before the War. There were weaklings among them. Nearly always the women were braver than the men—which perhaps is the nature of women. There were Russians who became pimps and panderers in the vicious haunts of *la vie de luxe*, exploiting their titles, or adopting false ones, to get the favour of snob-minded women on whom they sponged. Michael Pavlovitch Markov, who dropped his title of Count, hated that kind of life and turned his mind from it with disgust, though he had to fiddle in such places and breathed their bad air.

This aspect of the Russian invasion was apparent to the spectators of the human peepshow in the pleasure haunts of Paris. Invisible and unknown to them was the work of thirty thousand Cossacks who tilled the fields round Toulouse, and the skilled drudgery of many thousands of Russians, once soldiers of Denikin and Wrangel, in the factories of Citroen and Renault, who kept their battalion formations and their old officers, until gradually, as the years passed, they dropped out of that custom and became merged in the life of France, putting their Russian dream into the background of their minds.

Stripped to the waist, plastered white with dust, or wearing the blue overalls of the French *terrassier*, thousands of Russians became day-labourers in Armentières, St. Quentin, Rheims, and Arras, and helped to reconstruct the devastated areas—that great wound in the body of France made by four and a half years of gun-fire. Afterwards they became plasterers, bricklayers, mechanics, and dockside labourers, though some of them had been men of rank or university students and intellectuals.

Everywhere these exiles penetrated the life and industry of France. They set up tea-shops on the Riviera, grew flowers for scent in the neighbourhood of Grasse, became designers of French fabrics, salesmen of French goods, clerks, messengers, shop-walkers, and taxi-drivers. Thirty per cent of all the taxi-drivers in Paris were Russians, and at first were ridiculously ignorant of places and streets marked on the map over which they pored as they sat in little *bistros*, with the elbows of their leather jackets on the tables where they sipped their coffee or their cognac. They wiped out of their minds the remembrance of caste—it was better to get enough to eat and drink—except now and again when a taxi-driver put off his leather coat and put on a shabby dinner-jacket, and attended a reception in honour of a man to whom they bowed as Czar of all the Russias, though a slant-eyed revolutionary named Lenin was successor to the Romanovs.

Many of them became French citizens, as a life-insurance policy, and because it was better to be a citizen of France than a nomad without a country or a passport. But the Russian cannot change his skin or his soul. There were men in Paris who drove their taxis by day but had a night off now and then when they spent all their earnings in one wild and glorious burst of extravagance, until they wept on one another's shoulders, or made love to one another's women, or argued very fiercely about life, until dawn came and it was time to put petrol in the tank. Some of them had been princes, others were the sons of Moscow shopkeepers, and others had been students, artists, dancers, or boys playing with toy soldiers until one day the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had ridden forth, bringing with them war, and pestilence, and famine, and anarchy.

LVII

IN the souls of these Russian émigrés there was for some time a dream, a mirage, an illusion. They would go back again to Russia, they said. This Bolshevism was, they believed, only a passing madness, a new tyranny without strength, a brief chapter of history. There would be a Czar again. He would go back with all his friends. There would be a liberal constitution, of course. Russia would be governed on parliamentary lines. The Russian people would be liberated from the servitude of the Soviet system, worse than their serfdom under the Czars. There would be a real democracy in Russia. But the old customs, the old faith, the undying soul of Russia would arise from the ruins. The exiles—all these people in cabarets and concert-halls, and factories and garages, would take their old places in the social life of Russia after the nightmare of Communism. The Five Years' Plan would fail. The industrialization of Russia would never happen. The peasants would refuse to be taken from their farms and communized. There would be a peasant revolt. The Red Army, recruited from the peasant stock, would turn upon the dictators. The bells of the Kremlin would rock below the golden crosses on the domes when the Romanov dynasty returned to break the evil spell of the Cheka and its executioners.

That was the dream which haunted the minds of many Russian exiles. They talked about it as though it might happen any day—even tomorrow—until many morrows had passed into yesterdays. It was the utterly false dream of minds which belonged to the past because that had been their time of happiness and pride and power. It was the dream of men and women who yearned for the air of Russia, for the feel of its earth under their feet, for a lost fatherland. It was the dream of men and women who had heard the tinkle of the sleigh-bells down the Nevsky Prospekt on winter days, when the hard snow glittered and the cold sun shone upon the domes and spires of St. Petersburg. It was the dream of those who had had villas in the Crimea and lovely gardens filled with a thousand scents; and of those who had had old estates with many peasants to work for them, and of those who had a mystical love of Russia only to be understood by the Slav soul and by minds steeped in the music, art, folk-lore, and spirit of these people.

But it was a dream which was thrust away by younger folk in exile, even by elder men and women who stared into the face of reality and saw its truth. There would be no going back from this exile. It was better to accept that fact and adapt themselves to life accordingly. It was no use, they

thought, to keep aloof from the life around them, as Russians living among Russian groups. It was wiser to become absorbed in French life or German life, or among the people of any land which gave them shelter. In any case, there could be no return, they knew in their hearts, to the old Russia. The War had altered everything, even the minds of men and women.

It was the end of an era. A new world was coming with new systems of society and government. In Italy there was a new experiment called Fascism, under an ex-anarchist named Mussolini. It was supposed to be at the opposite pole to Communism, but it proclaimed the same discipline of service to the State, the same obedience to dictatorship, the same denial of individual rights or free speech, or free thought. Mussolini was on the same road as Lenin, though his signposts had different names. In Germany a madman—or was he only a fanatic?—had come with a new faith and was organizing bands of young men who called themselves National Socialists. They were fighting and murdering Communists, who fought and murdered them. But their creed seemed to be very much like Communism in its attempt to control all the powers in the State and in its hostility to the liberty of individuals. It was to be a kind of Communism which would be National instead of International. It seemed to be making headway in Germany under the leadership of an Austrian ex-housepainter named Adolf Hitler.

Russian ex-soldiers in French factories listened to the point of view of French working-men who were inclined to approve of the Russian experiment. “After all,” they said, “why shouldn’t there be a comradeship among all the workers of the world? Perhaps it might prevent another war. Perhaps it might give us better conditions and better wages. *Pourquoi pas, mon vieux?*”

Russian intellectuals working in French attics or bed-sitting-rooms entertained their friends to coffee or cheap wine, and stayed up late discussing the ideal form of government, and the rights of human nature, and the French ideal of liberty, and the German need of discipline, and the inevitable change of thought as time marched on. A new era was at hand. It wouldn’t be like the old world. This Russian dream in their hearts? Those Russian memories, weren’t they becoming unreal? Weren’t they the harking back of the mind to things which had gone for ever? Wasn’t it more prudent to take out papers of French citizenship? Wasn’t it more intelligent to move with the times and look forward to the future instead of back to the past? They were Russians, yes! But no Romanov would ever rule in Russia again. Perhaps Stalin, who had succeeded the dead Lenin, would get things going. He was building a big machine-power over there. Its wheels were beginning to turn. He was teaching Russian boys to become machine-minded. He was

making a new Russia. It might be better than the old. Better or worse, the old Russia had gone for ever. The old world had gone. There was no bringing back the world before the War. The human tribes were on the move again to something different. There was no sense in clinging to a dream.

LVIII

MICHAEL, so very Russian, learnt all there was to know about life in Paris and the character of its people. He went through many dark hours in that city of light, and knew an utter loneliness of soul in its crowds, and ate the bread of humiliation, and drank the bitter waters of grief, but also, during his time of exile there, he had moments of great happiness, a sense of ecstasy now and then, and hours of gaiety, laughter, and the joy of love, which is good in Paris when lovers walk hand in hand through the glades of the Bois, or sit at a table in a cheap little restaurant, or stand at an attic window looking over the grey roofs and multitude of chimney-pots above this city where always through history the student mind and the lover's heart have found freedom and sanctuary.

After his experiences in Berlin, when he had gone into the depths, he found his mother and Olga had made a home for themselves in two rooms of a workman's cottage at a place called Val Fleuri, not far from Paris, to which they went every morning by an early train, for work in the dressmaking business of the Grand Duchess Marie, coming back with labourers and midinettes after working-hours.

Michael found that Val Fleuri was not so poetical as its name. It was inhabited mainly by the working-class of Paris, who lived in rows of grimy little houses behind the railway-line. One of these rows of two-storied dwellings was a Russian colony, and rather overcrowded. A Russian general who had been Denikin's chief of staff had a tiny bed-sitting-room, hardly bigger than a bathroom, but in this he found room to write his memories of war and revolution, sitting on winter nights in an old raincoat which he had worn when he was a prisoner of the Reds, from whom he had escaped by a kind of miracle. His wife and daughter worked with Michael's mother and Olga, and travelled by the same trains. The son of a pre-War millionaire had a room in the same house and was a clerk in a French bank. Several of the taxi-drivers of Paris came back in the early hours of the morning for a few hours' sleep, if they cared to sleep. Sometimes they didn't. They sat on their beds in the little rooms of these workmen's houses, telling their adventures in the streets of Paris, twanging balalaikas, singing old Russian songs, drinking French wines, smoking *petits caporals*, and discussing life, religion, art, morality, and the foreign policy of M. Poincaré, with the Russian passion for abstract argument.

Here in this row of labourers' houses was the hidden drama of Russian tragedy. These people had gone through the Terror. They had hidden from the Reds in many disguises, and had had hairbreadth escapes. And now here they were facing another adventure of life with a courage, a resignation, and an endurance of poverty which were not unheroic. Some of these pretty girls here in Val Fleuri were wearing out their eyes and their fingers over fine needlework all day long, always laughing a good deal and not complaining very much because they were poorly paid at sweated rates. Men who had studied science, art, and literature, in Russian universities, were glad to get a workman's wage or the salary of a French Civil Servant—that is to say, nothing much—in any office or warehouse where perhaps, if they were patient, they might get promotion later on. They were not the romantic figures of Russian exiles who provide characters for musical comedies and American film dramas. At Val Fleuri the ex-generals of a lost Empire, and daughters of the old régime, were as respectable and hard-working as the class into which they had come by that destiny which had decreed this change of life. It was elsewhere in Paris that one might find the wildness of Georgian princes, the passion of women with Tartar blood, the night-life of those who flung about their money, somehow gained, though tomorrow they would go hungry.

Michael had a room next to those of his mother and Olga, just long enough for his bed, and just broad enough for a chair and a table at the side of it, to which he came back in the early hours of the night after playing in an orchestra of Montmartre.

It was unfortunate for him that on his arrival in Paris with Oliver Alden, his good English friend, he fell ill for a time, having been infected by some malignant microbe in the *Nacht Asyl* of Berlin. The illness itself was not serious, after a night or two of delirium and the usual weakness after fever, which he rather enjoyed because he was nursed by his mother and felt like a small boy again in a Russian nursery. But he missed the chance of rejoining the orchestra of the Russian Ballet, which was engaged for a season in Monte Carlo.

After his convalescence, and when he still felt weak in the legs, he searched Paris for work, and took an engagement, with a sense of humiliation, for a salary which was not magnificent, but very much better than nothing. It was at the Palais des Folies, a variety show in Montmartre frequented by foreign tourists, and now and then by French bourgeois, who went there to *faire la bombe* with their womenfolk.

“The Palais des Folies is not to be despised, my comrade,” said the Russian friend who had introduced him to one of the directors. “It has a first-class orchestra, it puts on most artistic shows, and it has often been a stepping-stone to fame and fortune for artists of talent. You will find a few Russians in the orchestra and at least three Russian girls of good family among the dancers. Why should you feel humiliated by accepting an engagement in this place? I fail to understand you, after what you have told me about your desperate adventures in Berlin.”

“I have no pride of caste,” said Michael, “but as the owner of a violin which once belonged to Rosenthal, I hate to play bad music in a house of ill-fame.”

His friend was astonished and amused.

“The Folies, my dear fellow, is as famous as the Pantheon and as virtuous as the Gare du Nord. They play good music magnificently, as you will find.”

Michael was of opinion that his friend exaggerated. Certainly it was a good orchestra, but he was obliged to play weird and wild stuff which could not be dignified by the sacred name of music and the sounds of which tortured him. A thousand times as he drew his bow across the strings of Rosenthal’s violin he felt degraded and dejected.

“I am ashamed,” he said within himself. “This is a degradation. The atmosphere of this place is suffocating. It’s worse than that of the *Nacht Asyl*.”

The atmosphere of the Folies reeked with stale scent and tobacco-smoke, but it was not so foul an odour as he had breathed when he lay in one of the bunks of the Berlin night-shelter. Perhaps also he exaggerated the impropriety of the costumes, or lack of costumes, of the dancing-girls who, in some of the spectacles—which he had to admit were not without artistic merit—appeared as daughters of Eve. Olga argued with him on that point, after seeing the show for the first time.

“I can see nothing wrong with it,” she told him, as they went back in the last train to Val Fleuri and their workman’s cottage. “To my simple soul those naked girls are very beautiful.”

“They’re very indecent,” said Michael. “It’s a degradation of womanhood. Surely you must admit that, Olga!”

“What is indecency?” asked Olga. “When we went to the Louvre you were enraptured by the Greek sculpture. You stood gazing at the Venus di Milo as though it were a divinity in stone.”

“Sculpture idealizes the human form,” said Michael. “It’s not one woman but all women. In any case it’s a work of art.”

Olga jeered at him.

“You’re as easily shocked as an Englishman, Michael. In fact, the English only pretend to be shocked. It gives them a very great deal of pleasure to see undraped females.”

“It’s a sign of decadence,” said Michael severely. “I’m frightfully sorry for those Russian girls who sell their beauty in this way for a living wage.”

Olga laughed at him in the corner of a dirty carriage in a fourth-class train.

“You needn’t be so sorry for them, brother Michael. One of them—little Sonia—told me only yesterday that she enjoys her life and finds it all very amusing. She meets enchanting people who treat her with the greatest respect. The French variety artists are intelligent and comradely.”

Michael answered angrily.

“The Folies is a haunt of disgusting humanity. It’s only because I have to earn a living wage that I coerce myself to go on playing in its orchestra.”

Olga yawned a little and laid her head upon his shoulder.

“You take things too seriously, Michael,” she said sleepily. “You’re worrying about your soul and your conscience and wondering whether God is pleased with you.”

Michael laughed in spite of himself, and had to admit the truth of this diagnosis.

“That’s true. I wish to live up to a high ideal which, I confess, I don’t see very clearly in my own mind. I only know that sometimes I feel degraded, and that at other times I want to reach up to all that’s beautiful and spiritual in life.”

Olga had developed her own theory of life. It was Tolstoyan, though she was unaware of that. She thought where love is God must be also. God, she said, would not blame Sonia because she showed her naked body in a show at the Folies. Sonia was doing it for love—to earn money for her mother, who was too delicate to work.

“Surely that is lovely of her, Michael? Surely she is a little saint in the eyes of God?”

Michael laughed good-naturedly.

“Why do we argue like this?” he asked. “There are more important things in life. Mother’s health is one of them. She’s working too hard, I’m

afraid. She looks very fragile.”

“We are both working too hard,” said Olga. “I can’t say that I’m getting fragile, but I’m getting very weary of stitching all day in that awful dressmaking establishment. Stitch, stitch, stitch, and always in those stuffy work-rooms. I want to meet French people. I want to enjoy intelligent conversation. I want a little joy in life. One day I shall ask Sonia whether she can get me a place in the Folies. I have a very nice figure.”

She looked at Michael with challenging eyes.

“No,” said Michael. “If you did that I would never speak to you again.”

Olga gave a ripple of laughter and held out her hand to this austere brother. Hand in hand they walked from the station to the row of workmen’s cottages.

There was a light burning in a top room. That was where Konstantin Maisky was designing Christmas-cards on a warm August night. He did them with exquisite skill and sold them for a few sous apiece to a firm of printers in the rue St. Honoré. In another room at the back of this workman’s cottage, a girl named Lydia, who had been the wife of Sacha Dolin, was painting wooden toys carved by Russians in the old peasant style. She found she could earn a livelihood that way, but sometimes she spoilt her work by weeping on its wet paint.

Anna Markova was awake that night when Michael and Olga came home from the Palais des Folies. She called to them, and after Olga had gone to bed, Michael sat by her bedside and held her hand.

“How good you are to me!” said Anna Markova. “I know how hard it is for you to go on playing in that dreadful place.”

“It’s not so bad, mother,” said Michael. “In the orchestra I might be on a desert island. I’m alone with my own thoughts. My fingers play but my mind wanders.”

“Olga is becoming impatient,” said his mother. “It’s the impatience of youth. She wants joy and love. That’s very natural.”

“Olga ought to be put into a convent,” said Michael, caressing his mother’s hand. “That’s the only safe place for her.”

Presently he withdrew his hand and crept away. His mother had fallen asleep as the first faint touch of dawn lightened her little room.

LIX

MICHAEL made many friends in Paris, and with the Russian gift for languages learnt to speak French almost perfectly. He liked the French mind, so realistic, so sharp in its definition, so free from the vagueness and contradictions of his own Russian way of thought. These French people, he found, had developed a good working philosophy of life, touched with humour and a little cynicism which made them avoid sentimentality or any mystical idealism, which he knew as a weakness in his own character and that of the Slav mind itself. They were all intense individualists, insisting upon liberty of thought, and critical of mass emotion or mass discipline. In every class—especially in the great middle class of ordinary bourgeois folk—there was an intelligence, a shrewd judgment, a natural wit which seemed a national quality.

“These people,” thought Michael, after a chance conversation in some cheap restaurant, or over the counter of a small shop, “are very highly civilized. They have a tradition of culture which has reached down to the humblest classes. They think things out clearly. They’ve learnt the art of good manners. They don’t reach up to the spiritual heights, they have no exaggerated views of life’s possibilities. They are without illusions and are, perhaps, too cynical of human nature, but they have none of the violence which is the defect of Russian character. They don’t give way to despair. They have a strange and wonderful balance.”

On days when Michael was not wanted for any rehearsal at the Palais des Folies—that was not often—he called at a house in the rue François Premier where his mother and Olga were working. The concierge came to know him and greeted him with a “*Bon jour, monsieur*”, and let him go down a stone passage which led to the back stairs. It was a winding staircase of rickety wooden stairs, dimly lit, and at the top were the work-rooms where a number of Russian needlewomen were busy. Now and then Michael was embraced by an old gentleman with a little white beard who was always smiling and courteous.

“How goes it, my dear young man? Still at the Palais des Folies?”

“Alas, yes, Highness.”

“Well, it’s not too bad. One can’t quarrel with one’s bread-and-butter. Thank heaven our little business is doing rather well.”

This old gentleman, Prince Poutiatin, was the father-in-law of the Grand Duchess Marie who, with her brother, the Grand Duke Dimitri, had started this dressmaking place mainly to provide work for Russian women of good family.

Michael passed to the workroom, bent low over the hand of the Grand Duchess Marie, a little smiling lady, and felt rather shy among all these young women who looked up from their sewing-machines or their needlework to smile at him.

There was Olga, bending over a piece of linen, until she became aware of his presence and raised her hand to him after a stitch with her needle and cotton. There, at the far end of the room, was his mother, sitting next to an old lady with thin white hair and a delicate worn face who was, Michael knew, the wife of a famous general.

All the women here, young and old, had once belonged to the Imperial Court of Russia. Now they were earning two francs an hour, which, at that time, was worth eight cents in American money, or fourpence in English. And yet some of them were happier, perhaps, than if they had still been in Russia, living in luxury, without much object in life, with no interests beyond the next dinner-party or the next dance. Michael was often astonished at the ripples of laughter that came from this group of princesses and other ladies, at the radiance in their eyes when they looked up at him. It was only Olga who seemed to fret and to hate her task. But even she did not lose her sense of humour, and when Michael appeared, she announced to the company that she was being invited out to lunch by a young gentleman who liked the look of her, or some other little joke which made them all merry.

She was happier for a time when, much to Michael's annoyance—that was foolish of him—she left the Grand Duchess's place for the Maison Yteb in the rue Royale. It was a dressmaking establishment organized by other Russian ladies, among whom was the Baroness Wrangel—the wife of Michael's general in the last retreat—and the wonderful Princess Kougoucheva, who had done a great work of charity for the starving refugees in Constantinople, where once she had stood in the streets selling cakes from a tray to passers-by.

It was through her friend, the Countess Goruno, that Olga joined this establishment as a mannequin, parading up and down the shop in the frocks designed for the fashionable women of Paris, who came here to be fitted by princesses and to wear clothes stitched by countesses. Now and then they would bring their husbands, or the gentlemen who would be kind enough to pay for their frocks.

Olga found it the next best thing to the Folies. Some of these Frenchmen commented favourably upon her appearance. One of them, who happened to be a vicomte, slipped a little card into her hand when his wife was being attended to by the Baroness Wrangel. On this little card he had scribbled an invitation to supper at the Restaurant Henri. Olga tore it into tiny pieces and flung them on the floor with a look of haughty contempt. But she was secretly pleased with the compliment, even though it came from an old roué. It was at least an adventure. It was an amusing episode after her imprisonment as a sempstress, with her nose over a piece of linen and a needle pricking her finger because she had tears in her eyes now and then at this waste of youth, this waste of beauty, this waste of Life, as it seemed to her in black moments.

LX

MICHAEL was a great wanderer in Paris, because, now that his mother and sister were working all day, he was much alone until he was due at the Palais des Folies. He stood in the dim vastness of Notre Dame and felt a *frisson* down his spine as he remembered some of the long drama of French history which had passed down these aisles. Ghosts were about him—the ghosts of poets and fair women, and great kings and princes, and soldiers and statesmen, and murderers and villains. He went into the Palais Royale and stared at the statue of Camille Desmoulins, who had called the people to the Bastille and begun the French Revolution. He explored the markets of Paris, and sometimes at dawn, after his work at the Folies, sat drinking coffee with the porters and salesmen in the ‘Chien Qui Fume’.

They were friendly fellows. Most of them had fought in the War. They told frightful stories of their experiences in the trenches. Most of them thought the War had been a great stupidity. Most of them seemed certain that it would happen again, when Germany was strong enough to fight again. “Humanity,” said one of them, “is incurable. We are all tigers and wolves. We have learnt nothing from the last war, and we shall be duped again by corrupt politicians and the old diplomacy, which is another name for jungle law.”

“Perhaps it is only Communism which will unite the workers of the world,” said another of these men in the ‘Chien Qui Fume’. “Capitalism is warfare under another name. We who are the wage slaves of peace become gun-fodder in time of war, when the great industrialists, and the land-grabbers, and the exploiters of mineral wealth, and the would-be profiteers, decide to have another bang at each other. Democracy is too stupid to defend itself against these assassins.”

Michael listened to all this talk, and sometimes argued with these men, who showed no resentment when he disagreed with them. They were interested when he told them something about the Russian Revolution.

“You are a Russian, comrade? Ah! Then you have seen something,” said one of these fellows, who had been a sergeant of artillery in a World War.

“I have seen massacre and disease and famine,” said Michael.

“In France,” said the man, “we shan’t go so far. I confess to you, comrade, that when I call myself a Communist I mean that I want better wages and shorter hours. I have a little bit saved up. I don’t intend to share it

with any lazy bastards because they wish to grab other people's property and do no work themselves. Theoretically I am a Communist. But I don't exaggerate. One can carry one's theories beyond common sense."

It was in a little restaurant in the rue Montmartre that Michael made his best friend in Paris. It was called 'Le Croissant', and was open all night for journalists and other night-workers.

Sometimes Michael went there to get a light meal after playing in the orchestra of the Palais des Folies. Several times he sat opposite a young man who had a pale, intelligent face with a little thin moustache on his upper lip. Michael noticed that an empty sleeve was pinned to his breast. He always sat with a book which he read as he took his food. One night they spoke.

The young Frenchman looked up from his book and his eyes wandered to Michael's violin-case, lying on a chair beside him. Then his eyes met Michael's and he smiled in a friendly way.

"You are a musician?"

"I play in the orchestra of the Palais des Folies," said Michael. "I'm a Russian and have to earn the bread of exile."

The young Frenchman smiled again.

"It's a great nuisance having to earn one's daily bread, but that is an unavoidable necessity for most of us. I am a journalist. That is to say, I belong to the most corrupt profession in France. In private life I have an honest mind. I have a leaning towards truth. In fact I am a poet, who, of course, is the only truth-teller."

"To be a poet is marvellous," said Michael. "You are the first poet I have ever met. May I ask your name?"

The young man's name was Bertrand Carpentier, but no relation, he said, of the pugilist. In saying that he was a poet, he had perhaps exaggerated. His poetry still remained unwritten, though he had had a play produced at the Théâtre Marigny. It had been a failure. It had only run three nights, and the audience had consisted of the gendarme, who was there to keep order according to police regulations, and four people in the stalls who had received free tickets. They were his concierge and his wife and their son and daughter.

"Nevertheless," said Michael, "your play was produced, and you saw your characters come to life. That's marvellous. It must be very thrilling."

Bertrand Carpentier said that it was worse than drink in its intoxicating effect, and likely to produce a headache on the morning after the first night.

“One has to have the hide of a rhinoceros to bear the poisoned arrows of the critics, unless one can afford to buy them. It’s unfortunate that I was born with a thin skin.”

It was some nights later that Michael commented on the empty sleeve of this agreeable Frenchman. He was having some trouble in cutting up his meat with one hand.

“Allow me,” said Michael. “Can I be of service to you with a knife and fork?”

“You are very kind,” said Carpentier, the poet. “I’m still clumsy.”

“You lost your arm in the War?”

The Frenchman nodded and answered carelessly, as though having lost an umbrella.

“Yes, I left it behind at Souchez.”

“You must have been very young,” said Michael.

Bertrand Carpentier stated that he had been seventeen in the first year of the War. He was one of thousands of young volunteers who were swept down like grass at Souchez and Notre Dame de Lorette.

“Life was cheap in those days,” he added. “Our generals threw it away as though France had inexhaustible reserves.”

“France was extremely heroic,” said Michael.

The Frenchman stared into his eyes for a moment as though seeing right through his head to that time of heroism.

“Yes,” he said. “In the early days we fought with great *élan*. We were willing and eager to die for France. But it lasted too long. Afterwards it became just machine-made massacre on both sides. It wasn’t a war between men and men, but a war between machines and machines. That is the enemy of mankind—the machine. That is going to destroy civilization one day. The last war was only the preliminary skirmish for the next, which will be the end of all things.”

“You believe that?” asked Michael gravely.

Bertrand Carpentier glanced round the room of this all-night restaurant in the rue de Montmartre, as though to see that no one might overhear his next words, or as though thinking out his answer to this question about his sincerity. No one paid any attention to what he might be saying. A young woman on the plush seat by the window—it was through that window that a man named Jaurès was shot on the first day of the war they were talking about—slept with her head on the shoulder of a young man who was eating

blanquette de veau. Behind the counter the patron was reading the *Intransigéant*. The waiter was talking politics with an elderly man who announced that Poincaré had the mind of a small grocer in a provincial town. At one of the tables a lean old man with the ribbon of the *Légion d'Honneur* and dirty cuffs beneath a shiny black coat was playing the game of patience, as he did every night for an hour, while he smoked six cigarettes and drank two cups of black coffee. A painted lady of the streets was having a late supper with a man in the black leather jacket of a taxi-driver.

"I have an idea—almost a belief," said the man with the empty sleeve, "that the world is rushing to destruction because it has sold its soul to the devil."

"The devil?" asked Michael in a startled voice. "You believe in the devil?"

"The machine devil," said Bertrand Carpentier. "We worship the machine nowadays. We have created a monster which is the enemy of mankind, and now it masters us. We use it for mass production and it displaces human labour. We use it for the production of cheap luxuries and it is killing beauty and all art. Our scientists have discovered the darkest secrets of nature and have used their knowledge to design new weapons and new forces of destruction, which they have put into the hands of imbeciles who call themselves statesmen, and politicians, and patriots. We worship speed—machine-made speed—and our victory in the air has not given us the wings of the gods, but the wings of demons who will war against each other in the skies and drop death upon cities crowded with a terror-stricken humanity."

"You alarm me," said Michael. "That's a terrifying vision."

Bertrand Carpentier smiled, as though amused by having frightened this young Russian.

"There is one way of escape," he said. "It's a race with time between two powers."

"Tell me," said Michael anxiously, "what are those two powers?"

"Intelligence and stupidity. Intelligence may win. I see signs here and there that intelligence is beginning to assert itself. Briand has displaced Poincaré, that rigid old man who invaded the Ruhr. We have signed the Pact of Locarno, which should do something to remove the fear which haunts our French minds. In Germany Herr Stresemann is fighting against German stupidity and the old forces which want to put the clock back. Above all, I see a slight advance in the intelligence of the common man, who is

beginning to suspect his newspapers, his politicians, and his national slogans. He knows that the last war was a degradation of civilization and an imbecility, out of which the only people who gained anything were the profiteers and the armament rings, and the contractors who reconstructed the devastated areas. He will refuse to be caught in that man-trap again. He will put up a resistance to any ruffian—President or Prime Minister—who wants to lead him by the nose to new shambles. It's possible that the intelligence of the masses may call off that race to destruction and control the machine in time to save humanity from final ruin."

"You give me some hope," said Michael.

Bertrand Carpentier laughed over his wine-glass.

"You tempt me to talk like this—like a Hebrew prophet. I'm only a journalist on a low-class paper which can be bought at a cheap price by any politician who wishes to pervert the truth."

"We must talk much more," said Michael. "I, like yourself, am devoted to truth, though I have to sell my music for daily bread. I'm very ignorant. I want to find out much more about life. I want to know how I can best serve the ideals I have in my secret heart."

"You are a Russian and therefore a mystic," said Bertrand. "I am a Frenchman and therefore a cynic. Nevertheless we will find other opportunities for talk. It's always amusing and is the cheapest form of entertainment."

LXI

THEY talked much more in this restaurant of Le Croissant and on the *terrasse* of the Dôme up in Montparnasse, where Carpentier introduced his Russian to French artists, poets, scholars, and actors, all of them very poor, some of them very charming, and a few of them extremely repulsive to Michael because of their dirty finger-nails, their decadent views of life, and their behaviour with loose women.

“You are a Puritan, my friend,” said Carpentier, after they had known each other some time. “You have the austerity of Calvin and the asceticism of John the Baptist. Is it possible that you’re immune from the frailties of human passion? I notice that you behave to some of those little sluts at the Dôme as though they were vestal virgins. That girl Yvonne—she’s rather seductive, don’t you think?—complained to me the other night that she can’t overcome your virtue and that you frighten her by your Christ-like manners.”

Michael blushed very deeply, and then became pale.

He was sitting back in a low chair in a garret room at Montparnasse where Bertrand—they called each other by their Christian names now—slept after his night-work on a French newspaper and spent odd hours writing new plays which no manager would produce after his first great failure.

“I’m extremely passionate,” said Michael. “Like all Russians I am capable of great love for women. But I have also a great pity and reverence for womanhood, and especially for those girls who have to sell themselves. It’s because my mother is a very saintly lady.”

Bertrand stared at him with amazement, and then burst out laughing.

“No wonder my friends regard you as a mysterious and romantic figure. You’re an incredible phenomenon in the post-War world, with its contempt for the old repressions and its revolt against the old moralities.”

“I don’t pretend to be virtuous,” said Michael, in apologetic tones. “But I’m a little fastidious. It’s probably conceit. I’m afraid of degrading myself. I’m afraid of losing my own self-respect. It’s probably a form of egotism.”

“I must introduce you to some nice girls,” said Bertrand, after another shout of laughter. “You can’t play good music unless you have a love-affair.

It would do you a world of good and take away that underlying melancholy which I find in your Russian soul.”

“I have a love-affair,” said Michael, “but I don’t care to talk about it, if you’ll excuse me.”

“No, no,” said Bertrand. “We are friends. I insist upon hearing about your love-affair.”

“It’s my secret,” said Michael. “I don’t discuss it with anyone. In any case, I am too poor to play about with women.”

“That’s true,” said Bertrand; “they are very expensive, these females. My own poverty keeps me celibate. It’s one of the grudges I have against this post-War world and that foul newspaper which has made a slave of me.”

It was perhaps with a desire to provide Michael with a love-affair that he introduced his friend to his own sister. She lived with her mother in a small apartment at Auteuil, where she taught French literature in a school for young ladies which paid its teachers badly. It was Michael’s first introduction to French home life, and he came to know all about its little economies, its formalities, its exclusiveness, and its charm when once its barriers of reserve were removed.

Madame Carpentier had lost her husband in the War. He had been in command of an infantry battalion and was killed in the first battle of the Marne, when Henriette, her daughter, was a schoolgirl in the establishment where she now taught. Her first reception of Michael was rather chilling, although perfectly polite. She warmed to him a little after his third visit, when he played his violin. After that she was gracious and friendly, though not without occasional anxiety, as Michael could see, lest he should pay too much attention to Henriette before he was in a position to make an offer of marriage.

It was Henriette who explained this to Michael, with a candour which embarrassed him.

“My mother,” she said, “does not receive strangers very willingly. That’s an old French tradition when girls weren’t allowed to be seen by a possible candidate without strict safeguards of their virtue and an accurate knowledge of the young man’s fortune and prospects. But Bertrand has assured her that you have no designs upon me, honourable or dishonourable.”

Michael hoped that Bertrand had also informed her mother that he had no fortune and few prospects.

“It was some time,” said Henriette demurely, “before Bertrand mentioned your connection with the Folies. My mother is prejudiced against

that theatre.”

“She has every right to be,” agreed Michael.

Henriette confided to him, under a pledge of secrecy, that she had been to that place of amusement more than once, and that she had been very much entertained, and, as far as she could tell, uninjured, morally and spiritually. It was of course necessary to refrain from mentioning that to her pupils in French literature.

“Nudity doesn’t shock me at all,” she told Michael, “I belong to the post-War generation.”

“I am not enormously strait-laced,” said Michael, “but nudity does shock me when it is exhibited as a spectacle.”

“We must discuss that subject,” said Henriette. “You must be extremely old-fashioned, Monsieur Markov.”

“I have an old-fashioned mother,” he explained.

She thought that was not a good explanation. She also had an old-fashioned mother.

They discussed that subject, and, as time went on, many other subjects. This girl with very dark, vivacious eyes and a graceful little body, always neat and elegant, was highly intelligent, very witty, and perfectly clear-cut in her ideas about most things. She regarded the Germans as barbarians, and incurable in their barbarism. They had, she said, been untouched by the Latin spirit. She was certain that they would attack France again when they had recovered from defeat. She thought Michael was very optimistic in believing that there could ever be friendship between France and Germany, and in putting his faith in an illusion which went by the name of the League of Nations.

LXII

MICHAEL, who was a faithful lover, experienced the ecstasy and the agony of love in Paris. It was ecstasy for him when Vera Sokolova walked hand in hand with him through the Tuileries gardens, or sat with him on the *terrasse* of Fouquet's in the Champs Elysées, or in her own apartment on winter nights after dancing in the ballet, curled up on her hearth-rug before an electric fire, and talked to him, or listened to him, until sometimes she fell asleep.

Once she slept with her head on his shoulder for several hours, and he sat very still, not moving a muscle, though cramped in one arm, until suddenly she awakened and gave a little laughing cry.

"I dreamed I was in Russia!"

"I dreamed I was in Paradise," he answered.

It was already dawn, and she made coffee in her little kitchen and found some *croissants*, with which they made an early *déjeuner*.

"This is very naughty of us," she said gaily. "There will be a great scandal when the concierge sees you depart after spending the night here. And yet we have been as innocent as the Babes in the Wood! All the same, I blame myself. It's very indiscreet of us. I shouldn't behave like this with anyone but you, my comrade!"

"I held you in my arms," said Michael. "Whatever happens in life, I shall always remember this night when your head lay on my shoulder and I felt the warmth of your body and kissed your hair a thousand times."

"You are very chivalrous, Michael," said Vera, taking his hand. "No other man would have been so good and patient."

"I'm terribly impatient for your love," said Michael. "How long must I wait before I shall hold you in my arms every night? How long must I go on alone, seeing you only at far intervals of time, and having to live like a monk, tempted always by your beauty?"

Vera pleaded with him for further patience.

"Give me a little longer, Michael. We're still very young. You and I have our careers to make. We're both dedicated to art. Each of us must go a different way for some time. You can't afford to keep me, and I can't afford to give up my work."

She went a different way many times, and each parting, when the Russian Ballet left Paris for other places, tore at Michael's heart and left him in the depths of melancholy for a time, until he could look forward to her return.

She had many friends unknown to him. Often, as he sat in a French café or a cheap restaurant, with a newspaper before him on the table, he saw her name among the guests at some social entertainment.

Among those who attended the reception of the Duchesse d'Aumale was the beautiful Russian dancer Vera Sokolova.

At the opening of the Salon d'Automne were several members of the Russian ballet, including that charming ballerina Mlle Vera Sokolova.

At a dinner-party given by the Prince and Princess of Monaco last night were many distinguished people now enjoying the season at Monte Carlo. Among the beautiful women was that graceful creature and admirable artiste Vera Sokolova, who is now prima ballerina in the Ballet Russe.

He read that last paragraph when he was sitting in a low-class restaurant up in Montmartre, having a meal after his work in the orchestra of the Folies. Round about him at the tables were taxi-drivers, mechanics, and night-workers of Paris. At the bar stood some disreputable-looking young men with painted girls. Opposite, at his own table, was an enormously fat Frenchman without a collar, who used his bread to mop up the gravy on his plate.

“We belong to different worlds,” thought Michael. “Vera has moved far away from me. And yet always she keeps a place for me in her heart and isn't ashamed of me when she comes back. After all, that is a miracle. After all, I ought to be thankful for such friendship, though I suffer agonies without her.”

He had distressful days with her when they quarrelled absurdly. It was his jealousy which made them quarrel. He was sulky with her when she wouldn't listen to his pleading for life together as man and wife without further waiting. He accused her of heartlessness, and coldness, and selfishness, and a desire for a life of luxury. He almost spoilt everything by his rages and impatient passion and abrupt plunges into despair because she allowed him to love her but would not let him become emotional. She prevented the spoiling of everything on these rare days by her sense of humour, her gaiety, her common sense, her refusal to get angry for more than a little while, and her moments of tenderness which renewed his happiness.

They went sightseeing together in Paris like two American tourists. She insisted upon his taking her to the Louvre and the Luxembourg, and walked through innumerable galleries, excited by their treasures, when he wanted to make love to her. She became absorbed in the sculpture of the Egyptians when he wanted to kiss her in some quiet place.

She made him go with her to many churches and said little prayers before many shrines when he had tried to tempt her into the Bois where they might find a quiet glade and lie in each other's arms. She made expeditions with him on Sunday afternoons to the slum districts of Paris out by Belleville and La Villette, and was amused by the children playing in the gardens of the Butte de Chaumont. Although she was a famous lady now, with many worshippers of her beauty, she was not ashamed to sit in little restaurants frequented by the working-folk of Paris, and refused to let Michael take her to expensive places which she knew he could not afford.

"I can't find a clue to your mystery," said Michael one day when they were having a cheap *déjeuner* in one of these restaurants which advertised a luncheon of four courses for the modest sum of three francs fifty.

"What mystery?" asked Vera, glancing towards a young French soldier who had his arm round his girl at a neighbouring table.

"You might be lunching with one of your admirers in the most expensive restaurant of Paris, and yet here you are sitting in this dirty little eating-house in a slum district and looking as though you enjoyed it."

"I'm a student of life," said Vera. "I like to study all its types. This is the real life of France. Look at that young soldier with his little sweetheart. What a fine face he has, that boy! He has the face of D'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*."

"I'm ashamed to bring you here," said Michael. "I wanted to give you a nice little meal in some pleasant spot."

"In Russia they don't feed so well as this," said Vera. "In Russia there are millions starving to death, Michael. What's the matter with this?"

Michael's face became grave instantly.

"That's true. We are, after all, very lucky."

They talked of Russia. They talked of a thousand things, not as lovers but as two people of intelligence trying to grope their way to the truth of life.

"Sometimes," said Michael, "I'm tempted to become a Socialist."

"You?" said Vera, looking into his eyes. "You can't make me believe that, Count Michael Pavlovitch Markov."

Michael put his elbows on the table and spoke gravely.

“It’s because I hate the injustice and inequalities of life. I sometimes think that it’s greed of money and luxury that causes wars and many cruelties. My nights in the *Nacht Asyl* of Berlin left an indelible impression on my mind and conscience. Why should a minority of mankind enjoy wealth and beauty and all the lovely things of life while so many millions know misery and wretchedness?”

“And yet you didn’t like my coming to this cheap little place!” said Vera, with laughter in her eyes. “Oh, the inconsistency of the human mind! But, my dear Michael, let me ask you a serious question. Why should the minority be dragged down to misery because so many people are miserable? Why not raise up the people from their misery and give them all a share of beauty? Socialism, which is the father of Communism, drags everything down to the depths. It’s a system that can only be established by cruelty and bloodshed and human misery, as you and I have seen.”

Michael groaned slightly, as though torn by an inward conflict of thought.

“I have said that a thousand times! But perhaps a country like France, highly intelligent, with a tradition of culture which goes deep down to the common people, might establish social equality without such cruelties. There is great corruption in France among the rich classes. The wealthy people are mostly those who profited out of the War. That seems to me very unjust.”

Vera accused him of being tormented by the demon of the Tolstoyan soul.

“It was this spirit which weakened our class and led to the Revolution which was made by the liberalism of our aristocracy—people like you, my comrade, who said: ‘We have no right to our wealth. We should abandon our titles. We should surrender to the Bolsheviks, who, after all, perhaps, may have right on their side.’”

“It may be true,” said Michael. “Sometimes I’m tempted to think that, though it is against all my instincts and tradition.”

Vera laughed with her eyes.

“Many Russian refugees are going through that phase of thought, Michael. They come and confess to me that they have become believers in democracy and Socialism. They forget that there can never be equality in human nature and that mankind can never be crushed into the same mould

except by a tyranny like that in Russia now, where there is no freedom of thought or speech.”

This was not lovers’ talk. Many times they talked like that, arguing about the ideal system of life and the problems of civilization, as youth was doing at that time in every country. But they had moments less serious, and as sentimental as Vera would allow. Michael kissed her very passionately behind a lamp-post in the Avenue Victor Hugo on a wet night before she went away to Nice for the winter season. He put his arm round her waist like a French clerk walking out with a shop-girl in the glamorous twilight of the Champs Elysées when she met him now and then on summer nights. Once he rowed her in a boat on the lake of the Bois, and they landed on a little island where, against all rules and regulations, they went into hiding. She lay with her head on his lap and they talked very softly, and listened to the chirruping of birds who were not frightened by these two lovers. It was a French gendarme who saw their empty boat and shouted out from the bank until they reappeared, looking very shy. It was Vera’s gaiety and grace which melted the heart of a French policeman, whose sense of propriety had been gravely scandalized.

Then one afternoon Michael was stricken by what seemed to him an almost mortal blow. He had gone round to Vera’s apartment and found her excited by some secret thought which at first she refused to tell him.

“Something has happened in your eyes,” he said. “They are dancing eyes. What tune is being played in your mind? Tell me!”

She told him, after a teasing delay.

“I’m beginning a new adventure. It’s a great adventure, my comrade! I shall be on the top of a ladder in a new world. I shall be in reach of the stars.”

“What does all this mean?” asked Michael, turning pale with a dreadful apprehension.

It meant something very desperate to him. The *Ballet Russe* was going to the United States. Vera Sokolova would be *prima ballerina*.

“I shall lose you for ever!” cried Michael, like a wounded animal. “I shall be eternally alone.”

“No!” said Vera. “Distance makes no difference to the spirit, Michael. Our spirits will walk hand in hand.”

He spoke to her harshly.

“You’re inhuman. I’m not so spiritual as that. How can you leave me like this? How can you pretend to love me? Your eyes are dancing because

you're going away across that frightful sea which will separate us for all time."

"It's only a week away," she reminded him. "I shall come back. If you will still be patient, Michael, our separation won't seem long."

He answered bitterly.

"I'm sick of patience! I've been too patient. I've killed my passion for your sake. I've lived a life of asceticism without reward. Now you go to the United States and laugh at my agony."

She didn't laugh at his agony. She was kind to him. She promised to be faithful to him. She let him embrace her before all her friends on the platform where the train was waiting to take the Russian Ballet to Cherbourg before their embarkation on the *Lafayette*. She leaned out of the carriage window and held his hands before the train moved.

"One day I shall come to you, if I have to swim," he told her.

He stood there with Rosenthal's violin in its case at his feet. He stood there until he was elbowed on one side by a porter with a trolley. As he strode away, he felt a sense of death in his heart.

*Partir, c'est mourir un peu
C'est mourir à ce qu'on aime.*

LXIII

MICHAEL'S friendship with the Carpentier family was his introduction to the life of Paris and the mind of France in the professional and intellectual class. In the apartment at Auteuil, Madame Carpentier gave little receptions after dinner with very small cups of black coffee for her guests, made and served by Henriette, and very tiny glasses of *fine champagne*. They were attended by professors, retired officers, and two or three elderly aristocrats who bore names famous in French history, but lived modestly and with great economy in small apartments at Auteuil similar to that of Madame Carpentier herself. M. Pierre Bertillon, a professor of political economy who lectured in England and the United States, came sometimes with his wife and daughter—the latter being a vivacious and intelligent girl who was a friend of Henriette. M. André Duchesne, who had been an interpreter with the British Army during the War, and had written a book of very great humour on his experiences with a Scottish battalion, bowed over the hand of Madame Carpentier, paid his compliments to Mademoiselle Henriette, and talked with great brilliance but with perfect simplicity and without a touch of affectation or self-conscious effort, with beautiful gestures of his long, thin hands, and a smile which lit up his dark, grave face, which had an Arab look.

Michael, this stranger among them, this Russian exile, listened to their conversation. These French intellectuals were worried about France and about civilization itself. Beneath their smiles and their wit, they were haunted by many fears and many anxieties. They were afraid, it seemed, that France had been irretrievably weakened by the drain of blood in a war which had killed its best youth; that had left France without reserves of vitality and without recruits for an intellectual leadership.

"France is without leadership," said M. André Duchesne. "There is no one to take the place of the old men who have had their day and cannot readjust their minds to new conditions. There is also a political corruption in France which may one day destroy us. The War loosened all moralities. Profiteering after the War, in the reconstruction of the devastated areas, has eaten deep into the social system. Our politicians are inferior to the moral standard of the nation. There is an exasperation and bewilderment in the French mind which may have distressing results one day."

They were afraid of Germany. Always that fear was revealed in this company and conversation. Although Germany had been thrust deep into

economic ruin by the invasion of the Ruhr and by the drain of reparations, they were afraid of her recuperative powers and her dynamic potentialities.

“One day Germany will be strong again,” said M. André Duchesne. “Nothing can prevent that. How are we going to deal with those people?”

“There is only one way of dealing with them,” said a French colonel. “It is to fight a preventive war while we are still strong enough.”

“That is no solution,” said Pierre Bertillon. “It is only a postponement. And the French people will refuse to fight that preventive war. They are deeply pacifist. They will never fight again, except in self-defence against a brutal aggression.”

“We were perhaps mistaken in entering the Ruhr,” said one of Madame Carpentier’s guests uneasily. “M. Poincaré was perhaps too rigid. It gives the Germans another reason for hating us. One day they will desire vengeance.”

“We are guaranteed by the pact of Locarno,” said one of the professors. “England guarantees our frontier in case of German aggression.”

“Our best guarantee,” said the retired colonel, “is the Maginot line of fortifications. I have no faith whatever in paper pledges. Locarno is a phrase.”

“And England is always perfidious,” said one of the ladies. “England will never fight except when her own financial interests are involved.”

“Very true,” said the retired colonel.

M. André Duchesne, who seemed to be a friend of England, defended the honour of that country.

“I confess I tremble at our economic dangers,” said M. Bertillon, the economist. “I foresee a general collapse in the economic structure of Europe. France will not escape. At the present time our politicians are piling up a great deficit. They have no knowledge of arithmetic.”

“They have no morality, that *canaille*,” said one of the old aristocrats, who lived with strict economy in a small apartment above that of Madame Carpentier. “How can one expect morality from men of low character and deep corruption—and no religious faith? I am a Royalist, as you know. There will be no health in France until we clear out these bandits and bring back a Royalist régime.”

“Without a king, perhaps,” said M. André Duchesne, with a smile.

Michael listened.

LXIV

HENRIETTE, a little laughing lady to whom he became devoted, introduced him to some of her younger friends, ex-pupils of her school for young ladies. They invited him to take tea with them in the Bois, on the Iles des Lacs, where he rowed them in small boats on summer afternoons. It was a pleasant and refreshing change from the over-scented atmosphere of the Palais des Folies, where painted women paraded in the foyer. These French girls were fresh, clean, merry, and healthy in mind and body. They had great spirit, and a quite lively intelligence, and extreme candour of thought. For some reason Michael's gravity and simplicity appealed to them. They seemed to find him romantic and attractive. They were amused by his touch of melancholy and had perhaps a little pity for his poverty when for a time he became very poor in Paris.

"There is something noble about your Russian friend," said a girl named Yvonne de Maresquel to Henriette. "He has a very simple mind and is not enormously intelligent, but he is extremely spiritual and sensitive. He hates cruelty and is very pitiful. That's rather rare among young men of today, who believe in brutality and ugliness and vulgarity."

Henriette repeated these words to Michael, who was much embarrassed.

"Certainly I'm not enormously intelligent," he said, "but I can't claim any nobility. I'm nothing but a fiddler at the Palais des Folies."

Henriette put her hand on his arm. They were walking together in a glade of the Bois while Bertrand was rowing on the lake with two other friends.

"You're too modest, Michael," said Henriette. "Even Bertrand, who is a cynic, says that you're a modern Bayard—*sans peur et sans reproche*. He has a great admiration for you."

"He's my friend," said Michael. "He's very generous in his friendship, as you are, mademoiselle."

Henriette laughed, and turned her head a little to look in his eyes.

"Are you Russians always satisfied with friendship?" she asked. "Does it never advance a little to something warmer—let us say affection?"

"The Russian temperament," said Michael, "is very sentimental and sometimes very passionate."

“I can hardly believe that,” said Henriette. “I have been your friend for quite a time now, but you behave to me always as though we had met for the first time. I should like to see you a little sentimental now and then. For instance, we are alone in this little glade. The birds are singing. Here am I, not altogether repulsive as a female, I hope. Let us sit here on the grass and be a little sentimental.”

“Certainly,” said Michael. “That would be charming. Recite some of the old songs of France, those beautiful old *chansons* which belong to the springtime of France, by Ronsard and other poets.”

Henriette gave a little squeal of laughter.

“You want me to behave like a schoolmistress!” she cried.

They sat together on the grass, which was silvered by daisies.

“Let’s make a daisy chain,” suggested Henriette. “I will be a princess of France, and you shall be my young troubador. You must crown me with a chaplet of daisies.”

She was childish and charming. When she had made the daisy chain, Michael put it on her dark little head.

Suddenly, as he bent over her, she took his head in both her hands and pulled it down and kissed him on the lips.

“Love me a little, Michael, my friend,” she said after that moment. “I’m in a romantic mood. I’m tired of being treated like a schoolmistress. I am young and passionate and foolish. But you needn’t be afraid. You needn’t look so frightened.”

He was much afraid. She was the sister of his friend and the daughter of Madame Carpentier, who was very strict. Also he was the lover of Vera Sokolova, who was coming to Paris again very soon.

“I am devoted to you,” he said. “I am very grateful to you for your kindness to me. I have the highest respect for you, my dear.”

He took one of her little hands—they were very small and delicate—and raised it to his lips.

For a moment Henriette was impatient with him and almost angry. She took her hand away quickly and jumped to her feet.

“You are excessively noble,” she said. “You are absurdly respectful to me. You are as cold and stupid as a Russian bear.”

Then suddenly she laughed again.

“Forgive me for frightening you so much,” she said. “I only did it to tease you. You needn’t tell Bertrand how naughty I was. Shall we go back?”

They went back, hand in hand, like brother and sister. She went on being kind to him.

LXV

PARIS was the capital of Russia in exile. Sooner or later any emigré there was certain to meet his friends, unless they had wandered into Asia or settled down in Serbia, or gone over to the United States, or got caught in some desperate adventure of poverty in any city between Adrianople and the other end of the world. Michael, walking about Paris by day and night, between his time at the Palais des Folies and the lonely hours when he played in his room with muted strings—Rosenthal had told him that to be a great violinist it was necessary to be sacrificial in devotion to its toil—met many comrades of his soldier days and Russian boyhood. He was never surprised when in some street of Paris or in some café he was seized in strong arms and kissed on both cheeks by one of these *revenants*. He was not surprised when one day in the rue St. Honoré he was seized and kissed on both cheeks by that naval captain Boris Gronov, who had been on Prinkipo with his pretty French wife.

“Michael, my infant, my little comrade, how goes it with you?” cried Gronov. “How is your beautiful mother? How are your adorable sisters?”

He was wearing a well-pressed suit of blue serge and a peaked cap with a white linen top.

“My dear Captain Boris!” exclaimed Michael. “Where have you been hiding all this long time? Have you joined the French Navy? You look very like a naval officer again.”

Captain Gronov, who had washed up dishes in the Russian restaurant in Constantinople, laughed heartily. “No such luck, my little comrade. All the same, I’m not doing so badly. I call myself Gaston in working-hours. I’m known in all the garages of Paris and in all the wayside inns from Boulogne-sur-mer to Monte Carlo and Antibes. I am in the employ of Thomas Cook and Son. They entrust me with their best clients—English tourists, American mothers, even a millionaire now and then. I drive them to the battlefields and point out the horrors of war, which are now hard to see, owing to the blessed work of Mother Nature and the toil of human ants—including Russian refugees. I have not yet killed any of them, in spite of great temptation and the hazards of the roads. I have a blameless record as a good driver and an intelligent guide. My wife is very happy to be back in Paris and we have a nice little apartment in the rue St. Roch, a stone’s-throw from where we are now standing. You must come and see us one night.”

“Delighted,” said Michael, glad to see this friend again.

“You must ask for Gaston,” said Captain Gronov. “I am well known by that name to every taxi-driver in Paris.”

“Why Gaston?” asked Michael.

Boris Gronov shrugged his shoulders.

“Why not? Cook and Son wanted a name which they and their customers could pronounce. For some reason ‘Gaston’ came into my mind. There was a barber of that name in St. Petersburg when I was a naval lieutenant with hair as soft as down on my handsome young face. So now I’m Gaston. I get a living wage and now and then good tips. It’s not a bad life. I know France like the back of my hand. I feed well in good hotels. I meet charming people to whom I tell many stories as I drive them along the roads. My wife regrets my being away so much, but I have no anxiety on her account. She is very faithful to me. . . . Do you feel like a cup of coffee and a cigarette? I wish to hear all your news. I wish to talk about old times. I might even bore you with my unrivalled knowledge of French life as I have learnt to know it in French garages and provincial hotels.”

They took a cup of coffee standing at the *zinc* of a *bistro* in the rue St. Honoré.

“*Bon jour, Monsieur Gaston,*” said the fat lady behind the counter.

“*Bon jour, madame,*” said Captain Gronov, once of the Imperial Russian Navy, lifting his peaked cap politely.

“We are in the most civilized city in the world,” said Gronov. “In the humblest classes there is an intelligence and a good nature which I find enchanting. In Russia the Revolution dragged everything down. In France the Revolution of 1789 raised everybody. One says ‘*Bon jour, madame*’, to the poorest old woman as though she were a duchess. They have a great respect for human dignity and the rights of the individual. In Russia the individual counts for nothing. He is an ant. He must conform to the law of the ant-heap or get wiped out. These people keep the liberty of their souls and minds.”

Michael agreed.

“That’s true, my dear Boris. I have come to have a great admiration for France, but I also have a great admiration for Germany. That leads to argument sometimes.”

Gaston, as he called himself in working-hours, laughed and tilted his peaked cap.

“In France I refer to Germans as *sales Boches*. It reassures the French mind, although, like you, I admire many aspects of German character.”

“Do you think a Communist revolution may happen here?” asked Michael. “I talk with many *terrassiers* and market porters and intelligent fellows I meet in cheap eating-houses. They’re dissatisfied with their own Government. They talk a good deal about Soviet Russia, whose example they think might well be followed here.”

Captain Gronov waved his hand with a gesture of denial.

“I know them to their bones, these fellows. They talk frankly to me. They profess a little Communism now and then because it frightens the bourgeoisie and gingers up the political situation. In their hearts they are individualists and capitalists. As soon as their children can understand words, their parents say, ‘*Il faut gagner les sous. Il faut gagner les sous.*’ Every French peasant has his secret hoard which he hides from the Government lest it should be taken away from him in taxes. France is most decisively conservative. If there is any revolution it will be from the Right. A dictator like that fellow Mussolini who is playing the little Napoleon in Italy.”

“The world is in a bad state,” said Michael. “Everywhere there is fear and apprehension for the future.”

The employee of Thomas Cook & Son shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“It’s always the same, my comrade. For hundreds of years it has been the same. How could it be otherwise? Humanity is made up of tigers, wolves, and sheep. The sheep, who are the masses, live in a state of fear. That’s natural. But tell me about your family affairs.”

Michael told him about his mother and Olga, and Tania, who had been left behind in Austria and now had taken her degree in medicine.

“And Sacha Dolin”—asked Captain Gronov—“that melancholy man who had all the tragedy of Russia in his soul?”

“He’s dead,” said Michael.

Gaston crossed himself, and there were tears in his eyes when Michael told him about Lydia’s return just at the moment when poor Sacha had been buried and his pictures made into a bonfire.

“May his soul rest in peace,” said Gronov. “But it was unkind of God. God sometimes is hard upon us. That poor girl! That poor child!”

“She’s painting wooden toys here in Paris,” said Michael. “She lives in the same house as my mother and sister. She is wonderfully brave.”

Gronov nodded.

“All Russian women have been wonderfully brave. I take my hat off to them and salute them wherever they are in exile.”

He took off his peaked cap very solemnly.

LXVI

IT was because of Olga that Michael left the Palais des Folies and gave up a certain salary—none too grand, but enough for his needs—for the uncertainty of finding a new engagement. It was a painful episode in his life, and heartbreaking to his mother. He had been there for something over a year, never without an inward revolt against a place in which he felt spiritually degraded because of the music he had to play, unworthy, he thought, of Rosenthal's inspiration, the audience who sat in the seats nightly, and the parade of painted women, and the quarrels, jealousies, scandals, and vulgarity with which he became involved behind the scenes. He detested some of the staff, and particularly one of the directors, who engaged the chorus-girls and the variety artists, a man named Constantin Isvolsky.

In spite of his Polish name, he looked like a typical Parisian of the *beau monde*, always elegantly dressed and with a superficial charm of manner which in Michael's opinion was a mask for unpleasant qualities of character.

It was well known to the theatre that he had had several mistresses—a fact which did not scandalize Michael's fellow-musicians, who were merely amused at this series of amorous adventures. He had been living lately, it seemed, with the beautiful Spanish dancer Mariposa, who wore the most sensational dresses in the spectacular scenes and for a time attracted all Paris by her daring displays of acrobatic dancing. According to the stories which ran round the orchestra and behind the scenes, her beauty was only matched by her temper, which reached fantastic heights of violence, and it was generally assumed when Constantin, as he was always called, appeared one day with a scratch down his right cheek, that it was due to a slight difference of opinion with this Spanish girl who had taken the name of "Mariposa"—which, being translated, means "butterfly"—but had retained the knife-throwing skill of gipsy ancestors.

All these stories went in at one of Michael's ears and out of the other. He had an instinctive prejudice against M. Constantin Isvolsky, though he had to admit that the man had a certain genius for colour and grouping, also a flair for seeing new talent among the variety artists of the Continent. He had become one of the best-known figures in Paris. When he entered a restaurant the headwaiter came to bow obsequiously, and in any smart crowd there was a murmur of his name when he appeared.

"That is Constantin Isvolsky."

“He looks like it.”

“But extremely good-looking, don’t you think?”

“They say he earns the biggest salary in the theatrical world.”

“And spends it on his women like a Russian prince of the old régime.”

Michael had overheard such a conversation one day, and the remembrance of it was not in his favour when Olga mentioned one night that Constantin Isvolsky had been round to her dressmaking establishment to see the parade of mannequins for the new spring fashions.

“I expect he was in search of new girls,” said Michael rather cynically. “Or else he wanted to see the latest absurdity for his latest mistress.”

Olga was silent for a moment or two, and a little smile was playing about her lips.

“I thought him charming. I had the luck to be introduced to him, and he was very flattering. I think he rather liked my way of showing off a frock. At least, he was good enough to say so.”

Michael glanced at her over his violin, which he was playing very softly in his little room in the workman’s house at Val Fleuri, doing some intricate fingering while Olga talked to him before going to bed.

“I shouldn’t accept any compliment from that fellow,” he said sharply. “He is a libertine and a most unpleasant person. He has the worst possible reputation.”

Olga coloured up quickly and spoke with a slight challenge in her voice.

“I am afraid you always think badly of good-looking men, Michael, especially if they pay me the slightest attention. I can’t understand it.”

“I have to look after you, my little one,” said Michael good-naturedly.

Olga sprang to her feet and answered him with an emotion which startled him.

“Do you call it looking after me to keep me in those work-rooms like a woman convict, never getting into the fresh air or seeing anything of Paris? Do you think it’s fair on me, Michael? I am a young girl. I want a little joy in life. It’s my right, isn’t it?”

Michael put down his violin and stared at his sister with astonishment because of this sudden outburst of revolt against her way of life.

“We both have to submit ourselves to disagreeable necessity, little sister. I’m not fulfilling my own ambitions of happiness. I thought you were

amused with your work as a mannequin. And in any case we have to earn a living.”

Olga agreed that she had to earn her living, but she knew of other ways than that of a mannequin on a miserable wage that would be despised by a French midinette.

“What other ways?” asked Michael.

Olga glanced at him, to see the effect of her next words.

“Monsieur Isvolsky has asked me to join the chorus of the Palais des Folies. He offers me three times more than I am being paid by the Baroness Wrangel. I should be able to help mother a good deal.”

Michael thrust back his chair with a certain violence.

“No,” he said harshly. “I forbid it, Olga. Understand that. I forbid it absolutely.”

Olga answered meekly, as though prepared to recognize his right to forbid this idea provided she could understand his point of view.

“Why, Michael? Please tell me why. What’s your objection?”

He had a hundred objections—a thousand—if there were time enough to tell her. The moral atmosphere of the Palais des Folies was disgusting. The life of one of its chorus-girls was full of temptation, and very degrading. She would be expected to wear indecent costumes, or none at all. Constantin Isvolsky was probably a blackguard of the very worst type. He distrusted the man. He detested him.

“I implore you, Olga, to remember that you are a Russian girl of good family. Have you no respect for our mother, who is a saint? Have you lost your Catholic faith? Have you no sense of decency whatever?”

“I don’t see what all that has to do with it,” said Olga very calmly, but with a slightly heightened colour. “It is perfectly possible for a chorus-girl to be as virtuous as Joan of Arc or Saint Cecilia. What about Vera Sokolova? Everybody knows you worship the ground under her dancing feet. But she’s not afraid of showing her lovely limbs to the world. In fact, that’s what her public goes to see.”

“She is an artist,” answered Michael, after a moment’s thought to find the right answer to this challenge. “Her dancing is spiritual. She makes men worshipful because she lifts up their minds to the ideal beauty. That is not the vocation of chorus-girls in the Palais des Folies. They are taught to appeal to the lowest instincts of the lowest minds.”

Olga was silent again for a few moments. Then she laughed and spoke lightly, as though refusing to continue this argument on serious lines.

“You’re extraordinarily narrow-minded, my dear brother. You’re a mediaevalist. But the fact remains that Monsieur Isvolsky has offered me an engagement which I have accepted.”

“You have accepted it?” asked Michael unbelievably.

Olga smiled again, but with an uneasy look in her eyes.

“I dined with him last night. He gave a nice little dinner-party in the Pavilion Bleu. He drove us there in his Mercédès. It was all very delightful and perfectly respectable, with charming people, among whom were a Monsieur Stavisky and his wife, who seemed to take a fancy to me. Madame Stavisky is enchanting.”

“You accepted an engagement from this man Isvolsky?” asked Michael again in a half-angry voice.

“It was rather informal,” said Olga. “But quite serious, I think. He smiled at me over the table and said: ‘When are you coming to the Palais des Folies, mademoiselle? There’s a place waiting for you. Shall we say next Monday?’ ‘Certainly,’ I told him. ‘Let us say next Monday. I shall be there.’ We shook hands across the table. He has very nice hands.”

Michael sprang to his feet and stood facing his sister.

“You shan’t go,” he said. “I will tell Isvolsky that I won’t allow you to put your nose inside his filthy place.”

“How absurd you are, Michael!” cried Olga. “How utterly ridiculous! And what right have you to interfere? I shall be extremely angry if you dare to spoil this chance of mine.”

Michael spoke with emotion.

“I’m your brother. We have been through many adventures together. It’s my sacred right and duty to save you from all dangers. Olga, I beg of you, I plead with you, to avoid that man Isvolsky. He is a tempter. He has no morality. He is trying to lure you into evil ways.”

Olga put her arms about him and laid her cheek against his. She pooh-poohed the dangers. She was quite able to look after herself, she said. As for Constantin Isvolsky, she was quite sure that he was extremely nice. She didn’t believe a word of the scandalous stories told about him. He had been a little wild, like many young men, perhaps.

It was the beginning of many arguments, many scenes, and many tears on Olga’s side. Anna Markova agreed with Michael that Constantin Isvolsky

was a dangerous friend for any girl, though she had to admit that she knew nothing more than what Michael had told her. Once or twice she weakened, because of her wish for Olga's happiness. Once or twice she asked Michael if he were not perhaps a little prejudiced against this young man, and if he did not exaggerate the dangers of the Palais des Folies.

After all, she said, one had to be broadminded nowadays. Modern young people seemed to think nothing of showing their bodies.

"Mother!" cried Michael. "Are you taking Olga's side in this matter?"

"I want her to be happy," said Anna Markova. "And I'm sure she will always be good."

The argument was decided one night in the Palais des Folies. Michael went to Isvolsky's room between the scenes and knocked sharply on the door.

A good-natured voice said, "Come in."

Michael went into the room. Isvolsky was at his desk with his back turned to the door. He was writing while he smoked a cigarette with a long holder. A little wreath of blue smoke rose over his shoulder.

"Yes?" he asked, without turning his head. "Is that you, Pierrefeu?"

Michael answered harshly.

"It is Michael Pavlovitch Markov. I wish to speak to you."

Isvolsky swung round in his chair.

"Sit down," he said pleasantly. "Have a cigarette. You are the brother, are you not, of the beautiful Olga Markova? She has told me about you."

"It is about her that I wish to speak," said Michael. "I understand you have offered her an engagement in the chorus."

Isvolsky nodded.

"She has a charming figure. She is enchanting."

Michael had a little flame in his eyes.

"I refuse to allow her into this theatre. I shall be much obliged if you will refrain from making her any offer. I shall be still further obliged if you will understand that I do not wish my sister to have the honour of your acquaintance."

Isvolsky flicked the ash off the end of his cigarette and smiled at Michael as though faintly amused and not at all annoyed.

"My dear Markov," he said, "your sister is surely old enough to decide for herself what friends she makes and what engagements she accepts. I

don't recognize your rights and I slightly resent your manners. If you were not the brother of a young lady whom I find very attractive, I should ring the bell and have you thrown out. As it is, I wish to be friendly. I might even be useful to you."

Michael's face was pallid and his eyes glowed with that little flame of anger.

"I should despise myself for accepting any favour from you," he said. "I regard you as a man of base character and poisonous influence. This place is a moral stench and you are the filthy mind which directs it. I think it well for my sister's sake that you should know my opinion of you."

Constantin Isvolsky rose quietly from his chair and touched a bell. Instantly a man appeared through the inner door. He was a young man in evening-clothes whom Michael had seen about the theatre.

"Oh, Pierrefeu," said Isvolsky in a quiet voice, "this is Monsieur Markov, who is a member of the orchestra. He dislikes the moral and spiritual atmosphere of this theatre. In order to relieve him of further distress I have accepted his resignation. Kindly see that his name is taken off the pay-sheets."

"Certainly, M. Isvolsky," said M. Pierrefeu.

"My compliments to Mademoiselle Olga," said Isvolsky.

Michael left his room. He also left the Palais des Folies.

When he stood out in the street, with his collar tucked up because it was raining a little, he drew a deep breath, as though glad of this fresh air. In his left hand he held the violin given to him by Rosenthal. With his right hand he thrust back the lock of hair which fell over his forehead. A street-girl came up and spoke to him, but he shook his head. He was out of a job again. It was rather serious for a Russian exile in Paris, but he had a sense of gladness and liberation. He had walked out of a poisonous atmosphere into this fresh air of Paris. He would no longer be degraded by playing abominable noises. He had saved the soul of his sister. He had regained his self-respect.

"Taxi, m'sieur?" asked a chauffeur, bringing his car alongside the kerb, seeing this man in evening-clothes with his collar tucked up in the rain.

"No, thanks," said Michael.

The chauffeur spoke in Russian and leapt down from his seat.

"Michael Pavlovitch!" he cried. "My comrade! After all this time! How is Olga? I long to see her again. I've had many ups and downs since last we

met.”

It was a man named Mirski, who had been with Michael in Wrangel’s army, and an exile on Prinkipo.

They had a drink together in a *bistro* near the Palais des Folies.

LXVII

IT was two in the morning when Michael arrived at the workman's cottage in Val Fleuri, after his dismissal from the Palais des Folies. He stayed too long with that man Mirski, talking about Russia and old friends and life in Paris, and life everywhere. Mirski was a philosopher as well as a chauffeur. He had theories about fate and predestination. He wished to explain them to Michael while he drank cheap cognac in that *boîte* which was crowded with taxi-drivers, porters from the markets, and little drabs of the street. Michael almost lost his last train.

When he walked up from the railway-line he noticed that a light was burning in his mother's room, and he felt guilty that he had kept her awake so long. Nearly always she stayed awake until he came back.

After letting himself in with his latch-key, he crept upstairs very carefully, because of sleeping friends in this house crowded into their little bed-sitting-rooms. The third stair was malignant. It always gave a horrible creak. It creaked now, and it was this sound which brought Lydia, the wife of poor Sacha Dolin, on to the landing with an oil-lamp in her hand. She was in her night-clothes, with a plait of hair hanging over each shoulder.

"Is that you, Michael?" she asked in a whisper, peering down the dark stairs.

"Yes. Can't you sleep tonight, Lydia?"

"Your mother is ill," she told him. "Olga and I are sitting up with her. We're rather frightened."

For a moment Michael's heart seemed to stop beating. That word stabbed him. He was terribly afraid. He went up the stairs two at a time and stood by Lydia.

"What's the matter with her?" he asked. "Has she caught a chill?"

It was rather more than a chill. It was some kind of fever. Anna Markova was delirious when Michael went into her bedroom and leaned over her.

Olga was in an evening-frock cut low on the shoulders.

She had been dining out with some friends at Passy and had come home rather late. Her mother had complained of feeling feverish and had taken a dose of aspirin. She had kept on asking whether Michael had come back. She seemed very worried because he was so late. Then she had gone to bed,

and Olga heard her talking to herself in a strange way that frightened her. She was frightened now.

“Oh, Michael!” she said in a tragic whisper.

Anna Markova was talking very rapidly in German, and her eyes were smiling with an unnatural glitter, and her face had a beautiful flush of colour.

Michael leaned over her and listened to her words.

She seemed to think that she was in Vienna in the time of her girlhood. She was saying something about a ball at the Hofburg. A young cavalry officer had flirted with her and she had smacked his hand when he tried to kiss her. She was a little worried because her frock kept slipping off one shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “It keeps slipping off. I don’t do it, Luise, because I have pretty shoulders.”

“Mother!” said Michael in a voice of anguish.

She looked at her son with smiling eyes.

“No,” she said, “I can’t give you a dance tonight. Look at my card. It’s all filled up.”

Michael stood back from the bed and thrust back the hair from his forehead.

“I must fetch a doctor,” he said. “Oh, my God! I’m terribly alarmed.”

Olga began to weep a little by her mother’s bedside.

Lydia followed Michael on to the landing. She said, “Don’t look so frightened, Michael. It may be only a feverish cold.”

“I’m frightened to death,” he answered.

He remained as frightened as that for nearly a week. The Russian doctor he had fetched from one of the workmen’s cottages along the street, spoke the word pneumonia. The Countess Markova must have caught a severe chill, he said, and had neglected it. Possibly she had sat with wet feet in the work-rooms. Her shoes needed mending, as he had noticed when he looked at them.

Olga said, “I think we ought to send for Tania. If anything happens, Tania would be heart-broken.”

Michael answered her with brutality and anger, because he was so frightened.

“What do you mean by talking such nonsense? If anything happens. What do you mean by such idiotic words?”

But he sent a telegram to Tania, telling her to come.

She arrived early one morning, looking tired and rather dirty, having travelled from Vienna in a third-class carriage where she had had to sit up all night.

Tania stood weeping by her mother's bedside, and Michael was angry with her.

"Why don't you control yourself?" he asked her in a whisper. "Why do you behave as if she were dying? The doctor is very hopeful."

"She is very ill, Michael," said Tania, in the next room. "I have seen pneumonia before. I know its dangers, my dear."

Tania was older. She wore horn-rimmed glasses which made her look very intellectual and distinguished. Even in this time of fear Michael was glad to have her back again. He and Tania had been good comrades. She was so different from Olga, who worried him by her worldliness. He begged her to talk seriously to Olga, who was in need of good advice.

Perhaps Tania was talking seriously to Olga one evening when Michael sat by his mother's bedside. He could hear the girls' voices murmuring in the next room. Perhaps Olga was telling Tania about Constantin Isvolsky and his offer to give her a place in the chorus of the Palais des Folies. He hoped Tania would have a good influence upon her. She had been very pale and upset when he told her about his scene with Isvolsky before walking out of the Folies for the last time. He had declined to discuss the matter further while their mother was ill.

"I've been rather ill-tempered," thought Michael, sitting by his mother's bedside. "I ought not to be so harsh with Olga. She is, after all, only high-spirited and eager for the joy of life. I must be more good-humoured. I am all nerves. When mother is better again I must make life more amusing for Olga. I must find a nice fellow to marry her. Bertrand Carpentier would make a very decent husband for her."

So his thoughts strayed, until he was aware that his mother had opened her eyes and was looking at him with recognition. She put her hand outside the bedclothes and felt for his.

"Mother!" said Michael, in a quiet voice in which there was a great gladness. "Are you feeling better?"

He took her hand, so thin and delicate, and bent his head down to kiss it.

She wanted to say something to him. Her breathing was very hard, but he heard the words very faintly.

“Play something, Michael.”

He was quite sure she said those words, though he had hardly heard them.

He went out of the room with a sense of excitement. His mother was getting better. The darkness of this fear was lifting. The torture of this anguish would soon be over. Perhaps in three days she would be sitting up again. It was wonderful that she wanted him to play something.

He went into his bedroom, hardly larger than a bathroom, and took the violin out of its case and crept back again. He could see by the look in her eyes that she was conscious, that she knew him, that she was glad he had come in to play something.

He put his violin under his chin and raised his bow. What should he play? His mother loved Schubert. He would play something of Schubert's. He would play the '*Ave Maria*'.

Olga and Tania heard him playing and were startled. They crept into the bedroom and stood there with astonishment. Lydia came out of the room where she was painting wooden toys, and stood at the bedroom door.

Michael played Schubert's '*Ave Maria*' very softly at first and then with full tone. The melody filled his mother's bedroom with its exquisite and lovely sound. Michael was looking at his mother across the body of his instrument. There was a great love in his eyes, a great tenderness. She looked very beautiful there, he thought. She looked very ill, of course, very tired, very weak, but much better. She even raised herself for a moment and said something which Michael didn't hear because he was playing. It was Tania, nearest to the bed, who heard the word and told him afterwards. It was the word 'refugee'.

Suddenly Michael lowered his bow and stood leaning forward with all the colour drained out of his face and terror in his eyes. Tania gave a cry. Olga made a rush to the bedside.

Anna Markova was no longer a refugee.

It was Michael who walked the road of exile, terribly alone.

LXVIII

THE death of Michael's mother left him terribly alone. Tania went back to Vienna and married her Jewish doctor, who lived in the communal dwelling called the Goethehof. Vera Sokolova was a world away from him across the great grey sea. He was quite alone when Olga left him.

She left him after a time when they were reduced to extreme poverty in Paris, and after a quarrel which caused a long estrangement between this brother and sister who had been good comrades in exile.

It was difficult to get an engagement, he found, after that night when he had walked out of the Palais des Folies, having insulted one of its directors—that man Isvolsky whose morals he disliked.

Week after week went by, and then month after month, and he was still looking for work. Several times he had high hopes that his luck had changed at last. Bertrand Carpentier, his best friend in Paris, gave him introductions to theatrical people who promised to bear him in mind for any vacancy that might occur in their orchestras. That phrase "I shall be delighted to bear you in mind" lost the glamour of its promise after that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick. Michael had pretended to Olga an optimism which he did not have.

"Any luck, Michael?" she asked, a hundred times, when she came home to Val Fleuri after her day's work as a mannequin, or more often when she returned late at night after social engagements with friends who were unknown or disliked by her brother.

"I have a very good chance of an engagement in a week or two," he answered. "There's talk of a vacancy at the Chatelet."

Or again:

"Bertrand has given me a letter to a man who runs the publicity department of the Hôtel Scribe. He'll put in a word with the director of the orchestra. It seems an excellent chance."

Olga became sceptical and presently a little bitter in her sarcasm.

"We can't live much longer on 'excellent chances', Michael. The situation is getting pretty desperate. I also am getting rather desperate. This poverty is horrible. My underclothing is in rags. Even on top I look like a drab."

“Sometimes you look like a *demi-mondaine*,” answered Michael sulkily. “I wish you wouldn’t use so much lipstick and paint your finger-nails. It’s idiotic of you. It’s a disgusting habit.”

“Some of my friends like it,” answered Olga carelessly. “All smart women in Paris touch themselves up a little.”

Michael was in one of his black moods and answered ill-temperedly:

“Some of your friends have very bad taste. I suppose you mean that fellow Isvolsky, and those Stavisky people, who introduce you to a set which seems to me very poisonous. I don’t think you ought to go about with them so much. You leave me here alone night after night, and then you complain of my being moody and melancholy. Now that mother has gone you seem to have lost all sense of decency and loyalty.”

These were hard words which brought the colour flaming into Olga’s face. It was on a summer night when Paris was sweltering in heat, and when in this suburb of Val Fleuri the inhabitants of workmen’s cottages had flung their windows wide open for a little air. From some of them came the blare of gramophones. One of the Russian exiles was playing his balalaika. Olga was sitting without her frock, mending some of that underclothing which she said was in rags.

She dropped this work and sprang from her chair and spoke in a passionate voice.

“Michael, you are sometimes intolerable! Do you think I wasn’t heart-broken when mother died, and that you are the only one who grieves? But I can’t go on weeping for ever. I’m young and life calls to me. It isn’t fair on me that I should sit here night after night watching your melancholy face, listening to your eternal fiddling on muted strings, and hearing you groan because another day has passed without your getting work. I’m sorry about that. But I must think a little of my own happiness as well as yours. I want to use the gifts that God has given me to make things better for both of us. I can’t bear to see you getting so shabby again and looking so thin because you starve yourself to save a few miserable francs. I have only to say the word to earn plenty of money for both of us and to have every kind of comfort.”

She panted a little, with both hands to her bosom. Standing there, with bare arms and shoulders, she looked extraordinarily beautiful and very passionate.

“What on earth are you talking about?” asked Michael. “To whom would you say the word?”

She hesitated for a moment before telling him. Then she spoke a name which he disliked most of all in Paris.

“Constantin Isvolsky. He’s willing to do anything for me. He still wants me for his Folies.”

“No!” said Michael. “I forbid you. That man is without morals. The Palais des Folies is a place of vice. The thought of it nauseates me. Its atmosphere is disgusting.”

Olga did not agree with him. She judged people as she found them. She found Isvolsky kind.

“Constantin would help you to make a great career, Michael. He’s very influential in Paris, and knows everybody in the musical world. For my sake he would do everything for you. He has no grudge against you for the bitter words you spoke to him. He told me so last night.”

“I don’t want you to have anything to do with him!” shouted Michael very angrily. “I wouldn’t accept any favour from that man. I beg you to keep away from his evil influence.”

Olga answered with ominous quietude:

“He happens to be in love with me. Why shouldn’t I make use of the beauty which God has given me?”

It was that night that they quarrelled very bitterly, this brother and sister who had been together through war and revolution and the years of exile.

Three evenings later Michael came home extremely fatigued in body and spirit. He had hung about the hall of an *hôtel de luxe* waiting for an appointment with its manager with a view to an engagement in the orchestra. The manager was extremely busy, it seemed. After two hours he sent out word that he would see Michael at seven o’clock that evening.

Michael tramped about Paris, staring into shop-windows and sitting for a time in the Tuileries gardens, watching the children playing with their white-capped nurses, and English tourists strolling about with red-bound guide-books. He had abstained from having any lunch in order to save the money. His funds were at lowest ebb, but he had refused an offer of a loan from Bertrand Carpentier. In a week or two he would have to leave the rooms in Val Fleuri, unless he could find work somewhere and somehow. Sometimes he thought it would be better to give up this profession of music. It might be better to get a labourer’s job. Olga would be all right as long as she remained with the Baroness Wrangel. Her wages would keep her from starving. His only worry about her was the temptation of that fellow

Isvolsky, who lured her towards the Palais des Folies and all its false and filthy glitter.

At seven o'clock he returned to the hotel and, to his extreme annoyance, found that the manager had gone out without leaving a message for him. Now he came back to Val Fleuri and the workman's cottage, which was sacred to him because his mother had died in it and because her spirit still dwelt in it.

Olga would be home by now. He called out to her as he stood in the sitting-room and flung his hat on one of the chairs.

There was no answer from Olga. But there was a letter for him in her big sprawly handwriting. He opened it with raised eyebrows and a look of annoyance. Probably she was spending the evening in Paris with some of her smart friends.

It was quite a long letter, and when he had read it he dropped it on the floor. His face had gone dead white. He stood there motionless for a long time, and then strode into the passage and cried out a woman's name, loudly and harshly.

"Lydia! Lydia!"

A door opened, and Lydia Dolin stood there in a blue overall with a paint-brush in her hand. She had been painting the wooden toys by which she earned her living now that Sacha was dead.

"Anything the matter, Michael?" she asked.

"Olga has gone," he said in a strangled voice.

"Gone out?" asked Lydia. "She will be back late again?"

"She won't be back," said Michael. "She has gone with Isvolsky. She has gone to the devil."

He burst into tears, and Lydia put her arms about him and tried to comfort him.

LXIX

MICHAEL found an engagement at last. He became first violin in the orchestra of the Hôtel Splendide in the Champs Elysées. A year later he changed that position for a place in the orchestra of the Restaurant Royale in the Bois. In the following winter he became leading violin at the Dôme in Montparnasse, where his grave face with its Slav features and sombre eyes was well known to the habitués of that famous café, frequented by artists and their models, American and English tourists, who went there to see Bohemian life—‘the real thing’, as they called it—and by groups of degenerate young men and women of many nationalities, who were noisy on its *terrasse*.

There must be many such people who remember the look of him as he stood with Rosenthal’s violin under his chin and a little frown on his forehead, and his bow arm sweeping the strings. Even in this place of noisy conversation and the traffic of waiters bearing drinks, and groups of young men and women with long hair and dirty finger-nails who argued incessantly about art and sex and politics and life, in half the tongues of Europe, there were some who became hushed when Markov played, and were thrilled by the tone of his instrument and the mastery of his touch. Now and again a man nudged his nearest friend and said, “That fellow knows how to play!” Now and again a girl who was a little drunk, or even a little sober, stopped making eyes at one of the degenerates who was standing her drinks, and stared at the violinist of the Dôme, and lost herself in his magic. Now and then parties of men and women in evening-clothes, who drove up in motor-cars or taxis after the theatre, stopped their chatter for a few minutes while Markov played, and clapped hands when he lowered his bow. His acknowledgment of that applause was very slight and perfunctory, except when he recognized a group of Russian friends and came towards them with his violin.

He saw Olga sometimes, and she kissed her hand to him, though he made no sign of recognition. It was when he was in the Hôtel Splendide that he saw her many times in the great dining-room where he played. She came in often for supper with her friends, among whom was always the man Isvolsky, with whom she was now living. Stavisky and his beautiful wife were sometimes there, as Michael noticed with his sombre eyes. Olga seemed to know many of the famous people of Paris—politicians, financiers, actors, and pretty ladies who showed their backs down to the

waist-line and their arms up to their shoulder-straps. Most of these men who bowed over the hand of Olga Markova were *decorés*. One of them was a Prime Minister of France, among many Prime Ministers who changed places every six months or so, and sometimes more often, at a period of history when there was no long tenure of the Governments of France, each of which plunged more deeply into debt and failed to give a sense of security to the French people.

Olga was the most beautiful among these women, as Michael saw with moody eyes. Every time she came in with Isvolsky the other people at the tables turned to look at her. She also wore frocks which showed her back down to the waist-line and her white shoulders. Sometimes she wore vine-leaves in her hair, and sometimes a Russian tiara which sparkled with points of light.

“That is my sister Olga,” thought Michael over the body of his violin. “She shows her nakedness in the Palais des Folies. Her name flashes out in light above the theatre. *La Belle Markova*. She is living with Isvolsky. She is a friend of Stavisky, who tells French politicians how to make money by gambling in shares. That man with a ribbon in his button-hole who raises his glass to her is steeped in the corruption of French politics. That is my little sister Olga, who used to huddle close to me in the terrible days in Constantinople when we were fugitives in the time of revolution. Now she is one of the cocottes of Paris.”

Once, as he strode along the road leading through the Bois, he saw Olga in an open racing-car. Isvolsky was driving her, and she touched his arm so that he slowed down. Michael heard her voice calling him.

“Michael!”

He turned away down one of the glades.

She wrote to him sometimes in her schoolgirl scrawl, saying that she was happy with Constantin Isvolsky and with her work at the Palais des Folies. Would he not take some money from her? She could well afford it. Constantin had no grudge against him. If he would only be friendly Constantin would do anything to help him.

Dearest Michael [she wrote in one of her letters], why are you so cruel to me? I love you just as in the old days when we starved together and laughed together. I miss you terribly. I want to help you.

He answered her letters very coldly. He sent back a thousand-franc note which she had slipped into her last letter. He had no need of help, he said. He would rather die of starvation than be indebted to a man like Isvolsky, for whom he had no respect.

She came to see him once. He was ill and miserable. It was between his time with the Restaurant Royale and his engagement at the Dôme, in a winter when he was in ill health which led to a touch of pneumonia. He had given up his rooms in the workman's cottage at Val Fleuri and had taken a bed-sitting-room in the rue St. Roch. Somehow Olga heard of his illness, perhaps through Lydia, who met her now and then, and to whom he had come to be very deeply attached because of pity for her and homage to her courage.

A little French slut who cleaned his room and waited on his simple needs opened the door one afternoon when he lay in bed.

"There's a lady wants to see you," she said. "She looks too pretty to be good. I wish I had her luck."

Michael raised himself from his pillow. He had not shaved for a week and had a beard on his face. His bedroom was untidy with some of his clothes hanging on the chairs. He had been dosing himself with aspirin and felt like death.

There was a voice at the open door. "Michael!"

Olga came in and flung herself down on her knees at his bedside and put her arms about him and pressed her face against his cheek.

"Michael! Oh, my dear! How ill you look! How miserable you are in this little room, with no one to look after you!"

"I wish you hadn't come," said Michael. "I am very angry with you."

There was an emotional scene which made him feel weak. Olga wept because of his hardness. She was deeply distressed because he would not let her give him any kind of help.

"You've sold yourself," he said. "I won't live on your immoral earnings."

Those words hurt her, and she answered hotly.

"If that is what you think I won't worry about you. I'll go back to people whom I find more amusing and who don't find it necessary to insult me."

Michael answered with extreme harshness and with a flame of anger in his sunken eyes:

“They are the people who would be amused if they could make money out of another war. They’re the profiteers and gamblers who drag down France. They would sell women’s souls for a few francs and betray their own country for a profit on their shares. I’ve seen you with them. I hear a thousand scandals about them.”

“They are my friends. They are kind to me. You are unkind, my brother!”

She hesitated for a moment at the door.

“Michael!” she cried in a broken voice.

He turned his head away from her on his pillow and she left him alone in that little squalid room in which the only thing of value was Rosenthal’s violin, which lay silent in its case.

He had other visitors at this time. Prince Andreyev, who had abandoned the profession of *gigolo* on the Riviera for that of shop-walker in the Galeries Lafayette, found him out and came to sit on his bed with many friendly and affectionate words which softened Michael’s heart to a man he had distrusted, and who had no sense of morality whatever, as he proved again when he spoke of Olga.

“She is doing well for herself. I saw her last night at the Palais des Folies. She is an exquisite creature—the very model of beautiful womanhood. I hear she is living with Isvolsky.”

“It’s unforgivable,” said Michael.

Prince Andreyev laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“My dear lad, you are very old-fashioned! Perhaps also you are taking a false view of life. I am a man of the deepest religious convictions, but that makes me tolerant towards little affairs of the heart. God is more forgiving than men. It is, as the French say, His *métier*.”

Michael turned uneasily in his bed.

“Let us talk of other things,” he said.

He refused Andreyev’s offer of a loan.

Bertrand and Henriette Carpentier came to see him several times, and Henriette brought him flowers and fruit, and tidied up his room and placed the pillows better for his head.

He was a little shy of her. He was a little tempted by her. At one word from him she would have come to him. He would have had the love of a very charming demoiselle of France who had wit and tradition and spirit with the fine intelligence of so many Frenchwomen. But he was a poor devil

of a refugee without a job. And in his soul was fidelity to another woman to whom he was pledged.

“A thousand thanks,” he said to Henriette. “Those flowers are enchanting.”

“Get well soon, my friend,” said Bertrand, that one-armed man who said he was a cynic.

LXX

IT was at the Dôme one evening that Michael found two other friends whom he had not seen for a long time, but who were always in his memory, and for whom he had the greatest affection, though in his mind they did not keep company together.

He had been playing one of Schubert's melodies, and was vaguely conscious of the applause which followed as he lowered his bow and with the back of his hand pushed back the lock of hair which fell over his forehead. It was the usual scene which sometimes sickened him.

Inside the Dôme, the tables were crowded with familiar types and familiar faces. He knew the artists who posed before American tourists in corduroy trousers and Lavallière ties—sham Bohemians and sham painters, whose work was rubbish and whose vanity was grotesque. He knew the little sluts who came here every night, charming their men friends and getting excited on alcoholic drinks. He knew the American art students who drifted into this false Bohemianism and let themselves go too far from the traditions of Boston and Philadelphia in their search for the soul of Paris, for which they mistook the degeneracy of its weakest types. He knew the young panderers and pimps who frequented this place, and the English tourists who came to have a look at Montparnasse and thought it as good as a stage play. He knew the waiters who worked like dogs for very little pay. Two of them were friends of his. They had been soldiers in Wrangel's army. One of them was in distress tonight because his wife had died in giving birth to a child. He was trying to find a place for two new arrivals, and lifting chairs above the heads of the company.

An Englishwoman was coming towards him. She was looking at him with a strange smile in which there was a kind of wonderment and a kind of emotion.

“What's the matter with that English female?” thought Michael carelessly. “Why does she advance upon me? Why does she look as though I were her long-lost brother? She is not very beautiful. Englishwomen as a rule aren't very beautiful, though there are exceptions now and then, as I must admit.”

“Michael!” said the Englishwoman.

He stared at her. He dropped his bow. His eyes, which had been so moody, lighted up as though a fire had been kindled behind them. Some

people in the Dôme were astonished and amused when the Russian fiddler, that Slav fellow who looked like a Russian prince, flung his arms about a plain-looking Englishwoman and kissed her a dozen times.

“Miss Browne!” he said in English. “Brownie! What a miracle! What a joy!”

“I’m a married woman,” she told him with a sudden flush and laughing eyes. “For goodness’ sake don’t keep on kissing me, Michael. This is a public place. And I’m a respectable married woman!”

It was several minutes before he understood that she was a respectable married woman. He couldn’t believe it even then. Miss Browne was Miss Browne for ever in his mind and for ever in history. She couldn’t be a married woman. That was absurd. He had promised to marry her himself years ago, when she was his governess.

“My husband is over there,” said Betty, who had been Miss Browne. “He’s a friend of yours and anxious to have a word with you. I warned him that you would kiss the skin off my face.”

“A friend of mine?” said Michael, feeling stupefied.

It was his friend Oliver Alden, whom he had known first on the quayside of Sebastopol when the Reds were very close.

Betty Browne was looking after him, and for that reason was the wife of a man who had been appointed Paris correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*. They had arrived that very evening.

It was a deep pleasure to Michael to have these two friends in Paris. They had an apartment in Auteuil, not far from his other good friends the Carpentiers, and he was very much at home there whenever he had a few hours to spare in the afternoons.

Betty Browne, who was now Betty Alden, never tired of talking about the old days in Russia, and was also a very good listener when he was in a mood of self-revelation, desiring spiritual and intellectual comfort. She hadn’t changed much, this English Betty who had once been his governess. She had the same bluntness of speech which was like a cold douche to his Russian introspection and self-pity. She had the same sense of humour, very quick to see the comicality of life. She had the same English common sense, so different from Russian emotionalism and extravagance of thought, and in addition Michael noticed a new serenity, a new happiness in her eyes which made her plain face beautiful, he thought.

“You are very happy with your noble husband?” he asked one afternoon when he was alone with her in the apartment at Auteuil.

She answered with a look of amusement.

“I’m happy with Oliver, but he would hate to be called noble. Like most men, he has his weaknesses, poor dear. You are all children, you men, utterly incapable of behaving reasonably.”

Michael was astonished.

“I can’t believe that my dear friend has any weaknesses. He is a great-hearted English gentleman.”

Betty was much amused again by this description of her husband.

“Well, I don’t want to give him away,” she said, “but I have to reprove him now and then for cleaning his boots with his handkerchief and letting lighted cigarettes burn our best furniture, and being extremely rude to people who call on us, and being grumpy at breakfast and talkative when I want to go to bed. These are his minor defects. He is, of course, an idealist. That is to say, he believes in foolish dreams which ignore the naughtiness of human nature.”

“Without such dreams,” said Michael, “man must surrender to despair. Unless men had dreamed like that we should still be beasts.”

“Remembering the newspaper I read at breakfast,” said Betty, “I don’t think we have advanced very far. The world seems to me in an awful state. If they would leave it to the women for a little while, we might make a better job of it. I should like to sweep out some of the cobwebs, and let in a little fresh air, and tidy up the mess.”

Michael was much impressed by this thought.

“It would be wonderful,” he said, “if you became President of the French Republic. It would be the end of corruption. You would sweep out the Chamber of Deputies with an English broom. You would treat them all like naughty schoolboys.”

“We’re talking the greatest nonsense!” said Betty, with her good-natured laugh.

“How charming to talk nonsense now and then!” said Michael.

Betty distressed him by talking about Olga. She had been to see her at the Folies.

“One of those nude women!” said Michael, with a groan. “It makes me shudder.”

Betty took a tolerant view of this nudity, surprising in an English mind, especially surprising in the mind of an ex-governess.

“I can’t say she was over-clothed for the time of year, but she looked beautiful. I couldn’t feel shocked about it. No one else was, as far as I could see. Oliver didn’t turn a hair, as far as I observed. ‘That girl is a peach,’ he told me.”

“To expose oneself in the market-place like a Greek slave!” exclaimed Michael. “My mother’s daughter!”

“Yes,” said Betty, “it’s very naughty of her, but somehow I don’t see any real wickedness in it. With all this sun-bathing going on at every seaside place the human body doesn’t seem to need so much hiding. People don’t get hot and bothered about it as they used to do in good Queen Victoria’s golden days.”

“She is living with Isvolsky,” said Michael. “Do you approve of that? Do you defend that? If so, then you are no longer the Betty Browne I knew in Russia, and I shall have no more faith in women’s virtue.”

Betty, who was Mrs. Oliver Alden, could not defend Olga as far as that, but she wasn’t at all sure that Olga was a lost soul to be for ever cut off from her family and friends.

“She’s a child! The other night when I went into her dressing-room she flung herself into my arms. She was still the little Olga who always wanted me to tell her the tale of Cinderella before she went to sleep. She always expected the fairy godmother to turn life’s pumpkins into a coach and horses. She was always waiting for the fairy prince to take her to the ball. Michael, don’t be too hard on her. One day she will need your love again. I think she needs it now, poor child.”

“When she leaves Isvolsky,” said Michael, “I will take her back into my heart. I miss her frightfully. We were good comrades.”

He was much distressed. Betty’s pity for Olga broke down his anger and harshness. He blamed himself for having been too severe with a girl whose nature could not endure the poverty and misery which he had asked her to share with him so long. In that little workman’s cottage in Val Fleuri she had brooded over the thwarting of her youth and beauty. He ought to have given her a better chance of happiness, instead of practising for hours on muted strings and leaving her to shed tears over her needlework, until she sought a way of escape.

LXXI

HE had the idea of going to see Olga at the Palais des Folies, and talking to her behind the scenes, and persuading her to leave that man Isvolsky and his friends. This idea became urgent in his mind when a message came to him out of the blue.

It was a message from his old master, Rosenthal, sent by cable from the United States and brought to him in his bed-sitting-room in the rue St. Roch, when he sat in his dressing-gown dipping a *croissant* into a bowl of coffee. He read it with stupefaction at first and then with excitement.

Rosenthal begged him to take the next boat to America and enclosed a money order that would pay for his passage. There was a vacancy for a first violin in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

On my recommendation [wrote Rosenthal], my good friend Gatti-Casaza will be glad to give you that place. It will be a new adventure for you in the New World. The salary is not to be despised, and you and I will meet again and resume playing in the best orchestra in the world under the greatest conductors. That is a good chance, is it not? If you take it, I shall have the joy of embracing you and boring you once more as I bored you in Berlin with my views on life. I am still grateful for the friendship and comradeship you gave to an old Jew fiddler.

This letter was written in German, but it seemed to be written in letters of flame as Michael read it in his bed-sitting-room in Paris.

It would be wonderful to go to America! Over there was Vera Sokolova. "I will come to you, even if I have to swim," he told her once. But he would have his passage paid, and over there in New York he would be earning a good salary in the finest orchestra. Perhaps Vera would be waiting for him, and ready for his love at last!

Michael called at the stage door of the Palais des Folies to see his sister.

"No admittance," said the door-keeper gruffly.

Then he recognized Michael as having been in the orchestra.

"Still alive?" he asked more amiably. "I thought you might be dead by now. One of you Russians jumped into the Seine the other day, as I read in

Le Matin. One of the taxi-drivers who lose people between the Gare du Nord and Montparnasse.”

“I’m alive, my friend,” said Michael. “I have come to see my sister, Mademoiselle Olga Markova.”

The door-keeper, who was an ex-sergeant of French artillery and a hero of the War which was now forgotten, raised his eyebrows.

“You are the brother of that pretty lady? She is a friend of Monsieur Isvolsky. I have to be civil to her, and that’s not difficult. Beauty is always admirable, even to old fellows like me.”

Michael knew his way about the back of the stage. He asked one of the call-boys the way to his sister’s dressing-room. Presently he tapped at her door.

It was an hour before the curtain would ring up, and Olga was having her hair dressed when he entered. She sat before a mirror in which she saw him standing. In the mirror he saw her astonishment, as though it were a ghost who had come to her.

“Michael!” she cried.

She sprang up from her chair and pushed her woman on one side.

“Why have you come?” she asked. “Oh, Michael, I have been terribly hurt by your unkindness.”

She went towards him with her hands outstretched and clasped him about the neck and kissed him.

She wore a silk wrap, and her body was soft and yielding as he put his arms round her.

“I want to talk to you alone,” he said. “I have very great news.”

When her woman had left the dressing-room, he spoke abruptly.

“I’m going to the United States. A good engagement is waiting for me in New York. I want you to come with me. I shall earn enough to keep you in comfort. We shall have a great adventure together in the New World. We shall be comrades again.”

Olga was startled. For a moment she stood very still with her head raised and a kind of eagerness in her eyes, as though this new adventure with Michael might be very amusing, as though it called to her. Then she looked at him and shook her head, with a little smile about her lips.

“No, I can’t come with you, Michael. I couldn’t leave Constantin in the lurch. He’s very kind to me. I am having a wonderfully good time. I should be silly to give it all up.”

Michael pleaded with her, became angry with her, and spoke passionate words, even seized her by the wrist as though to drag her out of this place then and there. Suddenly he became rigid and silent, because someone entered his sister's dressing-room without knocking at the door. It was Constantin Isvolsky, in evening-clothes, with a white flower in his button-hole and little jewelled buttons in his white waistcoat.

"This is my brother Michael," said Olga. "He wants to carry me off to the United States."

Isvolsky smiled and showed a set of beautiful white teeth.

"Are you going with him?" he asked carelessly.

"I shall finish my engagement here," said Olga. "I shall stay until you're tired of me."

"That will never be possible," said Isvolsky. "Does one ever get tired of beauty?"

"Beauty fades," said Olga. "One's idea of beauty changes. I have no illusions."

Michael ignored Isvolsky, and turned towards his sister and spoke with his eyes as well as with words.

"Olga! I beg you to come with me! We should have good times together. We should begin a new life in the New World. All this would seem a bad dream. We should breathe a fresher kind of air. We should perhaps meet better men and women. Who knows?"

Olga's face flushed and then became a little pale.

It was Isvolsky who answered.

"That is like a speech in an old-fashioned melodrama. Is it possible that such things can be said in this very modern world, and in a dressing-room of the Palais des Folies?"

He turned to Olga with his charming smile.

"What answer do you give, Olga Markova?"

"I have a right to choose my own way of life," she said. "I choose this."

She kissed her brother again and wished him good luck before he went away with a slight nod to Constantin Isvolsky, who had once paid his wages.

The director of the Dôme regretted his departure. Many friends gave him their left hands—nearest to the heart—and wished him good fortune in the United States. Among them was Andreyev, a shop-walker in the Galeries Lafayette.

Bertrand and Henriette Carpentier grieved at his leaving Paris and were not at all sure that he was wise in this decision. Paris, after all, was Paris.

Henriette, who had made no secret of her adoration, cried a little and laughed a little when he kissed her hand on the platform where a train was ready to leave for Cherbourg.

“I am jealous of America for taking you away from France,” she said. “You were becoming a perfectly good Frenchman. Why should you leave civilization?”

“I shall come back,” said Michael. “I shall never forget my friends in France, so incredibly kind to a Russian refugee.”

Betty and Oliver Alden were there to see him off.

“Write and tell me the secret of American wealth in a world which is rapidly going bankrupt,” said Alden.

“Write and tell us all your adventures,” said Betty. “Beware of bootleggers and gunmen and Hollywood film stars, and all the perils of New York. And if you’re going to kiss me on both cheeks, remember I have a jealous husband.”

He kissed her on both cheeks, being a perfectly good Russian. On the platform at his feet was Rosenthal’s violin in its black case. It was his only travelling-companion, and all his fortune was in that bit of wood. He travelled steerage in the *Lafayette*.

LXXII

MICHAEL PAVLOVITCH MARKOV learnt to speak English with an American accent. He learnt how to disguise himself as an American citizen in ready-made clothes bought off the peg, with padded shoulders and shaped waist-lines. In an apartment of a brown stone house on the west and unfashionable side of Central Park he learnt how to prepare a meal at a moment's notice from a row of cans containing an assortment from fifty-seven varieties of preserved food. He learnt how far he could make a dollar go—and it wasn't very far—while sitting on a high stool at a quick-lunch counter or in a taxicab between West 76th Street and the Metropolitan Opera House. He learnt how to save his life by watching the traffic-signals down Fifth Avenue or Broadway, after several adventures of absent-mindedness when he tried to cross just as a thousand cars swept down upon him and the curses of their drivers awakened him from a day-dream of Russia in the time of revolution, or Vienna in the days of his dire poverty, or Berlin when German money went bad, or Paris where he had played in the Dôme at Montparnasse.

He learnt not to be terror-stricken by a sense of enormous loneliness and utter strangeness among all the millions of human ants who rushed about the deep canons of the streets between cliff-like buildings which seemed to touch the stars—these people of the New World who, when first he came, talked a language he didn't understand, though he had learnt English from Betty Browne, and were intent upon some purpose of life remote from his knowledge and imagination, restless, feverish, with a quick rhythm at a hurrying pace.

Standing hand in hand with Vera Sokolova at the top of a tall sky-scraper called the Empire State Building in Fifth Avenue at Thirty-second Street, he had looked down upon this city of fantastic beauty, wild as the dream of a lunatic stone-mason, and upon those millions of little creatures far below him who were men and women. He had been afraid.

“I feel that I've left the world I knew,” he told Vera. “This civilization is terrible in its strangeness. I feel as though I had come to Mars, or some other planet, where nothing in my own mind or nature has any relationship with these people or their ways of life. Even the air they breathe is different from that of Europe. It's intoxicating. It's electric. The light is different. It has no softness. It gives sharp outlines. What is moving in the minds of those who dwell in this city? How do they think? What ideas have they of beauty or

peace, or the meaning of life? Why are they all in such a hurry? What are they doing? What does it all mean?"

Vera laughed at him, holding his hand tightly.

"The strangeness will wear off," she told him. "Soon you will be able to talk to them. You will make many charming friends among them, and know people who love all the things that we love, Michael. One can be as quiet in New York as in a forest glade. Underneath these sky-scrapers and in those straight streets down there, human nature is the same as in Moscow or Paris."

Michael refused to believe it.

"These New Yorkers seem possessed by demons. They're robots. They're mechanized men and women. Everything is machine-made, worked by electricity. Their very door-handles send out sparks and give me shocks! They're all animated by electrical energy. I believe their minds are machine-made and work when one touches a button or a switch. Yesterday I lost myself in the underground railway. It was a terrible adventure! I asked my way, but no one answered. They were all in a desperate hurry, rushing past me. Their faces frightened me. They were demon-haunted. They were human ants scurrying about on some mysterious purpose of the ant-heap. They were machines in the guise of men and women, set in motion by some devil mind with a genius for invention. They're not human, Vera."

Vera laughed again at this outburst.

"Those are the first impressions of your simple Slav mind! You're startled by this intensity of life, and by all its mechanical devices. But elevators and electric buttons don't alter the human mind very much. In New York people get hungry, and suffer, and love, and hate, and dream, and die. There are many artists in this city. There are men with generous ideals and fine intelligence. The Americans have a sense of humour. They are very vital. They are very human. They go about searching for happiness like human beings in Europe."

"Do they find it?" asked Michael. "Is it possible to be happy in this fever-stricken city? Do they find happiness under the flashing signs in Broadway which blind their eyes to the stars, or on the fifty-first floor of one of these sky-scrapers where the elevators rush up and down, opening their gates to let out crowds of standardized humanity—if it is human?"

Vera answered after a laugh and a sigh:

"Happiness eludes one as much by a mountain stream as on the top floor of a sky-scraper."

“I’m alarmed,” said Michael. “I shall never get used to New York.”

He became so used to New York that he knew all the shops down Fifth Avenue, and all the paths in Central Park, and all the theatres, restaurants, cabarets, picture-palaces, and drug-stores under the electric signs of Broadway. He became no longer frightened of New York crowds. He stood among them in the hall of Grand Central Station—like a great cathedral where their footsteps made no noise in this vastness—and he gave his bag, which he learnt to call a ‘grip’, to a darkey porter—one of the ‘Red-caps’, without anxiety lest he should be lost for ever.

He could settle down in time like any American ‘drummer’ in the smoking-car of a long-distance train bound for Detroit or Chicago, and engage in friendly conversation with fellow-passengers who were glad to tell him the stories of their lives in considerable detail, their adventures on the road to success, the number of dollars they earned each year, and their opinions of the late President Wilson, of the present President Hoover, the mysterious workings of Tammany, the effects of Prohibition upon American morality, the causes of the crime-wave with its bootlegging and racketeering, and the blessings of the hire-purchase system, which had done so much, they thought, for the prosperity of the United States. He learnt about ‘sales resistance’, Rotary idealism, Chatauqua culture, the colour line, the Ku Klux Klan, and other mysteries of American life.

Michael Pavlovitch Markov became sufficiently Americanized to read the advertisements in the *Saturday Evening Post* and to grope his way about the innumerable columns of the *New York Times* to find out what was happening in Europe—which was generally something unpleasant. He became Americanized to the extent of smoking ‘Camel’ cigarettes when he could not afford Russian, and drinking iced water when he nearly fainted from thirst in central-heated rooms which made the veins swell in his forehead at parties lasting late into the night, where his mind became a little confused because of so many people and so much noise.

They were human, he found, these Americans. Some of Vera’s friends, these American hostesses, were very lovely and exquisitely dressed, and with a lively intelligence which made them eager to see things, to know things, to possess things hurriedly, as though time were rushing ahead and they might miss something good if they were not quick enough to catch it—the latest play, the latest opera, the latest lecture from some foreign poet, philosopher, or writer, the latest celebrity of any kind, even if it might be a Russian prince or a Red Indian chief, or Vera Sokolova, the famous dancer. They were tireless on the telephone. That instrument became a torture to

Michael because every time it rang he knew that he must refuse, or even accept, another invitation. These American friends of Vera's were fresh, gay, and conversational at hours of the night when Michael and Vera desired sleep and crept away from parties with that intent.

Michael abandoned his theory of mechanized men and women. He made friends who loved music and art and had quiet, thoughtful minds. He met young men who looked out on life with shrewd, watchful eyes. He met idealists, dreamers, poets, and humorists, eccentrics, and men who loved simplicity and were poor, even in New York where at this time there was a luxury, a wealth, and a sense of ever-increasing prosperity which seemed miraculous to a Russian refugee who had slept in the *Nacht Asyl* of Berlin and walked hungrily through the streets of Paris.

LXXIII

ROSENTHAL'S hand had been the first to grasp Michael's at the landing-stage in New York. Vera was not there. She was dancing in Chicago and had sent a cable to the ship, *With all my love*. That was a hard blow to Michael, who had been counting the hours before he could hold her in his arms, but it was softened by this meeting with Rosenthal.

The great violinist looked older and greyer than when Michael had known him in Berlin, but he still had the same shy, kindly, and humorous eyes, and the same look of a man who has faced the worst of life's cruelties—his experience as a soldier and prisoner of war—without losing his spiritual courage and his faith in beauty.

While waiting for the examination at the Customs amidst a seething crowd of passengers—one woman was in tears because the Customs officers were being rough with her for failing to declare the frocks she had brought from Paris—Rosenthal held Michael at arm's length and peered at him through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"You are no longer a boy!" he exclaimed. "Suffering has left its mark on your face. You have been through hard times, as I know from your letters. That will be good for your violin."

In German he quoted some lines from Goethe:

"Who ne'er his bread in sorrow ate,
Who ne'er, through weary midnight hours
Weeping upon his bed has sat,
He knows ye not, ye heavenly powers."

Michael held on to him after their first embrace. In the taxi-cab, when they drove to Rosenthal's apartment in West 76th Street up from the docks along Eighth Avenue with its railways running down the middle of the street, Michael had sat silent and pale, stupefied by his first view of New York rising from the sea like a dream city in a dream world, and by this entrance into the roar and dynamic life of an unknown civilization. Rosenthal had done all the talking.

"When I first arrived here, I thought I should go mad! I thought I should die! I suffered exceedingly from the racket of American life, this fearful restless energy of the American people. You will find their central-heating system very trying at first. All their rooms are over-heated. Many of their

minds are over-heated. They are intoxicated by their prosperity. Everyone is gambling in stocks and shares. They believe that there's no limit but the sky to this rise in national wealth."

"Perhaps they're right," said Michael, staring out of the window of the cab.

Rosenthal went on talking.

"They've found out the secret, they think, of inexhaustible prosperity. They're all grasping at this fairy gold, and sometimes I wonder how soon it will change into dust and ashes. How can any nation prosper when all others are sinking into ruin or struggling in the depths of penury?"

"I don't know," said Michael.

Rosenthal went on talking.

"Did I use the word 'nation'? America is a collection of nations. They are not homogeneous. This melting-pot of all the races has not yet melted them into one people. Here in New York, at least, they are very mixed. There are Jews—two millions of them—and Czechs, and Poles, and Slovaks, and Germans, and Italians, and Irish, and Russians, and every race on earth. It's the cosmopolis of the human folk. And yet, somehow, they have common characteristics which give them an appearance—an outward mask—of Americanization. One becomes Americanized very rapidly in adapting oneself to its way of life. That's true, certainly, and yet people like ourselves, fresh from the older civilizations—recent immigrants, exiles, and fugitives—keep something always of their own racial soul."

"Thank God for that," said Michael. "I feel very Russian. I also feel very sick. It's excitement, I suppose."

Rosenthal continued his monologue.

"To find the real America one must get away from New York. One must go to the Middle West or to New England and Massachusetts. There are many cultured people everywhere, you will find, my dear friend, but they are minorities in a world of standardized thought and mass-produced types. This country has enormous possibilities. It has also, I think, enormous dangers. In many ways it gives a lead to the world. By its machine power and genius for mass-production it offers the world an advance in material well-being—a distribution of goods—which would ease the burdens of the human drudge and the poverty of peasant countries. They worship the machine. That also is a menace to the world. Mass production may kill the soul of the world. Sometimes I tremble at the thought that the only music

heard in the future will come out of a machine, and that the individual spirit will be submerged and destroyed by mass mentality of low-class standard.”

“Terrible,” said Michael.

Rosenthal had more to say.

“Yet these people have generous instincts, fine emotional urges, a belief in idealism. Their struggle for wealth is their way of adventure. They are all adventurers, backing their luck like pioneers in the gold-fields. There’s something rather splendid about that. There’s something very dynamic in their contempt for stability. They are quick-change artists. They will pull down a building only five years old to put up another, higher and more modern.”

“I can’t see any sense in that,” said Michael. “Everything you tell me, Rosenthal, increases my alarm.”

Rosenthal went on alarming him.

“There are aspects of American civilization which are frightening to a timid soul like myself. Their newspapers are daily records of crime and violence. Throughout this great country there are criminals who live like Sicilian bandits in the very heart of their cities, holding up law-abiding people, shooting to kill, defying the law, and creating a reign of terror. But I must confess I have seen nothing of that. No one has ever tried to kill me! No one has ever robbed me. I have met only kindness, consideration, and courtesy. I have been overwhelmed by their enthusiasm for my fiddling. I have met many dear souls. I have made many good friends. I shall always have a warm place in my heart for this country where I have made more money than is good for me.”

“That’s good news,” said Michael.

Rosenthal’s next words were not so pleasing.

“After this American adventure I confess I have a passionate longing to get back to my dear Germany—it’s in a dreadful state!—and live once more in that type of civilization—in its last phase, I fear—where there is old tradition, restfulness of mind, old-world beauty, cottages instead of skyscrapers, log fires instead of central-heating, craftsmen who have no machines and minds untouched by jazz. I am going back in a few weeks, my dear friend! It’s a joy to me that I have been here to welcome you.”

“You are leaving so soon!” cried Michael. “That’s terrible! What shall I do without you in this terrifying city?”

Rosenthal introduced him to Gatti-Casaza, the director of the Metropolitan Opera House—a tall, heavy-shouldered man with a bald head

and a powerful big-jowled face and plump hands on which were diamond rings. He was the greatest impresario in the world. He had brought all the greatest musicians to America for his opera season. He was the uncrowned king of the music-loving people in New York. He had the manners of a man who knew his own power and genius. He could raise an artist to fame. He could send him back to despair. He could dominate their vanity, their jealousies, their emotional crises. One word from him would give talent its chance of success and genius its opportunity.

He spoke that word to Michael in a brief interview.

“Rosenthal tells me that you play the violin as well as he does. That of course I can’t believe! There is only one Rosenthal. But I shall be glad to give you a trial. We need a first violin. I will tell Bodansky to engage you. The salary will be a hundred and fifty dollars a week.”

It was a salary which enabled Michael to live in New York without fear of starvation.

Vera came to him from Chicago. She had already talked to him on the long-distance telephone across which he had sent his voice and his heart. He had heard her laughter when he had tried to kiss her with his spirit and his lips, though a thousand miles were between them. They had spoken in Russian. He had been excited and emotional.

“Your voice sounds different,” she told him. “It sounds older, Michael.”

“I’m an old man,” he answered. “I have a long white beard after all this time of waiting for you. I have a million wrinkles on my face and in my soul. If I don’t see you before another night has passed I shall be carried to my coffin, if they have such things in New York.”

He didn’t see her for three other nights, and then she came to him. He was in the apartment which Rosenthal had taken for him in one of the brown stone houses on the unfashionable side of New York. For three hours he had paced up and down the room waiting for the moment when he should see her again after their long separation. He wondered how much she had changed—if she had changed. Would he know her again? Might he not have been worshipping a dream woman, a creature of the imagination, a fantasy in his own brain? They might be strangers to each other. She might find him old and repulsive. She might have found a lover in America. She might only be kind to him for old times’ sake and give him a little pity.

Suddenly she stood in his room. She wore a fur coat and a little Russian cap of astrachan.

“Michael!” she cried. “Is it Michael?”

She had laughter and tenderness in her eyes. She held out her arms to him.

She had changed a little. She was more beautiful, he thought. She was more mature. She was more exquisite in grace.

“Where is that long white beard?” she asked. “You look even more noble than when we last met, my Michael. You look like a man who has become very wise. I’m a little afraid of you, and a little shy.”

He broke down her shyness. He held her close in his arms. He wept a little, being Russian.

It was sad for him that she couldn’t marry him at once. She was leaving the Russian Ballet, which was ending its season and its tour of American cities. They were breaking up. She had accepted an engagement with Mr. Sam Harris as his principal dancer in a musical revue. It would be a great chance for her. But she would have to leave New York for a time, as he was trying it out in Chicago. After the New York run they would go on tour to the largest theatres in the remaining theatrical cities.

“You tell me tragic things,” said Michael. “All this is frightful. It’s a death-blow to my hopes. In any case let us marry tomorrow, as it is too late tonight.”

She thought it would be best for both of them to wait a little longer, until they could live together. He would only be exasperated if she married him and then left him. It would be unbearable for her.

“A little longer!” cried Michael. “Oh, my God! How long is this ‘little longer’ for a man who has starved for love and who is damnably alone?”

“A few months,” she told him. “At most a year, Michael. Surely that’s not too long after all our patience?”

“It’s too long!” said Michael, with despair in his voice.

In the end he agreed to go on being patient, after many arguments and many tears. Vera Sokolova still put her art first. Love came second.

LXXIV

WHILE waiting for Vera, who was dancing her way into the heart of the American people, there was a year of hard work and strange experience for Michael. At times in his apartment he felt desperately lonely in his soul, and very unhappy in New York.

His spirit yearned for Europe where it felt at home in spite of all the poverty he had known there. Paris had been a hard foster-mother, but he had loved its streets and cafés and people. Walking down through Central Park he thought back to his bed-sitting-room in the rue St. Roch, and of the Chien Qui Fume at the corner of Les Halles where he had talked to the rough porters of the markets who had taught him their *argot* and discussed life with him. He thought back to the Châlet des Iles in the Bois, where he had sat with Henriette after rowing her on the lake. He missed Bertrand Carpentier, that humorous cynic. He missed Tania his sister, now married to a Jewish doctor in Vienna, and Olga, with whom he had quarrelled because she had gone off with Constantin Isvolsky. She was now Madame Isvolsky, as he had seen in a French paper sent out to him by Henriette. That fellow had married her. She was in the smart world of Paris now that she was the wife of the director of the Palais des Folies. He had written to her and had received an answer which was very emotional, very gay, and yet, he thought, not quite sincere.

I'm a respectable married woman [she wrote]. That ought to please your puritanical soul. It doesn't seem to make much difference, except that Constantin is less polite than he used to be, and goes out with other women. But I am very rich. I wear the most expensive frocks. I have the homage of distinguished Frenchmen who flatter me and say nice things. A French Minister makes love to me. I have a salon attended by a very amusing set. I should be perfectly happy except that I miss you very much, dearest Michael, and sometimes wish myself back again in the work-rooms of the Grand Duchess Marie, when you used to take me out to lunch in filthy little restaurants and we laughed together over small jokes. Can one have perfect happiness? Isn't it an illusion? Nevertheless I still find life amusing.

Michael was lonely in his soul until Vera came back. Yet he had only to step out of his room to find good company. In this apartment-house there were several Russians whom he knew or came to know. They were musicians like himself, or serving in big stores, or waiters in restaurants, or salesmen of machine-made goods.

Walking down Fifth Avenue one morning to get some fresh air after a late night—this fresh air of New York which was like the *elixir vitae* in its renewal of vitality—he came face to face with a tall, handsome man, who stopped as though he had been shot, and stared at him with incredibility. They had last met in the Crimea. It was when Michael was dragging a foot that hurt him behind a gun-wagon of Wrangel's army in retreat. Sacha Dolin had been walking by his side. This man who now strode down Fifth Avenue had ridden ahead in a Cossack uniform. It was Prince George Matchabelli.

"Surely that is Michael Pavlovitch Markov," he said, with surprise in his dark, smiling eyes. "Or am I dreaming of a boy who once marched with Wrangel's army?"

"My dear Prince!" cried Michael. "After all these years!"

They embraced each other in the middle of Fifth Avenue.

"I'm a business man, my dear Michael," said his friend. "I produce the most wonderful scents for the beautiful women of New York. I teach them to understand my perfumes. I sell them in little bottles upon which is a golden crown, designed by a friend of mine who understands the psychology of salesmanship. It's the fashion in New York to use the Matchabelli perfumes. I am doing well. I am making money. My little company prospers. My dear wife and I are happy when we don't think too much of our former life—that fading dream—in Russia."

He invited Michael to dinner at his little apartment, and these two charming people were always glad to see him whenever he called upon them.

Downstairs below his own apartment was a good-humoured fellow named Danilov, with whom he became on friendly terms, so that sometimes they sat on high stools together before quick-lunch counters and went into each other's rooms after the Opera for tea, which each of them took turns in making in his own samovar, and had conversations which went on, now and then, through the night. Their friendship had begun with a quarrel. Michael had to practise his violin for several hours a day. How could he do so when below him a man was bellowing like a bull? Perhaps that was an exaggeration, for a bull does not bellow operatic arias in a rich, full-throated, full-bellied baritone. The man liked his voice. He had no mercy on his

neighbours. He was intolerable to Michael, who dashed downstairs one day, burst into the man's room, and saw him standing before a mirror—he was in a vest and trousers with his braces hanging down—making the grimaces of an operatic character. He was singing lustily.

“For the love of heaven,” said Michael, “I implore you to moderate your voice. How can I work? How can I think? Your voice is an outrage in this apartment-house. Have you no consideration for other human beings? It's bad enough having to tolerate all their gramophones and all their radios. This is a musical madhouse.”

Danilov was astounded, hurt, and then good-natured. After his first consternation at this protest he laughed heartily.

“I had an idea that I was giving pleasure to my neighbours! I was at least giving pleasure to myself, which, after all, is the right of everyone. If I don't sing, I die. I believe in self-preservation. And you must admit, my dear Count, that I have a voice!”

“I admit it,” said Michael. “I deplore it.”

“I'm the future Chaliapine,” said Danilov. “But I'm also the victim of jealousy and persecution. Gatti-Casaza, that egoist, that tyrant, that Lenin of opera—keeps me in the chorus when I should be the leading baritone. I've told him so. I've sent in my resignation.”

“You have sent in your resignation?” exclaimed Michael, greatly startled. “Then how will you live, my dear fellow?”

Danilov shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

“Possibly I shall not live! Possibly I shall starve to death in this infernal city. But no one shall have the right to say that one of the greatest singers in the world has sold his soul for a place in the chorus. The chorus! Great God! I, Danilov, am asked to sing in the chorus!”

He lived for some time on the generosity of Michael, who lent him many dollars. He lived also on loans from other Russian friends. Now and then he obtained engagements in American concert-halls. He disappeared for months and then came back to borrow from his friends again. Often he burst into tears because of self-pity and his firm belief that there was a conspiracy against him. But he had the simplicity of a Russian peasant and was devoted to Michael with the devotion of Sancho Panza to Don Quixote. Michael missed him when he disappeared for one of his engagements.

Then one day, when Michael was walking down Fifth Avenue, intent on his own thoughts—Vera was coming back for a week—an immense automobile slowed down by the kerbstone and a voice hailed him.

“Markov! My dear!”

It was Danilov. On this winter day in New York he was wearing a magnificent overcoat with a fur collar. He opened the door of his great car, driven by a coloured man in uniform, and embraced Michael on the sidewalk.

“What has happened?” asked Michael. “Have you become a millionaire?”

Danilov was pleased with life.

“I’ve married a very dear lady,” he said. “She has been twice married to rich husbands who were good enough to die. I am her third and dearest. She heard me sing in Boston. She was profoundly moved by my voice and genius. She invited me to tea in the Copley Plaza. We became good friends. She has a passion for music and especially for opera. She was also lonely in the house bequeathed to her by her second husband. We made a little contract. It’s a condition of our marriage that I sing to her for an hour every evening after dinner. She gives me a handsome allowance. I have my own wing in her house, with two good bathrooms, of which I use one now and then. Every evening I sing to her. I give her, as in honour bound, the best of my power. I’m devoted to her. She is old enough to be my mamma. It’s a true comradeship of the spirit. I’m a happy man, my friend.”

“Congratulations!” said Michael, greatly impressed.

“Come and dine with us, my dear comrade,” said Danilov. “My wife will be delighted to meet you. You shall play to her. I have some very fine French wine in the cellars. My English butler is a charming fellow. We play dominoes together sometimes when my wife has gone to bed. It’s all very pleasant.”

Michael accepted this invitation and others which followed, and made a good impression upon the white-haired lady who had married Danilov for his voice, and perhaps also for his laughing eyes and florid face.

“Boris is my baby,” she told Michael. “He has the heart of a child.”

Michael agreed. But this baby with the heart of a child was too fond of French wines and American cocktails. After his wife had gone to bed—she retired at ten o’clock every night—he sat up late and drank too much, and wept over the downfall of Russia and his exile in a country which, he said, was inhabited by materialists and dollar-worshippers.

LXXV

VERA was in New York for a party given by Prince George Matchabelli—that Georgian prince who had become a business man. It was in honour of a Grand Duchess who had arrived in New York to become a saleswoman in one of the big stores, and it was there that Michael met his fellow-refugees and saw Vera dance again.

George Matchabelli had hired the Russian Restaurant in Lexington Avenue for his party, which began at nine o'clock on Sunday night, when other customers had finished their dinner and departed. The doors were closed except for the Russian guests. They had been serving all the week in New York stores or banks, and offices, and cafés, and work-rooms, and studios. Some of them were musicians, and designers, and chemists, and floor-walkers. Some of them were out of work and kept by a Russian committee who looked after impoverished refugees of their own class. The women were sempstresses, mannequins, typists, artist's models, singers, dancers, and waitresses. They had wandered across the world like Michael and Vera. He had met some of them in Constantinople, Vienna, Berlin, Paris. They had lived in slum houses and tenement buildings. Here, in New York, some of them were still poor in a city of enormous wealth.

But in this restaurant they were, for a few hours, again Russians of the old régime. Prince George Matchabelli wore his uniform of a Cossack cavalry officer, with long black coat and cartridge-belt, and square fur cap, and black top-boots.

The little Grand Duchess stood with him, receiving the guests, and wore a Russian headdress which had once glittered under the candelabra of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, and in the Imperial Throne Room of the Kremlin. Some of the girls—among whom was Vera—wore Russian dress which they used in the ballet. There was a little orchestra in which Michael played as leader.

When all the men had bowed over the hand of the little Grand Duchess, and all the women had curtsied to her, and she took her place at table next to the handsome Prince who was now a business man, Michael and his musicians played the old anthem of Imperial Russia. It was one moment of emotion in an evening which had other moments of that kind.

It was in New York, and very far from Russia. In Lexington Avenue there was a rushing tide of automobiles. These people were the derelicts of a

lost world. They were exiles in a new world very strange to them, as strange as though they had landed on a new planet. They had established a precarious foothold in its social life. The old Russia was a fading dream belonging to another existence. Their names, their titles, their tradition, were meaningless in this vast country to which they had come as refugees.

When Michael raised his bow to play the first notes of that National Anthem, all the men sprang to their feet, and all the women rose, and in their eyes were tears. In the silence which followed, ghosts walked into this restaurant in New York—the ghosts of the murdered Romanovs, and of a million victims of the Red Terror, the mothers and fathers, and brothers and sisters, and cousins of the little company, the ghosts of Old Russia for a thousand years of history.

These people saw their own ghosts—as officers in the World War, as women of the Imperial Court, as boys and girls in palaces and villas, as hunted creatures escaping from civil war. They heard in those moments of silence the bells of Moscow and the sleigh-bells of St. Petersburg, and the songs of Volga boatmen, and the sound of hoofs beating on hard snow round Russian villages where once these exiles had lived in old houses as landed gentry of a great Empire which had gone.

The Grand Duchess took her seat. The silence passed. The ghosts departed. There was laughter at the tables.

“All this is fantastic,” said Michael in a low voice to Vera, whose hand he clasped below the cloth on the little table at which they sat. “We are foolish, perhaps, to dream again. It’s weakening. It’s better to forget, don’t you think?”

“I like to remember,” said Vera.

Michael spoke again in a low voice.

“We belong to the New World. We shall never go back to Russia. Why do we pretend?”

“Hush!” said Vera. “Why say such things tonight, Michael?”

“This harking back to the past is a weakness,” he said. He had to steel himself against his own weakness and emotion. He too had seen the ghost of himself as a young soldier of the Russian Army. He was a little ashamed of his tears.

The Russian character was revealed in this party of Prince Matchabelli’s—its melancholy, its mysticism, its childishness, its extremes between gaiety and self-pity. As the vodka passed, laughter rang out. There was a merry din of conversation, under cover of which some of these Russians spoke in low

voices, telling their memories of the past, speaking of dead friends and relatives, until presently they laughed with the others.

“Markov, my dear fellow,” cried Matchabelli very gaily, “play one of the old dances! We’re becoming too serious. Give us a little music, and make it merry!”

Michael left his seat at table and assembled his orchestra. He played Kreisler’s ‘Gipsy Caprice’, and then some of the old folk-dances which he remembered from his boyhood.

Matchabelli, in his Cossack uniform, left his chair at the side of the little Grand Duchess. He put his hands together with his elbows squared, and danced in the centre of the room. His smiling eyes were fixed on Vera. He had chosen her for his partner. He enticed her, in the Cossack way, with his eyes and by every movement of his body. It was the invitation to a love-dance, primitive, Slav, very old in its rhythm.

Vera nodded her head from side to side like a Russian peasant girl. She slipped away from the table and faced the Prince. She made little dancing steps, provocative, coy, contemptuous, alluring.

The men sprang up from the tables and formed a ring, clapping their hands. Vera danced humorously, but with a grace that revealed great art. Matchabelli’s eyes were on fire. He laughed loudly, and gave Cossack cries. He sat down on air almost to the ground, and kicked out his long black boots. He was a Cossack again. New York and its sky-scrapers had disappeared. He was in Georgia among his peasants. Vera Sokolova was his girl.

Faster, faster! How could he catch this bird? Her flying petticoats flicked against him. Her head was held back beyond the reach of his embrace. At the end she sprang into his arms and he held her high.

There was a roar of cheers and laughter. The little Grand Duchess clapped her hands. She was laughing like a young girl. Michael smiled over his violin. He had no jealousy of Matchabelli, whose pretty wife was there. All this was traditional and innocent. It was Russian.

The Grand Duchess beckoned to him and he stood before her and bowed.

“That has made me very happy,” she said. “Thank you, and all of you. But now I want to hear you play alone. Now won’t you play something beautiful and less riotous?”

He played Tchaikovsky’s ‘Chanson Triste’, and the company listened to him with intent silence unbroken by any stir or sound.

Vera was watching him with a little smile about her lips. When he returned to her table she pressed his hand.

“You have reached the stars!” she told him. “That was beautiful, my dear.”

“It’s all Rosenthal’s fiddle,” he told her humbly, but her praise was better than wine to him.

LXXVI

MICHAEL played among the first violins in the Metropolitan Opera House. He played in a miscellaneous programme which included the 'Coq d'Or' of Rimsky Korsakoff, and 'Boris Godounov' by Moussorgsky, and 'Prince Igor' by Borodin. Afterwards he played through a Wagner season including the 'Meistersinger', 'Parsifal', 'Tannhäuser', and the 'Valkyrie'. It was a great experience to be in this orchestra, and a severe discipline. There were long hours of rehearsal, exhausting to the body and spirit. His fellow-musicians were of many nationalities—German, Italian, Polish, French, and Russian. They were hard workers and lived close to their instruments. Among them were great artists who had music in their souls as well as at their finger-tips, and yet were not too proud to be members of an orchestra on a fixed salary, and without chance of fame or individual recognition. They had a loyalty to the orchestra under its great conductor. In spite of all the toil and drudgery of the hardest profession in the world—that needing most self-discipline and sacrifice—they were enthusiasts of any masterpiece they played, and thrilled to the glory of sound which they helped to create.

Michael was caught up in this impersonal enthusiasm, and lost himself in the rhythm, and movement, and colour, and drive of these massed instruments, directed by one man's baton, and one man's intensity of leadership. In a way he was a slave, but there were moments when he felt it to be a glorious serfdom. As an individual he did not exist. He was one wave in a sea of sound. He was one vibration in this mystical world of music. He did not hear the tone of his own violin, nor any note he played. He was merged into the mighty symphony of this great orchestration. He was unconscious of any thought as he sat in front of his music-stand following the maze of notes. He was not a self-conscious personality, but a line of music, a spirit lost in a rhythmic ecstasy. His fingers worked. His arm went up and down. His body was uncomfortable. His mind moved only in unison with the beat, and volume, and rise and fall, of this tide of sound which swept from a thousand strings.

But sometimes when he sat there in the orchestra, tuning up among his fellow-slaves, he looked into the glamorous vastness of the Opera House and stared at the audience drifting in. He saw the invasion of the stalls and boxes by men and women in evening-clothes. The light gleamed on bare arms and shoulders, on men's white shirt-fronts and waistcoats, on women's jewels, which glittered with tiny points of fire. These American women

were very rich. They wore many diamonds in their hair and on their wrists. This audience was very rich. These American business men, among whom were many Jews, because Jews love music, had found, it seemed, the secret of the old alchemists. The world's gold flowed steadily into the United States. American stocks and shares were mounting to dizzy heights. A few dollars became multiplied by magic arithmetic if one bought the right things with them—abstract things on a list of meaningless names. Everybody seemed to know this fantastic arithmetic. Everybody except Michael and a few others. They made no secret about it. Shop-assistants with whom he talked told him that they had bought these mysterious commodities 'on margin', whatever that might mean. General Utilities, Tel. and Tel., Anacondas. They'd made wonderful profits. A young man behind the counter of the drug-store at the corner of Forty-fourth Street had confided to him that he was taking his little wife to Europe next month on the profits of a deal he had made with United Steels. Hundreds of thousands of these Americans were going over to Europe on the results of this magic multiplication table which turned cents into dollars and dollars into gold, while in Europe, according to the *New York Times*, the foreign exchanges were weakening still further and trade was dwindling, and poverty was spreading, and people were starving, and Governments were staggering under their burdens of debt.

Michael watched the people in the front line of stalls. There was a group of young American women with two white-haired ladies. They were very beautiful, thought this Russian violinist. There was something very fresh and exquisite in their youthfulness. Their faces were like portraits in silver point by the artist Helleu. It was a pity they over-painted their lips, he thought. There was really no need for that. It made their mouths too hard and vivid.

A young American boy came in with a lady who looked like his mother. He was a tall young animal, with a simple, good-looking, humorous face, and a little kink in his fair hair.

"American youth is very attractive," thought Michael. "These boys and girls haven't been through revolution. They haven't starved. They haven't slept on railway platforms among huddled crowds of refugees. They all have motor-cars—three to a family. They have more money than is good for youth, perhaps."

He had been told about petting-parties and other wildnesses of American youth in this time of great prosperity. In the orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera House there was a gulf between him and personal contact with these young men and women. It was only later, when he left the Opera House to

become leading violin in the Hotel Plaza, on a word of recommendation from his own conductor, that he established friendly relations with the younger set in New York society.

LXXVII

As leading violin at the Plaza, Michael made many American friends. At first he felt an unreasoning prejudice against these people who came in to dine in the great room where he played above the stairs in this luxury hotel which was like a palace.

The white-haired mothers and elderly business men gave parties to groups of the younger married set, or to boys down from Harvard and Yale with their sisters and friends. There was the usual traffic of a great hotel. It was crowded with rich business men from American cities, and many foreigners. Their pocket-books were stuffed with dollars. There was no limit to their wealth. They were the merchant princes of the New World, the lucky gamblers at the roulette-tables of Finance, the manipulators of money, the dollar-barons who fought in commercial wars between the great trusts, the masters of mass-production, the exploiters of labour, the machine-minders of this mechanized civilization.

In the mind of a Russian refugee playing to them as they sat at their tables, there was at first a resentment against them.

“Why should these people have so much wealth?” he thought, looking at them over the body of his violin. “Why should they succeed to all the treasures of the old European aristocracies who are now beggared? Why should these American business men and their women wallow in all this luxury when princes and princesses of the Russian Empire have to live in bed-sitting-rooms and work as shop-assistants?”

This resentment passed. He was softened towards them by the warmth of the recognition which came to him from some of these people.

The first time that happened was when he had played Schubert’s ballet music from ‘Rosamunde’. Very close to him was a party of young people being entertained by an elderly American and his wife. They clapped suddenly and loudly, and the applause was taken up at other tables. Michael smiled and bowed slightly. His eyes caught those of a young American girl, very tall and slim and fair. Her eyes seemed to send him a message of thanks and admiration. He looked in her direction when he played again — ‘Chanson sans Paroles’ by Tchaikovsky. She neglected her company to listen to him.

“That pretty girl thinks more of music than of her meal,” thought Michael. “It’s possible that she has a soul.”

People whom he would not have credited with any understanding of music, or any feeling for its emotional appeal, spoke to him as they passed. Hard-faced business men, as he had thought them, spoke kind and friendly words.

“We greatly enjoy your playing, sir. My wife and daughter come here sometimes especially to hear you.”

Elderly women whose faces he came to know, talked to him on their way out from dinner.

“You played that last piece divinely. Thank you!”

“It’s too bad of us to chatter while you give us so much of your talent. It seems a shame!”

“I certainly enjoy your rendering of the ‘Kreutzer Sonata’. I feel I must come to tell you so!”

These people were kind. He had begun by playing to fulfil his contract, quite indifferent to his audience, utterly aloof from them. Presently he was aware that some of them really listened now and then and responded to what he gave them. They began to send up little notes, asking for a repetition of things he had played a week or two before. The spirit of music touched them. They were generous in their praise.

They were not mean with their wealth. He received offers of private engagements for receptions in Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue, and was well paid. Perhaps there was a touch of snobbishness about it. They knew he was Count Michael Pavlovitch Markov. They liked to print that on their programmes. They liked to introduce him by his title, though he dropped it as far as possible in private life. That didn’t matter much to a man who had slept in the *Nacht Asyl* of Berlin, and gone hungry in the streets of Paris, Vienna, and Constantinople. He had moments of rage because, at these private receptions, people talked when he played, and because he felt humiliated when his hostess slipped a little envelope into his hand as payment for service. But that sense of humiliation was, after all, due to his own vanity and foolishness.

He made good American friends. They invited him to their apartments. He sat in artists’ studios in Greenwich Village, and found young men and women who believed in art and beauty and talked immense nonsense about it extremely well. He dined in small restaurants with Americans who worried about the state of the world, and were strangely critical of their own country, and keen to do something to increase the happiness of mankind by some kind of magic. He was ‘vamped’—he learnt that word—by young

women of great beauty who adored his grave face and moody eyes and took him to parties where he developed severe headaches and became very confused in the general din of conversation, so that presently he could not remember who was his hostess or what young woman among all these American beauties with red lips and bare arms had brought him into this company. The white-haired American ladies of New York appealed to him more than the younger women with whose vivacity he could not compete, and of whom now and then he was greatly alarmed. The elder women had motherly instincts, and he wanted to be mothered.

One of them took him on one side and spoke confidentially.

“I expect all this clatter is rather scaring to you. Coming from Europe—which seems in a bad state—I dare say we all seem too prosperous over here.”

He was surprised that she had read his thoughts so clearly. He admitted that he was ‘scared’. He admitted that he was overwhelmed by so much luxury.

He had some of his wealth within his reach. Like his friend Danilov, he might have married and become the paid husband of a rich lady. She was indeed one of the richest young women in the United States, her father being one of the masters of mass-produced goods.

He made shoes for the world. He was an idealist who believed that by making shoes for the world he was increasing the sum of human happiness, as well as his own business. *See that your children are well shod* was the slogan which had made his fortune. He would never rest satisfied, he said, until the Chinese, the Arabs, the slum children of European cities, the barefoot infants of peasant states, were all wearing Kimmick shoes.

“It’s the first sign of civilization,” he told Michael over his dinner one night. “In my judgment, Count Markov, sir, each footstep along the road to progress may be counted by the number of shoes and boots worn by mankind in its struggle for decent human conditions. We have a very long way to go. I’m striving to increase the pace of progress not only in the United States but in many other countries. Yes, sir! One of these days even Russia may be a great market. I shall be glad to turn my attention in that direction as soon as the Bolsheviks have modified their political fanaticism.”

Michael was not surprised by this idealism in relation to boots and shoes. He had heard similar ideals proclaimed in the smoking-cars of American trains by salesmen of ‘neck-wear’, ladies’ ‘undies’, gramophones, automobiles, fountain-pens, cash-registers, and safety-razors. They were all idealists who believed with the faith of missionaries that they were

advancing civilization by carrying their goods to increasing numbers of customers and putting up a heroic fight against a mysterious enemy called 'sales resistance'. It was the faith and gospel of the Rotary clubs. They were greatly helped in this good work by the blessings of the hire-purchase system and by the beneficence of brokers who were creating new wealth by some wizardry in Wall Street.

In this house on Fifth Avenue Michael saw the full glory of American prosperity. John Howard Kimmick of Middleboro, Massachusetts, lived in a palace which would have seemed magnificent to a Doge of Venice. It was furnished with the priceless treasures of the Old World now sinking into poverty and decay. He had a library containing a rich collection of early printed books, and the finest collection—except one—of Persian manuscripts. In his dining-room were masterpieces by Reynolds, Gainsborough, Hoppner, and other English artists of the eighteenth century. In his drawing-room were pictures by the Italian primitives. On the wall at the side of his staircase was an immense tapestry which had been in the Hofburg of Vienna. He had a spinet once played by Marie Antoinette and a bureau used by Richelieu when he made the map of France.

"My daughter Suzanne—we used to call her Susan—has very great admiration for your genius, Count," said Mr. John H. Kimmick. "She's crazy on music. Well, I dare say it's better than being crazy on other things. Suzanne is a very intellectual young woman and I've no complaint against her. I want to make her happy. Yes, sir!"

"She has all the surroundings of happiness," said Michael, looking round at the dining-room in this palatial house.

Mr. Kimmick sighed.

"There's nothing in the sale-rooms I can't buy her if she wants it. But I'm not sure that I can buy happiness. My son Edward has just come down from Harvard and seems a bit restless and uneasy with himself. He has two motor-cars and a generous allowance, but I can't say he seems satisfied. The other night he told me that he thought life was a miserable illusion! He's attracted by that creed called Communism, which seems to me another name for madness and murder, though I may be wrong."

"It's the generous instinct of youth," said Michael. "The young mind revolts against inequality and what seems to be injustice. I've had many conversations with your son, and I see that he has charming qualities, sir."

"Glad to hear you say so, my dear Count," said Mr. Kimmick heartily. "But I wish Edward would get down to the shoe business and stop dreaming of world Utopias."

“A dream is always necessary to youth,” said Michael, talking like an old man.

“Let’s join the ladies,” said Mr. Kimmick presently, looking down the table, where he had many guests. “Suzanne, of course, will want to hear you play, but hadn’t the courage to ask you.”

“I shall be delighted to play,” said Michael.

Suzanne was the girl, so tall and slim and fair, who had applauded him one evening in the Plaza when dining with a party. She had spoken to him several times. It was no doubt due to her interest that he had obtained an engagement at a great reception in her father’s house. She had asked him to play the ‘Chanson sans Paroles’ by Tchaikovsky. They had had a talk together and she had been very charming. Then she had introduced him to her brother, Edward, a typical young Harvard man, with a fine athletic figure and good-looking face and very pleasing manners.

“I would like to hear all about Russia one day,” he had said. “Is there any chance of your being able to lunch with me?”

Michael had lunched with him in a Hungarian restaurant. They had talked about Russia and the Revolution for several hours. Before long they had established a real friendship, and Michael found this young American very intelligent, very simple, and very sympathetic.

“I want an object in life,” he said one day when they were sitting over their coffee in a cafeteria near the Metropolitan Opera House. It was noticeable to Michael that this rich young man chose restaurants and cafés of the humbler kind.

“What kind of an object?” asked Michael.

Edward H. Kimmick laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“I know that sounds absurd! I’m not going to talk Rotary stuff to you, Markov. But I don’t want to develop into a lounge lizard or a gilded youth. My father wants me to go into his factories and keep on making shoes and finding new markets for them. Harvard spoilt me for that! Besides, it’s only another way of saying that my father wants me to go on piling up dollars. What for? I suppose I shall come into a million or so one day. What am I going to do with it? Buy another motor-car? I think I shall go to Europe and wander around a bit, trying to earn my own living and finding out what life really means in the rough. I might go hungry, but it would be a useful experience. I might make a book about it.”

“It needs great courage,” said Michael. “I’ve been hungry. It isn’t pleasant.”

“I dare say not,” said Edward Kimmick. “But I’m over-pampered. It wouldn’t do me any harm.”

It was Edward Kimmick and his sister who introduced Michael to many of the younger people in New York. They belonged mostly to the literary and artistic set, Edward having been editor of a Harvard magazine and having a secret ambition to write one day. Suzanne, who had once been Susan, had romantic ideas of Art with a tremendously capital A, and no use at all for the fashionable crowd of bright young things who were not interested in that aspect of life. Michael found himself in apartments belonging to ex-Harvard men and their sisters, who produced meals at odd hours from refrigerators and made dangerous cocktails in their bathrooms, and had a habit of sitting on the floor, and threw cushions at one another when argument became noisy, and discussed love, sex, art, books, and life with untiring enthusiasm and youthfulness.

“They’re all children,” thought Michael, sitting among them. “I’m a thousand years old compared with these young people who are playing a game of life without knowledge of its grim realities.”

They talked very lightly about the ideals of Communism and the success of the Five Years’ Plan, as though Russia under the Soviets was an earthly paradise. That was because it shocked their fathers and mothers and seemed very daring and liberal-minded.

“There’s something beautiful,” thought Michael, “about their freshness and eagerness. Among them I feel old and cynical and devitalized. They are wonderfully dynamic. They are very amusing. They haven’t grown up. Perhaps the United States hasn’t grown up.”

They were very polite to him and sometimes very hearty, slapping him on the back and calling him ‘Count’. Sometimes he played to them and they sat on the floor and listened with exemplary quietude, followed by tremendous enthusiasm.

“I’ll say that’s fine! That makes me feel good. That certainly is the best thing I’ve heard in years.”

Suzanne sat at his feet with her pretty chin tilted and adoration in her eyes. She had a passion for Schubert, which to Michael’s mind was inconsistent with her affection for Broadway melodies. He was alarmed now and then when she called at his apartment in West Seventy-sixth Street, unaccompanied by her brother, and sat curled up on his sofa with a careless disregard of showing her stockings, and with a humorous awareness of his shyness.

“You have such shy eyes, Count Markov!” she told him once. “And there’s always a look of sadness in their depths. That’s what makes you so romantic. But why are you shy, and why are you sad?”

“You think I am romantic?” he asked, with an embarrassed laugh, dodging her direct questions.

“Compared with Edward’s friends, you’re as romantic as Siegfried. American boys are very commonplace, don’t you think?”

“I find them very charming,” said Michael. “They’re younger than Russian men of their own age. They haven’t suffered so much.”

“Tell me about your sufferings,” said Suzanne. “I shall be terribly interested.”

He described some of his experiences, and she was terribly thrilled.

“It’s time you had someone to look after you,” she informed him decidedly. “You ought to fall in love with a rich American girl who would relieve your mind of all anxiety about the dollar side of life. How’s that for a good idea, Count Michael, sir?”

Michael laughed.

“It would be a surrender of my soul. I should hate to be a kept man!”

She thought it would be a perfectly good contract. The girl would provide him with dollars. He would give her his name, his genius, and his charm. The girl, she thought, would do rather well for herself by this exchange.

“Let us talk seriously,” said Michael.

“Tell me about your love-affairs,” suggested Suzanne.

Michael was secretive about his only love-affair, which was not for public discussion.

“Pardon me,” he said, “but I have to get ready for my work this evening.”

“I’ll drive you to the Plaza,” said Suzanne. “Give me a cigarette and I’ll be as good as gold while you get into your evening-clothes.”

He was driven to the Plaza in an enormous car which this girl handled with the skill of a professional chauffeur in a tide of traffic which was always terrifying to a Russian refugee.

Suzanne was very attractive, he thought. If he had been a cad he might have made love to her. He might have accepted the offer which was in her pretty eyes more than once. If his spirit had been unfaithful to Vera

Sokolova he might have sold himself for a high price. But he was not made that way. He was a faithful lover to one woman.

LXXVIII

VERA came back from one of her tours. She looked tired and worn when she laid her head on Michael's shoulder.

He drove her to a room she had taken in the Waldorf Astoria. It was a bower of flowers from Russian and American friends who knew of her return. The telephone-bell rang many times and there were greetings to this dancing lady, spoken in Russian and American and French. A number of New York reporters and camera-men were waiting for interviews and photographs of a girl who had been famous in the musical revues of Mr. Sam Harris. She was in the news. She would be on the front page with next day's murders, suicides, society scandals, European affairs, and Hollywood gossip.

Michael put his arms round her.

"At last!" he said. "Oh, my dear! I have been very patient and very impatient."

"We must answer that telephone," said Vera.

He answered the telephone. The reporters were getting even more impatient than this impatient lover.

"What is the date of our marriage?" asked Michael. "How about next Wednesday?"

Vera had her face against his cheek.

"Alas! Next Wednesday I begin rehearsing at the Music Box."

The telephone-bell rang again. The publicity agent of Vera Sokolova was anxious to have a few words with his victim.

"Vera," said Michael, "I have been very long without you. Every day has seemed a month, and every month a year. I've wandered about this city like a lost soul. My heart has yearned for you."

"Poor Michael!" said Vera, holding his face in her hands. "My very faithful lover!"

The telephone-bell rang again. Michael had no conversation with her until the reporters, the photographers, and the publicity agents had had their innings.

"You're terribly famous," he said, when the last of them had left.

“It’s all very tiring,” said Vera, “but I’m vain enough to like it. It’s the reward of hard work and great fatigue.”

“You will be terribly rich,” said Michael. “That’s a dreadful idea. How much are you going to earn by your new contract, did you say?”

She mentioned many dollars, and he gave a cry of astonishment and dismay.

“After all, I shall be a kept man! My own poor earnings will be negligible. What will you do with it all? How will you spend it? To whom will you give it away?”

Vera laughed at him with her head on his shoulder.

“A lot of it will go in frocks. With care we may be able to save something for the time that is bound to come. Then they will say, ‘That dancing-girl is getting scraggy. These old dancers are very unattractive. Give us a fresh young girl with the bloom of youth!’ We must make a nest-egg, Michael, while the sun shines.”

“Where shall we make our love-nest?” asked Michael.

They made it in Seventy-sixth Street, among other Russian refugees, most of whom were present at their wedding. It was a very fine affair, with several princes and princesses and a grand duke and duchess, who were wage-earners in New York. The New York Press made a feature of it, though the news editors were rather doubtful whether Russian princes and princesses and counts and countesses had any news value. They were getting rather cheap. They were getting rather tiresome. In a little while they were of no account whatever because history had passed beyond them and their titles meant nothing at all in American society. There were new interests, new excitements, and presently a new touch of terror.

LXXIX

MICHAEL and Vera had good days in the United States. They were lovers even after a year of marriage. They had a spiritual comradeship which had begun one day in a shed on the island of Prinkipo, and perhaps before then, as two children in Czarist Russia. They had also bad days, when Michael's misery was intense. There were many partings which tore at their hearts. Vera went on tour with Mr. Sam Harris's musical comedies, in which she was the leading dancer, while Michael accepted engagements in Boston, Philadelphia, and smaller cities, when he played in symphony concerts and built up his own reputation as a violinist of distinction.

"This life is unendurable!" he cried a hundred times. "Why should we be torn apart like this? Why do we go chasing dollars when we might be living quietly together as man and wife in some place of peace and with children in the house? All this is false. We're travelling on separate roads. They're not leading towards happiness."

"It's our destiny," said Vera. "We must follow our stars."

Michael wished his star to remain stationary.

"How long must I let you be torn from my arms by these infernal agents and directors? Why not live with me quietly in New York, and let me earn enough for both of us?"

"I owe something to the people who find me beautiful," said Vera. "I should be denying my own soul if I gave up dancing."

"It's greed," said Michael. "You're greedy for dollars. You're greedy for fame. You don't believe in love. You let your dancing come first always."

"Would you stop playing," asked Vera, "even if we came into a fortune? Would you put away your violin and let your bow be idle?"

He confessed that he could not do this.

"It's different with you," he argued. "This dancing exhausts you. It's a terrible strain. Why not rest now and then? You have so many dollars in the bank that I get frightened sometimes when I think of them. Your investments keep mounting up. Your money multiplies by magic arithmetic in which I see something diabolical. It can't be good. It can't be honest when the rest of the world is poverty-stricken."

Vera put her fingers through his hair and laughed at him.

“You have the Slav soul, Michael! You must have some cause for melancholy and some grievance against life. You’re miserable because our American friends advise us how to invest our little savings and increase the size of our nest-egg by the magic of American prosperity. How do you like this new frock of mine, well-beloved?”

It was a frock which had cost a great number of dollars. There was not much of it. Michael kissed his wife’s bare arms and found her beautiful.

Vera was away again one night when Michael put himself into evening-clothes and took a taxi to the house of John Howard Kimmick in Fifth Avenue. Suzanne had found a more romantic lover than even this Russian refugee who had resisted her friendly advances. She was engaged to a young English peer who had an old title, two ruined castles, and a bed-sitting-room in Chelsea. Her father was quite pleased about it and was giving a party in honour of the event. Michael had been invited and was taking his violin, knowing that it would please Suzanne if he played for her. He would play Schubert and a little thing he had composed himself and dedicated to this young woman, for whom he had a real affection.

He was a friend of the family. There was no need to send in his name. The English footman who opened the door to him no longer looked upon him as a hired musician who might steal the spoons.

It was ten o’clock in the evening before the taxi-cab stopped outside the big house. Michael was vaguely surprised that it did not have to take up a line behind many magnificent cars. It was alone.

It was a night in October of a day afterwards remembered by all Americans as one of the tragic days in history, a day of incredible, fantastic, and frightful disaster. Michael was unaware of this. He had not seen an evening paper, having been shut up in his room practising as usual.

The driver of the taxi-cab was a Russian. He recognized Markov and spoke a few words to him.

“There’s been a crash on Wall Street. It looks serious.”

“It doesn’t worry me,” said Michael carelessly. “I don’t understand these things. How are you, my dear fellow? Doing well, I hope.”

“Wall Street went mad,” said his friend. “There have been terrible scenes. Millions of people are ruined. I’m anxious about my small investments.”

Michael laughed.

“Another newspaper sensation. Surely you don’t get excited about newspaper headlines?”

“It’s more than that this time,” said his Russian friend. “It looks as though the bottom has fallen out of American prosperity. We shall be starving again soon. There’s no safety in this world. The devil is having a fine time with humanity. The world has gone mad. It’s a lunatic asylum.”

“Courage, my friend!” said Michael cheerfully. “Let us keep as sane as we can. What’s the figure on your clock?”

He paid his fare, touched his hat, and stood outside the door of this place on Fifth Avenue where he had kind friends.

The door was opened by the English footman.

He stared at Michael doubtfully.

“The party has been called off,” he said. “Most of the guests have called themselves off, as you might say. The telephone has been ringing somethink awful.”

“What has happened?” asked Michael. “Nobody is ill, I hope?”

The footman stared at him again.

“It’s this smash in Wall Street,” he answered. “Everything has gone bust, as far as I can make out. Mr. Kimmick is upstairs feeling bad about it. I thought he was going to have a stroke. I had to help him into his study.”

“I had better go,” said Michael. “Kindly let them know that I called.”

He was leaving when young Edward Kimmick came out into the hall and caught hold of his arm.

“Hullo, Markov! Don’t go. Come and have a drink.”

He added a few more words, after a queer little laugh.

“It may be the last you’ll get in this house. Something has gone wrong with American prosperity.”

He led Michael into the smoking-room to the right of the hall.

“I don’t understand,” said Michael. “What has happened, my dear friend? I’m in complete ignorance. Tell me, I beg of you.”

Edward Kimmick sat on the padded seat of a fireguard and flicked the ash off a gold-tipped cigarette.

“There’s been a collapse in Wall Street,” he said. “The ticker can’t keep pace with the break in prices. It’s an almighty smash, old man. It’s hell with the lid off.”

“I don’t understand,” said Michael. “You talk in parables and American phraseology. Tell me in elementary English.”

Edward Kimmick looked at him and laughed, but his laugh was nervous and excited.

“It’s not easy to put it into A B C. Perhaps none of us will understand it ever. These are high mysteries. But as far as I can guess, I should say that we’ve all been gambling with money we didn’t have and the luck has turned against us. We’ve been investing in securities which weren’t secure, and lending money—billions of it—to countries without credit. My father is upstairs with a sick headache and looks a broken man.”

“I’m bewildered,” said Michael. “I don’t understand. Is it impossible to help me to understand?”

Edward spoke more seriously.

“We’ve all been living in a fool’s paradise. It looked good while it lasted. We gambled in futures. The banks advanced money which didn’t exist for a merry game of make-believe. Wall Street brokers dealt in dreams. Now somebody has decided that the game is up. They’re unloading everything. It’s the little people who will be thrown to the wolves. They always are. But this time Big Business seems to be scared. ‘The captains and the kings depart.’ ”

“You alarm me,” said Michael. “I shall be deeply sorry if your father is touched by this. I have a great respect for him.”

Edward was grim for a moment. Perhaps he was anxious in spite of his light-hearted and fantastic words. His hand trembled slightly as he held his cigarette.

“I’m afraid the old man has been putting his money in Wall Street like most others. He tells me he is hard hit. As far as I’m concerned I’m not worrying.”

Suzanne came down. She looked as though she had been crying over her abandoned party, but she smiled at Michael when he kissed her hand.

“This isn’t exactly a house of mirth,” she said. “Father is very sorry for himself. So am I. I was looking forward to a nice party, but all our guests made excuses like those in the Bible.”

“I’m sorry,” said Michael.

“Father says we’re all going to be poor,” said Suzanne a little later. “But poverty, after all, is a relative term, and father always exaggerates. I can’t say I feel very frightened. Poverty may be rather amusing for a change.”

“I know all about poverty,” said Michael. “It’s not amusing if it lasts too long.”

He knew all about poverty again, and he was not amused, though he had complained to Vera that she was getting too rich.

He caught her in his arms one night when she became faint for a moment and swayed as though about to fall. It was after the third crash on Wall Street, when many banks had to shut their doors and millions of people in the United States knew that they had fallen from great heights to the bottom of the ladder again after climbing so hard and so high towards a mirage which had disappeared.

Vera Sokolova had danced herself tired in the United States and had put all her hard-earned savings into a nest-egg which shone like gold in her dreams. Kind friends had looked after her dollars, buying shares and securities which, they said, were 'sure things'. Now the bottom had dropped out of the nest and the golden egg had fallen into a great abyss. This dancing-girl had nothing left but her grace and courage, and for a little while her spirit drooped and fainted.

"We begin again," said Michael. "We have to face poverty again. After all, it's an old comrade. Why should we be afraid?"

Brave words! They were perfectly sincere. Secretly he believed that poverty would bring Vera closer to him. That would be a great consolation.

But he was alarmed when he lost his last engagement and could not get another. Restaurants dismissed their orchestras, cabarets closed down. Musicians joined the white-collar brigade, hardest hit in this time of depression. Russian refugees in New York who helped to cater for the luxury trades—it was their chief talent—were cut off from their means of livelihood when luxury was abandoned for a time by the American people. Some of these Russians starved again in New York; as they had starved in Constantinople, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and many other cities to which they had fled, caught always by the encroaching tide of ruin into which the world was sinking. Michael and Vera did not starve. But they were undernourished now and then in lean years whose wretchedness was redeemed only by the courage, the good humour, and the charity of American friends who had been rich, and now were hard hit by adversity which lasted too long.

LXXX

THE years that followed—these recent years of history—were crowded in many countries with passion, folly, intolerance, and fear. Fear was strongest. It crept into the minds of the peoples and became a dark shadow over their lives, spoiling the hopes of youth and the tranquillity of old age. It was fear that dominated the policies of statesmen and thwarted the intelligence of the common crowds. It was a fear which prevented any reasonable arrangements of peace and led to the despair of those who had striven for them with passionate hope that there might be enough intelligence in the human mind to prevent the suicide of their own civilization.

Common sense went down before this fear. Nations overburdened by debt due to a world war which had left a track of ruin in its wake and ten million dead on its battlefields, made ready for another. Trade was crippled. The economic condition in many countries was desperate. Unemployment was a spreading plague except in the armaments factories. Those were doing well. They were very busy. Presently they began to work double shifts. Presently in every industrial country there was an intense activity in the manufacture of big guns and every weapon designed by cunning brains to destroy human life with supreme efficiency. For defence only, of course. "It is our duty," said the politicians, "to see that our nation is strong in self-defence. A strong army is the surest guarantee of peace. In a world of bandits the unarmed citizen is at the mercy of the law-breaker." Unanswerable logic but a surrender of all better ways, a reassembling of all the machines which had been scrapped for a time after that other war which had not been prevented by the massed powers for defence.

Intolerance became a new gospel in millions of minds. Youth, upon which so many hopes of elder minds had been set—"they would create a new and better world"—"they would draw away from the old hatreds and stupidities of the old crowd"—"they would march forward to a new era of human brotherhood"—dressed themselves in different-coloured shirts and beat up any fellow-citizens who refused to acknowledge their articles of faith, their badges and slogans. They spat upon the idea of liberty for which their forefathers had struggled and died. They denied the right of free speech. They repudiated the use of intelligence. They proclaimed their belief in brutality. They had no use at all for such weakness as pity or charity. They put their faith in the cudgel, the rubber truncheon, and the ungloved fist—best of all, in the machine-gun, which is unanswerable as an argument.

For two thousand years of history, European civilization had fought its way through tyrannies towards forms of democratic rule in which the individual might have some measure of expression and some claim to his own liberty of life. Revolutions had been fought and won for this cause. It had had its martyrs and heroes. They had suffered death and imprisonment and torture because of their demand for a free Parliament, a free Press, and freedom from tyrant rulers. All that had been a mistake, it seemed. These men had died and suffered for a false creed, for a silly illusion, for an absurdity. Democracy was a failure. Parliament was a talking-shop for half-wits. "Liberty," said Mr. Mussolini, "is a stinking corpse."

Men had worshipped some spiritual idea of God according to their standard of intelligence or inherited belief. For all the span of the Christian era they had been taught to live, as far as human frailty would allow, in the love of Christ. European culture, all its traditions of beauty and art, had been inspired by the Christian spirit, often violated but always an ideal of perfection.

Another mistake, another illusion, another absurdity according to the new leaders and their recruits.

Three men in Europe repudiated the old faith and the old system. They substituted the worship of the State for the worship of the God. And they were the State, more infallible than the Pope. They were the law-makers. They had no respect for the individual. What is one ant in the ant-heap? The individual must be subordinated to the State. No minority would be tolerated. The Totalitarian State was the new order of Life. The individual would be blindly obedient to the State, and to its Leader in whom the State was centred. Otherwise he would forfeit his life. He would have no opinion, no mind, no liberty but as decreed by the State. He would be trained, disciplined, formed in body and mind from youth upwards. He would be fed and made strong for service in the State, in peace and war.

Three men in Europe had this power over the people they ruled. Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini. In their hands lay all power of life and death. If one of them had a rush of blood to the brain, if one of them touched a bell, millions of young men, trained in that blind obedience, would enrol in any way of death. That was the cause of fear which crept into many minds during recent years of history. It would be very dangerous if Mr. Hitler had a rush of blood to the brain, or if Mr. Mussolini made a speech from the balcony of the Palazzo di Venezia and called upon his Blackshirts to shed their blood on other people's soil.

One day Mr. Mussolini made that speech. It was very awkward for everybody, especially for the Ethiopian people, who had no gas-masks. It increased the state of fear. The British Fleet steamed into the Mediterranean. There were rush orders for naval shells in Sheffield. There was fear in every Foreign Office lest this affair in Ethiopia—this repudiation of the League by one of its members—this undisguised act of aggression—should lead to another world war. “When is it coming?” asked young men of military age. It seemed rather futile to get busy over a career which might be interrupted next week by the call to arms and death in the air.

LXXXI

ONE of the men who watched this history and helped to record it as it passed was Oliver Alden, special correspondent of the *Morning Chronicle*, who came home now and then to a cottage in Surrey where his wife Betty—a friend of Russian refugees—waited for him with a small boy who had come into this troubled world without knowing as yet anything about its uncertain future. He was just old enough, that boy, to find life extremely amusing because a round thing called a ball had unexpected playfulness, because the sunlight played little tricks on the wall above his cot, because birds sang to him in the trees when he lay resting after a midday meal, and because he had made friends with a dog who licked his face and with a woman who provided all his needs.

Perhaps it was the presence of this small boy, named Peter, which made Oliver Alden more anxious than he need have been about the state of Europe.

“Do you think we ought to have brought Peter into the world?” he asked Betty more than once. “It seems a bit unfair. It’s a most distressful world, and there’s no sense in it. Here we are giving this brat a good time, pretending that everything is lovely, telling him fairy-tales—it’s about time I went up to him—while the manufacturers of poison gas are getting busy and the sky is becoming confoundedly crowded with bombing-aeroplanes. It makes one feel dishonest when one looks into his candid eyes! What I saw in Berlin doesn’t reassure me.”

Betty reassured him by her serenity and cheerfulness.

“Peter is having a good time all right. It’s no use meeting trouble half-way. I hope he’ll live to a ripe old age. What did you see in Berlin?”

He had seen remarkable things in Berlin on recent visits. He had seen a fire which burned down the Reichstag, and the trial of prisoners accused of that crime—one of them a poor doped half-wit whom everybody believed to be the tool of men who had used the Reichstag as a bonfire to frighten the German people into a renewed terror of Communism.

He had seen the victory of a man named Adolf Hitler, who had screamed and shouted his way to the chieftainship of all the German tribes. He denounced the Jews as the authors of German humiliation, and had a strange mystical faith in an ‘Aryan’ race which must be kept pure from the taint of alien blood. He despised Parliamentarism, free speech, and the liberty of the

individual. He believed in one-man leadership, and that man himself. He was a little man with a tooth-brush moustache and eyes which seemed mild and gentle until they were lit by an inner flame of passion.

There was some mesmerism in his speech and eyes. No German could listen to him unmoved. Masses of Germans listened to him and were carried out of themselves by some racial and primitive passion beyond reason. He spoke all the things which were in most German minds. He promised them all those things for which they yearned: an end of humiliation in Europe, freedom from foreign control and penalties, the right of youth to work, the old pride of the German folk, a new unity, a new discipline, and a new power. He was a miracle-worker. He broke down the hostility and division between German States. He united Protestants and Catholics by his magic words, repeated endlessly: The German Folk . . . The German Folk . . . The German Folk. Beginning with a few brawls in Munich taverns, with a small group of ex-soldiers and comrades—men of no power and of low-class character—he had beaten all other parties at the polls and was now supreme dictator of German destiny. His comrades of the Munich beer tavern took over the offices of State and became his bodyguard, and his battalions of young Brownshirts—his ‘storm-troopers’—pushed out their elders from every place and proclaimed the gospel of youth and intolerance under the sign of the Crooked Cross. With the zeal of the *Unteroffizier*, young bullies beat up the people for whom their leader had such hatred and contempt. Jews were flogged and bruised by rubber truncheons, pushed into concentration camps, and terrorized in a campaign of brutality.

Oliver Alden, who had seen these things, described them to his wife Betty.

“This Jew-baiting business is sickening. I’m sorry about it because it will revive the old hatred against Germany.”

Betty smiled at him over a piece of needlework—some garment for that small boy Peter upstairs.

“You’ve always been a bit pro-German, Oliver. Father will say, ‘I told you so!’ ”

Oliver Alden shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

“Yes, all the old Hun-haters will wag their heads again. They use Hitler as a bogey to frighten us into another war-scare and stop the chance of peace. France is already in a state of blue funk and hysteria. They forget that Poincaré was the father of Hitler. That fellow would never have come into power unless France had tried to put Germany into a strait-jacket.”

Betty listened. She was a good listener, especially to Oliver, who was good enough to discuss world affairs with her while she was thinking about the state of his underclothing and household accounts, and the late delivery of some things she had ordered for his supper.

“No good worrying!” she said cheerfully. “I’ve no doubt the world will go on being extremely foolish.”

Oliver worried. He had an uncomfortable feeling that this peace in a Surrey garden, this happiness with Betty, might be invaded by the foolishness of the world. In any case, it was his job to worry as a writer in the world’s Press, a chronicler and interpreter of current history. He had been an advocate of fair play to Germany. He couldn’t eat all his words—thousands of words in the *Morning Chronicle*—because German bullies were beating up the Jews. There was more in it than that. There was something splendid—he was bound to admit—in the resurrection of hope in Germany which he had seen so stricken and despairing. If England had been defeated in war, that renaissance of youth’s spirit would have been regarded as a glorious return to all that England meant in history and tradition. Hitler—that mesmerist—had worked this miracle for Germany. But it was all mixed up with madness, and fanaticism, and false philosophy, and a denial of intelligence. It was all very dangerous. It was all very worrying.

Betty—that watchful wife—noticed that he looked worried again when he came back from Geneva where he had been attending the Disarmament Conference, which had been dragging on year after year without result. Betty hated the very name of it, because it took Oliver away from her again, and because she had no patience with so much talk. Men talked so much! They talked such nonsense!

“Worried again, Oliver?” she asked this naval-looking man whom she had first met on the quayside of Sebastopol when the Reds were coming close. If it hadn’t been for him she might have been ‘copped’. It might have been very unpleasant.

He came in from the garden where he had been tying up some windswept plants.

He grinned at her, knowing that she was jibing at him. Perhaps she had heard him groan while he was doing a bit of work outside the drawing-room window.

“Germany has walked out of the League,” he said. “We went back on our pledge to give her equality of status. We wanted to palaver for another eight years before we did a damn’ thing about it. So the Germans have walked out, and I don’t blame them.”

“Does it matter very much?” asked Betty, trying to take an interest in this situation, but secretly joyful that she would have Oliver home again for a few weeks or a few months.

“It’s a mortal blow to the League, old girl,” said Oliver. “I don’t like the look of things. Germany will rearm because we’ve failed to disarm. We’ve missed the boat again.”

“Well, anyhow, supper’s ready,” said Betty Alden who had once been Betty Browne. “Cold sausages, my dear. Sorry!”

“I like cold sausages,” said Oliver Alden.

He put his arm round his wife’s waist and laughed.

He had married a woman of common sense. She refused to worry about these things. She refused to worry about anything. She had given him Peter and made him happy. What a fool he was to worry about world affairs when he had this little private paradise!

LXXXII

OLIVER was in Paris, where there was some trouble in the Place de la Concorde. It had been brewing for some time on account of a scandal called 'The Stavisky Affair' which had shocked the French people by laying bare the corruption of many politicians who were deeply involved in this financial swindle and its sinister melodrama. The parties of the Right were using it as one more proof of the depths of shame into which France had sunk under the leadership of Radicals and Socialists. Paris was placarded with posters by the Croix de Feu and other Fascist bodies calling upon the French people to sweep away these criminals and to support organizations which would bring back law and order and honour and national discipline. Young men of good class were out in the streets selling a paper called *L'Action Française*, which denounced the Deputies and the Ministers of France as assassins, bandits, thieves, and traitors. Passion was rising high. Some explosion was near at hand.

Oliver Alden walked from the Paris office of the *Morning Chronicle* to the Place de la Concorde and was aware that he had no chance whatever of getting as far as the Chamber of Deputies, where he had arranged for an interview with M. Herriot. A vast crowd was moving slowly forward, always under the pressure of other crowds converging upon the Place from streets leading down from the Grands Boulevards. They seemed to be crowds of middle-class citizens—clerks, Civil Servants, professional men, and ordinary bourgeois of all types. But among them were young men belonging to the Fascist groups, and here and there gangs of rough-looking lads who were probably Communists or defenders of the Left. Some of them began to tear up the railings round the trees.

Presently, rather far from where Oliver was wedged among this mass of French humanity, there seemed to be some scuffling and ugly incidents. Some of the Gardes Républicains, who were trying to press the crowds back, were pulled off their horses. There were fights with bodies of gendarmes who were using their batons. Some women in the crowd began to scream. Some girls fainted. Men fought with their elbows for breathing-space. The pressure was becoming dangerous and unbearable. The vast concourse in the Place de la Concorde was being forced towards the bridge which led to the French Chamber. It seemed to be heavily guarded by French troops. An incessant shout went up:

“*À bas les Députés!*”

Suddenly on the other side of the bridge someone in authority gave the order to fire. No one ever knew who gave this order. But everyone heard the volley that followed—everyone except those who were killed by it. For a second there was a stupefied silence. Then screams rose. There was a howl of rage and terror. There was a wild-beast noise in the Place de la Concorde. It became a jungle in which panic fought with fury.

“This is damned unpleasant,” said Oliver, speaking aloud in English. He had no wish to be killed in the Place de la Concorde. His mind travelled very quickly to a cottage in Surrey where a small boy would be playing in the garden and a woman named Betty—his wife—would be tossing a ball to him.

There was another volley of rifle-fire, another silence, then screams again.

“*C’est un massacre!*” said a Frenchman by his side, who was panting as though he had a heart attack.

Oliver found himself carried off his feet. He was in a tide of terror which swept him back from the Place de la Concorde. Afterwards he remembered dimly that he had used his fists to smash back men who were trampling down a young girl—a *midinette*—who sank nearly to the ground. He pulled her up and held her for a few moments and then lost her when she was dragged out of his arms by this mad stampede. Someone had scratched his face. He was bleeding. Other people were bleeding more seriously. They were bleeding to death. He saw them being carried into the Restaurant Weber in the rue Royale, which was being used as a casualty clearing-station. He never knew how he got as far as the rue Royale. He never knew why a black-bearded Frenchman struck him across the face, nor why he had his arm round a boy of sixteen or so who was crying. It was all very confusing. It was all very unpleasant.

Something else happened along the Boulevard des Italiens. In the crowd a woman was being rough-handled by a group of young men belonging to the Croix de Feu. They were pulling her about like a rag doll. A man was trying to defend her, slashing about with a stick, until he was hurled to the pavement with a crowd of men on top of him.

“What’s it all about?” asked Oliver, trying to thrust his way nearer to the woman who was being roughly handled.

A man answered him.

“That woman was a friend of Stavisky and his wife. She was always with them. The man is Isvolsky. He was in this Stavisky affair. He ought to

be in prison. He is one of the bandits.”

Oliver tried to fight his way nearer. He knew that woman. He could see her face now. He could see how they had torn her hat off, pulled her hair about. They had torn off one shoulder of her frock. She was a girl he had met years ago on the island of Prinkipo. It was Olga Isvolsky, to whom his wife Betty had once been governess. She had been a beautiful creature. Now she looked like a woman of the streets in a drunken scuffle.

Oliver thrust his way forward with fists and elbows. He saw red. He hated cruelty to women, and this one had been loved by Betty. She was Michael’s sister.

One of the Fascists of the Croix de Feu gave him a blow in the face and he staggered back. There was no need of him anyhow. A body of gendarmes was on the scene. They were using their batons. One of them jumped on to a taxi-cab and ordered its driver to halt by the kerbstone. Oliver saw Olga Isvolsky driven away in it. She had her arms about a man who looked stunned and senseless. It was Isvolsky, the director of the Palais des Folies.

Before going back to England Oliver called on Olga Isvolsky. She lived in an apartment overlooking the Bois, and very elegant. Isvolsky was not there. He had been arrested for complicity in *l’affaire Stavisky*.

“All this is very stupid,” said Olga.

He was astonished by her beauty and by her courage. She bore no sign of that struggle in the crowd. She wore a frock which revealed the lines of her lovely body, and her hair was tidy again—that straw-coloured hair upon which the sun had glinted when he had seen her barefoot on the island of Prinkipo as one of the Russian refugees to whom he brought rations.

“I’m afraid this will have to go,” she said, looking round her room. “Constantin has been ruined by Stavisky. I expect we shall have to economize for a little while.”

“I saw you in the crowd,” said Oliver presently. “I tried to help you but couldn’t get near.”

He saw the smile fade from her eyes and lips for a moment.

“They were like wolves,” she said. “It wasn’t amusing.”

She was sorry for Madame Stavisky, whom she loved very much. They were keeping her in prison, and her children wondered why she had left them.

“Why not come to England?” asked Oliver. “Betty would love to have you.”

Olga Isvolsky shook her head and smiled.

“I must wait for Constantin,” she said. “We quarrel very much. He has no moral sense. Sometimes I wish to leave him. But now that he’s in trouble I have a little pity for him, and—it’s strange, isn’t it?—we love each other. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” said Oliver, “I understand.”

Olga Isvolsky sent her love to Betty.

“Tell her not to think too badly of me,” she said, with a little laugh. “Tell her that I am still in search of happiness, and very much amused with life, even when I weep.”

For some reason she wept a little then.

LXXXIII

“I WONDER what happened to Tania,” asked Betty on another evening when Oliver had come back from a foreign journey. He had been to Vienna, arriving just too late for hot news. There had been something like civil war in Vienna—something unpleasantly like civil war. The Heimwehr, who were Austrian Fascists, had attacked the Social Democrats, who were defenders of the Republican Constitution. Those great blocks of workmen’s dwellings which had been built as a splendid example to the world had been gutted by shell-fire. Oliver has seen the destructive effect of this bombardment and had talked with some of the people who had gone through this experience of terror.

“Tania?” he asked. “Michael’s sister, do you mean? Was she in one of those buildings? Good God!”

“In the Goethehof,” said Betty. “Don’t you remember? She was a woman doctor there with her Jewish husband. She helped to bring little Social Democrats into the world and looked after them when they were old enough to cut their fingers or have the mumps.”

“The Goethehof caught it rather badly,” said Oliver thoughtfully. “I talked with some of the people there. They were still shell-shocked.”

Betty dropped a small pair of socks which she was mending and gave a little cry.

“Poor Tania! I hope to goodness she’s safe. It’s not really a nice kind of world, is it?”

“It’s a mad world,” said Oliver.

Tania had been happy with her Jewish husband, Dr. Seligmann. She had taken her degree in medicine and was devoted to the children of the Goethehof, where they lived in quite a nice apartment. She belonged to two worlds in Vienna and crossed the bridge between them from time to time. Aunt Seppi and Uncle Rudi were always pleased to see her, though they grieved because she had married a Jew and worked among Social Democrats who were tainted by Russian Communism. That was the charge against them by the middle classes of Vienna, though even Uncle Rudi agreed with Tania that most of them had become respectable bourgeois citizens who were glad to get cheap apartments in these great blocks of dwellings and didn’t bother their heads much about politics. They were much more

bothered about the cost of living and the poverty of their wages and the naughtiness of their children, and the love-affairs of their young daughters.

Tania never talked politics with her aunt and uncle, though now and again she accused her Cousin Karl of intolerance and the bully spirit. She made herself pleasant to her uncle's friends and visitors, among whom were Prince Starhemberg, who came to tea now and then, and little Dr. Dolfuss, whose charming wife was a friend of her Cousin Sophie.

Dr. Dolfuss was a very good Catholic and disliked the Social Democrats because of their refusal to accept the dictatorship which he had set up in Austria after the dissolution of their Parliament. He wanted to found a Christian State in the spirit of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclicals.

Tania watched this little man with amusement, and enjoyed Uncle Rudi's latest stories about him. They went the round of Vienna and were a cause of laughter even among his critics.

"Dr. Dolfuss is busy today and refuses to see any callers. He is walking up and down underneath his bed, thinking out a new Constitution."

"What is that tortoise down there?" asked a foreign attaché, looking down from a balcony at a procession of soldiers.

"That's not a tortoise!" was the answer. "It's Dr. Dolfuss with a steel helmet on his head."

"There has been a plot against the life of Dr. Dolfuss. A mouse-trap was discovered in his bedroom."

He had a dozen nicknames. 'The Pocket Dictator.' 'The Miniature Metternich.' 'Hop o' my Thumb.'

Tania had the chance of listening to his conversation in the drawing-room of her uncle and aunt after his return from an European tour. He gave a lively description of his visit to England for the World Economic Conference. He had had a wonderful reception and the English people had made a great fuss of him.

He was quite modest about it all, and seemed amused by this hero-worship.

"A charming little man!" remarked Uncle Rudi. "In that small body is the courage of a lion. And he has delightful manners. It's astonishing to think that his people were humble peasants."

Tania agreed about his charm, but she had one reservation.

"I'm sorry he dislikes the Social Democrats so much. They're quite harmless, poor dears, and I love them because they love me."

“Their leaders write pestilential nonsense in the *Workman’s Journal*,” said Uncle Rudi, twisting his moustache, which was now getting white. “That man Otto Bauer is a red-hot Communist who still proclaims the godless gospel of Lenin.”

Tania laughed.

“He tries to earn his salary! Nobody pays much attention to him, except some of the younger hotheads—those boys of eighteen who belong to the Schutzbund, which, after all, is the defence force of the Republic.”

“Dr. Dolfuss has disbanded them,” said Uncle Rudi. “A very wise step. I don’t approve of private armies.”

“Why doesn’t Dr. Dolfuss disband the Heimwehr?” asked Tania. “Why should Prince Starhemberg march about with his battalion of Fascists?”

Uncle Rudi sighed.

“It’s all very dangerous,” he said.

There was no immediate sense of danger in Tania’s mind. She was pleased with life and shared her husband’s work and ideals. He believed in peace and human brotherhood. He wore himself thin in devotion to the sick and suffering. In the evenings his sister Rachel played to them in their apartment in one of the wings of the Goethehof which hummed with the life of working-class families. Tania had read many of those books which aroused her admiration and awe on her first visit to his room when she had arrived in Vienna as a Russian refugee, and had spoken to this man on the kerbstone during a procession of the Heimwehr. They were still lovers, and he was a man of gentleness and fine delicacy of mind, and liberal thought, contemptuous of all this political agitation in Austria. Lately it had agitated him unduly.

“Sometimes,” he told her one night, “I’m a little nervous when you spend the evening with your people, Tania.”

There was a tone in his voice which startled her for a moment.

“Nervous of what, my dear?” she asked.

He laughed uneasily.

“It’s very absurd, I know, but I get alarmed sometimes. Austria is a powder-magazine. Vienna is seething with political passion, and we are becoming the cat’s-paw of the Great Powers. Mussolini is in touch with Dr. Dolfuss and Prince Starhemberg. I hear things which alarm me a little. Some explosion may happen. I should be very frightened if it happened when you were away from me. My heart would bleed to death if we were separated.”

Tania tried to reassure him by her laughter.

“Why should you conjure up these imaginary horrors?”

“I’ve been talking nonsense,” he said humbly. “My nerves are on edge.”

It seemed to her nonsense until one afternoon when her Cousin Karl said something very strange to her, something very frightening.

He was in his uniform as an officer of the Heimwehr, and when he came into the drawing-room where she had been alone for a few minutes, she noticed that his hand trembled as he took a cigarette out of a silver box and lit a match for it.

“Aren’t you well, Karl?” asked Tania.

“Perfectly well,” said Karl, who had grown into a handsome young man since Olga had laughed at his schoolboy passion for her. “What makes you ask that?”

“Your hands are trembling,” said Tania. “You look very pale, Karl.”

He denied that he was unwell, but presently, after a brooding silence, he spoke abruptly.

“Tania! I’m pledged to secrecy, but I feel compelled to give you a warning.”

Tania looked up from a magazine she was reading.

“A warning?”

A sense of fear crept into her mind because of his gravity.

“If I were you,” said Karl, in a low, urgent voice, “I wouldn’t go back to the Goethehof tonight.”

Tania stared at him. What was he talking about? What was the mystery behind his words?

“My husband is there,” she answered angrily. “My home is there. What do you mean, Karl?”

He gazed at her intently, and with a strange look in his eyes—a look of fear.

“I can’t speak frankly,” he said. “I’m an officer of the Heimwehr. But I advise you—I warn you—not to go back to the Goethehof tonight—or tomorrow. Sleep here, Tania, in your old room. I beg you to do so.”

Tania dropped her magazine, and her face became white.

“What is going to happen?” she asked. “What do you know, Karl?”

He shrugged his shoulders and was silent. The silence seemed to last a long time before he spoke again.

“I can’t tell you. But you’re not without intelligence. You know the state of things in Vienna. You know that Prince Starhemberg has been to Italy, don’t you, and that we have made a pact with Mussolini? Things are going to happen. . . . I’m talking like a fool. . . . If you repeat a word of this, I’m lost. My honour will be forfeited. I’m telling you these things because I want to save you from very great danger, my dear Tania.”

Tania sat very still, as though thinking deeply, as though unable to move. Then she moved.

“I must go back,” she said nervously. “I must go back to my husband.”

Karl, her cousin, grabbed her arm in a strong grip, but she broke away from him.

She was in the Goethehof when the first shots were fired. No one knew, or ever will know, who fired those first shots. On the roof were groups of boys armed with rifles. Others were searching feverishly for secret stores of arms, which they failed to find. The leaders of the Social Democrats had been arrested before they could give any orders or plans to resist an attack by the Heimwehr. There was fighting in Linz and other towns. Detachments of the Heimwehr were advancing on the municipal dwellings in Vienna. A siren shrieked out. It was the signal for a general strike, but it was heard and obeyed only by a few sections of the workers. They were all bewildered now that their leaders were in prison. Boys belonging to the Schutzbund, their volunteer army, were summoned by their troop commanders. They were now on the roofs of all these great blocks of workmen’s dwellings which had been built on the outer Ring. In Floridsdorf across the river there was fierce fighting.

Tania’s husband, Dr. Seligmann, had been attending to a sick child when the first shots were fired. He went up to his own apartment. Tania was standing very still, listening to the noise of rifle-fire, with her head raised and a dead-white face. She heard his key in the lock and his footsteps coming down the passage.

“Are you frightened?” he asked gravely, when he came into the room.

“Yes, I am frightened,” she told him.

He held her in his arms for a moment very tightly. She knew that he was trembling.

“I also am frightened,” he said. “I am frightened for your sake, Tania, and for all the people in this block of dwellings. Great God, is there no sense

in the human mind? Is there no pity among men? These dwellings are crowded with women and children.”

As he spoke, a bullet came through one of his windows and struck a mirror over the piano, making a star-shaped splinter.

Dr. Seligmann turned very white.

“This may be death,” he said in a low voice.

“I’m afraid,” said Tania.

Dr. Seligmann raised both her hands to his breast.

“My dear wife,” he said, “my little Tania, we’ve been very happy together. I give you a thousand thanks for your comradeship and love.”

“I’m afraid!” said Tania.

Another bullet smashed its way into their room and buried itself in the piano, cutting one of its strings, which rang loudly as it snapped.

“Mother of God!” cried Tania, who was a Catholic though she had married a Jew.

There were other noises besides the sound of rifle-shots. There was the noise of screams from women and children. This sound of screaming came up to them through open windows round the central courtyard.

“This is terrible!” said Dr. Seligmann. “Those poor women! Those poor children!”

Suddenly he snatched at Tania and dragged her quickly and roughly out of the room.

“It’s safer in this passage,” he told her. “Our room is a death-trap.”

From the landing below came the tortured scream of a child. Tania looked over the stairway and gave a cry.

“That’s little Rupprecht! They’ve hit him.”

Suddenly she seemed to lose her fear because of this child’s need of her, and ran down the stairs.

“Tania!” cried Dr. Seligmann. “Tania!”

His wife was on her knees over the body of a small boy who had a bullet through him. His mother was weeping beside him. Suddenly she put her apron over her head with a cry of anguish.

On the landing were groups of women and children and old men. They were all shouting and screaming.

“We must get busy,” said Tania.

She inspired her husband with her own courage which had followed fear. These terror-stricken people clung to him as though he might avert the bullets which smashed through their walls.

It was very little he could do for women shot in the breast and lungs, or for children horribly wounded. There was nothing he could do for a small boy shot in the heart or for the mother who held his dead body in her arms.

It was later that the worst happened. The Heimwehr had brought up their artillery. Among its officers who directed the fire of these guns upon the Goethehof was Tania's Cousin Karl. When he gave the order to fire his face was blanched. But his voice rang out harshly, "Fire!"

Little Dr. Dolfuss was taking tea with Cardinal Innizer. They were discussing the constitution of a Christian Social State.

All that night in Vienna Tania's uncle and aunt sat listening to the scream of shells, as afterwards they wrote to Michael, their Russian nephew and Tania's brother.

"This is terrible!" said Uncle Rudi a thousand times. "This is a crime!"

He was an aristocrat, but he was also a gentleman. He hated the politics of Social Democracy but loved the people of Vienna, and was chivalrous to women and children.

There was no sleep in Vienna that night. In all the apartments and private houses professional and middle-class people sat up listening to that scream of shells and the heavy, dull thuds of their explosions. Many of them were numbed and sick with terror.

"The Devil laughs," said a young man in an attic-room which had a view from its windows over the roofs and chimney-pots of Vienna. He stood at that window looking at flashes in the sky and listening to the sound of machine-gun fire.

A girl cried to him from the bed.

"Fritzy! I think I'm dying. Hold me in your arms."

It was not a good night for women who were going to bring children into this world. It was a bad night for all the people of Vienna—that city of music and laughter.

At Floridsdorf, beyond the bridge over the Danube, young men were lying in their own blood, dead or dying. They had taken up positions in some factory-yards from which they kept back the Heimwehr troops by machine-gun and rifle-fire. They had only two machine-guns, but these were enough to sweep the line of approach. They retreated under gun-fire, but

those who were not wounded or killed took up new positions farther back. Other small bodies of men were on the roofs firing at the Heimwehr troops. One of Tania's friends, a young clerk who came in sometimes for a musical evening, could see what was happening down below his little room where he stayed for thirty-six hours. He could see the wounded lying on the pavement. He could hear their screams of agony. They were mostly boys of eighteen or so. There was no Red Cross work on either side. No doctors came to attend the wounded.

Tania's husband was the only doctor who did something for the wounded in the Goethehof. Many of them had crawled down to the cellars. Every now and then a shell burst in one of the rooms, leaving nothing of a working-class home but a heap of plaster and a rubble of bricks. Artillery-fire is very effective in destruction.

Tania and Dr. Seligmann went back to their own rooms. They were faint for food. Was it a week ago since they had gone downstairs or only one night of terror?

Rifle-shots and machine-gun bullets had smashed some of the pictures and mirrors. The walls were pockmarked with bullet-holes.

"We mustn't stay here," said Dr. Seligmann. "I'll grab something to eat. We must go down into the cellars. You look exhausted, Tania, my beloved."

"I'm rather tired," said Tania, "and I'm frightfully hungry. There are some sausages in the little cupboard."

"Lie down on the floor," said Dr. Seligmann. "For God's sake don't stand up, Tania."

She lay down on the floor quite suddenly. It was when a machine-gun bullet struck her in the left breast.

"Oh, my God!"

Dr. Seligmann gave a loud cry and went down on his knees and kissed the face of his dead wife.

LXXXIV

DURING these years which led to yesterday, there was a steady arrival in England of political refugees. They had escaped from the new era of intolerance which was established in many countries of Europe, or from revolutions on the Right, or on the Left, which resulted in the suppression of democratic ideas, free speech, and the old liberties of the individual.

The Russians of the old régime had been the first to arrive. They were followed very rapidly by Italians of the intellectual classes—old men, mostly, who had upheld the liberal traditions which had made Italy a nation, or younger professional men, lawyers and doctors, who disliked the rule of the cudgel by Blackshirt boys and the threat of life-imprisonment on unpleasant islands. They breathed more freely in England, even though they lived in bed-sitting-rooms at Barnes or Brixton and the poorer suburbs. A few Spaniards with very high titles took houses in South Kensington and changed pesetas into English pounds. They were visited from time to time by a restless man who had the underhung jaw of that Philip of Spain whom Velasquez had painted. He had ruled a people as restless as himself who after his going could not settle down to any kind of order between anarchy and street fighting and the burning of churches and the stripping of nuns and the killing of prisoners, on both sides.

Then German refugees began to seek English air, which they found better for their health. They were mostly Jews. They said ‘Good morning’ instead of ‘Heil Hitler’, but had been good Germans all their lives and looked on Germany as their Fatherland. Mr. Hitler didn’t think so. He disliked Jews. He thought they were contaminating the German race. He thought they were responsible for the downfall of Germany in time of war, and afterwards in the time of broken pride, bad money, and a spreading Communism which some of them had favoured. They had been knocked about by young Nazis. If they had escaped this treatment, they had been bullied and humiliated, and cut off from German citizenship, unable to carry on their business, or trade, or profession. It was a black mark against a good German citizen to buy in Jewish shops or to employ a Jewish lawyer, or to take advice from a Jewish doctor. How then could they live, these Jews? Their intellectuals as well as their traders were regarded with abhorrence by Germans who were contemptuous of intellectuality—very weakening, they thought, to the Nordic man, who should rely upon the vital urge of primitive and tribal instinct untainted by the decadence of reason. Not even genius

could be acknowledged if it were Jewish. Einstein had to go, with crowds of other scientists. The laws of physics could not be interpreted by Jewish minds. Biology must be co-ordinated with Aryan philosophy, as in Russia, under Stalin, it had to be interpreted according to Soviet ideology. In Germany, as in Russia, by Nazidom as well as Communism, history had to be written, drama had to be revised, science had to be regulated, in strict conformity with the State creed. It was intolerable for good Nazis to listen to an orchestra conducted by men like Bruno Walther, or to sit patiently when a Jewish violinist or a Jewish pianist dared to play music written by one of his own race. It was, of course, a pity that so much music had been written by Jews. But there was always Wagner.

The Jews of Europe who had been persecuted for more than a thousand years and by a miracle of endurance and racial vitality had survived as a people throughout innumerable *pogroms*, stared out upon a world into which intolerance had returned after a brief respite in history. Once again they had to flee from persecution. Once again they had to find some country in which they could have sanctuary.

Among the Jews who came to England with this hope was the famous violinist Rosenthal. He came one day with his mother, an old lady who had been living quietly in Frankfurt while her son travelled about the world or gave recitals in Germany. At his last concert in Munich there had been an unpleasant scene. Groups of young Nazis had made a demonstration against him and howled him down when he stood on the platform playing the ‘Tales of Hoffman’ and other pleasant things. Rosenthal had gone on playing for a time, as though deaf to all this clamour. Presently he lowered his bow and put his violin under his arm and came to the edge of the platform. It was when his pianist, a young man named Meyer, stopped playing his accompaniment in the middle of the ‘Hungarian Dance’ by Brahms, stricken by fear because of those shrieking boys.

“Jew . . . Jew!” they shouted, with a stamp of feet.

Rosenthal smiled at them through his gold-rimmed glasses, and spoke to them.

“You silly boys! How foolish of you! Does it matter whether I am a Jew if I play good music to you? My Jewish fingers play the right notes. What, then, is your quarrel with me?”

Only a few heard his words. They threatened to storm his platform.

Some people in the audience were distressed. In answer to their protests they had their heads punched and there was a free fight in the concert-hall.

Rosenthal was visited that evening by a police officer who advised him to leave Germany forthwith.

“It’s best for all Jews to leave Germany,” he said. “It’s best for them and best for Germany. *Heil Hitler!*”

“Good evening,” said Rosenthal politely. “I suppose I may allow myself twenty-four hours to pack up a few things and to obtain a passport and visa for my mother in Frankfurt?”

“That is reasonable,” said the police officer. “We are not unreasonable, even to Jews. *Heil Hitler!*”

It was Oliver Alden who found a home for Rosenthal in England. He received a letter from Michael, who was still in New York, begging him to find a quiet house in the country for the great violinist. He was not happy in Austria because of political passion there. He much desired to come to England.

Vera and I are also coming to England shortly [wrote Michael]. If by any chance you could find a house for Rosenthal in your neighbourhood, we should have the joy of meeting our dearest friends. Vera has received an offer to dance in the Russian Ballet which begins a season in London a few months from now. We look forward to this visit with the greatest delight. We have had hard times in the United States during these years of depression, whose darkness has been lifted somewhat by the inspiring leadership of Mr. Roosevelt, for whose courage and spirit both Vera and I have a fervent admiration. We shall weep when we leave a country where we have made many charming friends and received great kindness beyond all words of gratitude. That is inevitable. But England calls me very strongly because of you, my dear friend, and because of your dear wife, for whom always I retain a great devotion. It will call to me even more when I know that Rosenthal has made his home there. I beg of you to find him a house in which his gentle spirit may be at peace in your beautiful countryside and among your people, who are friends of liberty. Rosenthal isn't a poor man, he tells me. He has saved enough to live in comfort. You need have no anxiety about that. Meanwhile Vera and I send you our warmest affection. I am still overwhelmed with grief for Tania.

This letter, written in rather formal English, and very Russian in its emotion, excited Betty. She knew nothing of Rosenthal beyond what she had

heard of him from Michael and what she knew of his genius as recorded on black discs which Oliver put on the gramophone from time to time. But the idea of seeing Michael again was a pleasure to which she looked forward without disguise.

“It will be fine to see Michael in England,” she said to Oliver.

Oliver laughed, and kissed her behind the ear.

“I shall be jealous of that Russian,” he told her. “I believe you have a secret passion for him.”

Betty blushed a little over the book she was reading.

“Don’t be absurd, Oliver! I was his governess. I’m old enough to be his aunt.”

They found a furnished house for Rosenthal. It was a little old farmhouse for which the timbers had been cut in the time of Queen Elizabeth. Many generations of yeoman farmers had lived here and stored their harvests in its big old barns. Their footsteps had hollowed out the stone on the threshold. Their elbows had polished the doorposts and the panelled walls. Their spirit still haunted the rooms where they had sat with their children looking through casement windows to the tower of a village church which had Saxon work in its walls and a Norman nave. There were some good rooms in it. One of them was a big square room with a great fire-place and an open hearth.

“This might make a good music-room for Rosenthal the Jew,” said Betty.

The house was to let furnished by its present owner, who, like many others, couldn’t make farming pay in a country which imported two-thirds of its food supplies, in spite of quotas and tariffs and subsidies.

Betty and Oliver met Rosenthal and his mother in London and motored them out to the old farmhouse, thirty-six miles from Charing Cross. Rosenthal sat in the back seat next to the old lady who treated him as a child and every now and then put a knitted scarf tighter round his chest. They spoke together in German while Oliver drove with Betty next to his wheel. It was a day in June. Beyond the jerry-built houses along the by-pass roads they came into Surrey lanes where the hedges were white with may-blossom the ditches were tangles of wild parsley and meadowsweet and foxgloves growing tall.

“*Wunderschön!*” exclaimed Rosenthal in the back seat.

He stared out at the landscape on either side of the Hog’s Back. There was a vista of patchwork fields before they dropped into the old village of

Compton and then drove past heaths and commons into a twisting lane again.

“I must make a melody about this,” said Rosenthal in English. “It’s like an old song. What peace is here! What tranquillity! England has escaped the passion of Europe where foolish boys fight each other and where, when one talks, it is necessary to look over one’s shoulder lest there should be a police spy or an unfriendly fellow with sharp ears.”

Betty turned in her seat and smiled at him.

“Welcome to England!” she said. “It’s fairly safe!”

At the journey’s end, which led into the yard of the old farmhouse, Rosenthal stepped out of the car and gave his hand to his mother—a thin-faced old woman with parchment-coloured skin and humorous eyes.

“I hope you’ll like this old house,” said Betty. “It wants a bit of doing to it here and there, but it’s quite comfortable.”

Rosenthal stood on the threshold of that house whose step had been worn by yeoman farmers of England. He looked very foreign and very Jewish. It was a strange chapter of history which had brought him here.

“This is old England,” he said. “Here I shall find peace. I thank you, my dear friends.”

He turned and spoke a few words to his mother, who was staring about her with watchful eyes, and he raised her wrinkled hand to his lips and led her into the house.

Michael and Vera came to England a few months later. Rosenthal had invited them to stay with him, and Betty met them at Guildford station. They came out hand in hand, a porter following them with their luggage, and among the usual crowd of passengers on the fast train from Waterloo there were some who turned to glance at this couple, so obviously foreign, so unlike the usual type of humanity as they knew it, so queer-looking.

Michael wore American clothes, but he still looked like a Russian refugee, a little haggard and a little anxious. His face was thin and his cheekbones gave him away as a Slav to those who knew that race. A lock of hair fell over his forehead as usual, and he held himself very straight and walked like a man who had been a soldier. Vera looked frail and small by his side, and she had a grace in her movements, a kind of rhythm, which marked her out strangely from the young women of Surrey with their boylike strides.

Betty made a dart at them as they stood outside the station looking lost.

“Michael!”

Michael pulled off his hat and a smile lighted up his eyes and all his face.

“Is it all right, Oliver?” asked Betty.

He grasped her meaning and laughed.

“Get on with it!” he answered.

Michael was kissing her emotionally on both cheeks while Vera clung to her hand. Then Oliver took his turn, and found himself in the arms of this Russian, no longer the boy who had stood on the quays of Sebastopol overwhelmed with joy at the sight of ‘Miss Browne’.

“We are happy to be in England,” said Michael.

He kissed Oliver again on both cheeks, to the astonishment of the porter and other lookers-on.

LXXXV

OLIVER and Betty went up on many evenings to the old farmhouse where Michael and Vera stayed with Rosenthal for a time, and afterwards when they motored down from London where Vera was dancing in the Russian Ballet and Michael was playing for the B.B.C.

Rosenthal had many visitors who came to pay him homage or—too often—to plead for help because, as Jewish refugees, they were in desperate need of it and he was generous. Famous people—mostly musicians—motored down to the little Surrey village and in broken English asked their way to Valley Farm. Kreisler came. Toscanini came. Bruno Walther came. There were strange vibrations in the old beams of this Tudor farmhouse with its open hearths where logs were burning even on summer nights chilly to foreign bones.

On many evenings Oliver and Betty listened spellbound to magnificent music. Kreisler played once far into the night, and his bow drew forth deep and poignant notes which seemed to come from the depths of human sadness, and then with a charming humour and gaiety which was like the laughter of fairy folk.

Rosenthal listened with a pleasure which shone in his dark eyes.

“Good!” he said. “Good! That’s fine, my friend. Only you can play that.”

Rarely would he play himself, and then only when he was pressed. He liked to listen to Michael playing on his old instrument.

“You make it speak,” he said. “You have put your own soul into my old fiddle. I didn’t know it was as good as that.”

Michael smiled over his violin—he was playing a Nocturne by Chopin—and only answered when he had lowered his bow.

“It was made by a good carpenter,” he said, quoting Rosenthal’s own words in Berlin when he had made this generous gift.

“Yes! Yes!” cried Rosenthal gaily. “It’s all in the woodwork. You and I, my friend, must be grateful to a good craftsman.”

Oliver looked round sometimes at these faces in a panelled room in which there was a nicker light because of the burning logs and a few candles. It was an extraordinary phase of history, he thought, which had brought these people here—these exiles who had escaped from Terror of one kind or another. What was happening to civilization that these talented and

harmless people should have to flee from their own countries for sanctuary in England? Sometimes he was almost afraid to read the headlines in his own newspaper. Germany was rearming again. Mussolini had defied the League of Nations and broken every pledge of honour by his attack on Abyssinia.

There was no more talk of disarmament. The League of Nations had failed. Collective security was now only a phrase. With Germany and Italy out of the League and France hesitant about sanctions against an aggressor nation with whom it had signed a secret pact, there could be no collective action and no security. The policy of the British Government was dictated by fear—fear of a rearmed Germany, fear of another general war, fear of hungry and dissatisfied nations jealous of British colonies. They had made a frightful mess of that Abyssinian affair. They had put British prestige into the mud by a pitiful surrender to Italian threats. Now Great Britain was rearming. The munition factories were working overtime. A race in armaments had begun again. France had made a military pact with Russia again. It was the old formula which had led to 1914. Nothing had changed—not even the minds of men who remembered the carnage of the last war. It all looked pretty hopeless. People talked of war next year. Young fellows in the village wanted to know when they would be called up. They didn't like the prospect of it, but seemed to think it inevitable. That thought of inevitability was creeping into the minds and speeches of English statesmen. That was the most menacing thing of all.

Michael was playing again, but not loud enough to drown another noise. It was the noise of aeroplanes flying over this Tudor farmhouse, as they did most nights now. They were practising night-flying from Borden camp or some place beyond Aldershot.

Oliver moved away from the hearthside, where he had been watching Michael's grave face like a Rembrandt portrait in the flickering candlelight. He went to the window and drew a curtain on one side. He could see little moving stars. They were the lights of the aeroplanes. He could hear the drone of their engines. They were bombers, he supposed. That new war, if it came, would be a war in the air.

Presently Rosenthal stood by his side and spoke in a low voice.

“Yes,” he said, “they fly over this old house every night. They disturb my sense of peace a little, even here in England. Everyone is afraid of war. The world, my friend, has gone mad. This is God's lunatic asylum.”

Oliver turned and answered him.

“Perhaps intelligence may win even now. I refuse to believe in that next war.”

Rosenthal raised his hands—long, thin, delicate hands which had made him a master of melody.

“Here in this room,” he said, “are the refugees of brutality and intolerance which threaten to destroy civilization. I am one of the victims. They howled me out of Germany because I’m a Jew. Yet still I believe, like you, that intelligence will be victorious. Without that hope life would be vain and human reason of no avail.”

“What can we do?” asked Oliver. “Is there anything that the individual may do on behalf of peace—to shove off that frightful menace which is creeping up? I feel impotent. That’s the worst of it—the terrible impotence of the individual.”

Rosenthal took hold of his arm for a moment.

“We are all refugees,” he said. “Even you, my friend! We intellectuals—we few who believe in beauty and art and intelligence—are exiles from a world which believed in liberty and the brotherhood of man. We people who love music and intelligent conversation are surrounded by a spreading barbarism. This room is a little clearing in the jungle where the tom-toms are beating and the young braves are on the war-path.”

“Then you see no hope?” asked Oliver.

“For a little while we are in retreat,” said Rosenthal. “But I do not despair. Beauty is stronger than brutality. Man will emerge from this darkness of the mind. The light is always beyond, though it is dark in the jungle.”

A woman’s voice called out to them:

“What are you two conspirators talking about over there?”

It was the voice of Betty who had once been Betty Browne.

Rosenthal went back from the window.

“We were looking out at the night. There are little stars shining. Play something else, Michael, my dear.”

“What shall I play?” asked Michael. “I feel very Russian tonight.”

“Tchaikovsky’s ‘Humoreske’,” said Vera. “It will make us merry. I will play for you.”

She rose from her chair by the fireside and went to the piano.

For a moment Michael hesitated.

“Tania used to play that for me,” he said. “Poor Tania!”

He stood silent for a moment or two, remembering Tania who was dead.

Presently he played the ‘Meditation’ from ‘Thaïs’ with great tenderness and emotion.

The silence that followed was broken by Rosenthal.

“Good!” he said. “That is the spirit of beauty. Let us worship beauty, my dear friends—the beauty of the soul which is pitiful, and kind, and hateful of cruelty, and very near to God.”

Oliver Alden listened again to the drone of aeroplanes. They were flying very low.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Cities of Refuge* by Philip Gibbs]