

Phyllis Bottome

The
Lifeline

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THE LIFELINE

The central figure of *The Lifeline* is an Eton housemaster who finds himself acting as a secret agent in Nazi Austria. He was an unwilling recruit, frightened—for he had no illusions about what would happen to him if he were caught—and convinced that he was quite unfitted for the job.

He is, however, a proud, quick-tempered young man upon whose personality only the Gestapo has managed to impose a degree of moderation. His headquarters in Austria is a mental hospital, but his mission as a spy takes him throughout Austria and Germany, and the book is full of excitement and adventure in the mountains of those two countries.

THE LIFELINE

PHYLLIS BOTTOME



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The Lifeline

To
LOUISCHEN
of North Tirol

Chapter 1

Mark Chalmers was, as far as he knew, exactly the kind of man he wanted to be. He earned enough money for his tasks; he had done nothing discreditable; women admired him; boys obeyed him; and men of his own age definitely disliked him, unless they had been more successful still; and then they thought that he was a very nice fellow and might go far. But he would not go too far because he was already thirty-six.

The kind of job Mark was on was not greatly to his taste; but his friend Reggie at the Foreign Office was urgent about it, and had offered to pay his holiday expenses if he would undertake it. After all, it was only to take a message quite quietly and unobtrusively, to a man who lived in Innsbruck and then—the message given—Mark would be free to go on with his usual summer climbing in the Dolomites. Still if Mark had not decided to take the message he would not have gone to Austria at all, in the summer of 1938; because nothing outside his own personal life had ever so upset him as the occupation by Germany of his favourite country, stamping out, as far as spiritual values can be stamped out, its charm, its culture and its kindness.

Now there was only Switzerland left, for his favourite summer pastime, and Mark had never liked the Swiss as he liked the Austrians.

The Tiroler Hof, where he was of course staying, was a good hotel, but only Germans and Italians, with an occasional British tourist like himself, now stayed there—no Austrians. The waiters too, were either German or Italian—a curiously helpful, conversational staff, full of praise for the new Nazi regime.

Mark stayed there a week before attempting to give his message. He had his head screwed on the right way, or Reggie would never have hit on him as a messenger; and he wanted to get the pleasant hotel staff quite used to his harmless habits before he paid his visit; then he would feel certain that no footsteps behind him were intentional.

So for a week Mark was up at eight o'clock, and out all day long, with his food in a rucksack swung on his back, looking what he was, the usual British upper-class type—expensive, arrogant, active and harmless. His clothes, his papers, everything he possessed were no doubt duly examined in his absence but betrayed no interesting features.

Nor was it astonishing, though no doubt a pity, that he refused point blank the pleasant company of a fellow mountaineer—a German—who

offered to join him on his excursions.

“Sorry,” Mark said with his clipped Hanover accent, “but I prefer climbing by myself.” Saying “No” politely but firmly was no difficulty to Mark. He was accustomed to saying it to eager boys at intervals, all day long; and he almost always said it pleasantly and without explanations. But the boys saw that he meant it—and so did the German mountaineer.

Mark chose Sunday night at dusk, on his return from a day’s climb, to go to the address Reggie had given him.

He slouched along the empty streets, a little hungry and thirsty, dusty and tired, looking like any other Tiroler on his way home from a day’s hard exertion. The house he wanted was in a narrow street of high old houses, behind the Goldene Dächl. The street rambled crookedly backwards like the movements of a crab, towards the river Inn. The ancient houses leaned across it, so that two long arms stretching from opposite windows might almost have met. The number Mark stopped at, had one distinguishing feature—a little statue of St. Florian set across the doorway holding a remarkably large watering-can with which to put out a solid sheet of flame enveloping a toy church.

Mark rang twice and knocked once as he had been directed to do. There was a long silence, and then he saw eyes looking at him through a grille, on a level with his own. “Herr Martin, ist er zu Hause?” Mark demanded. No motion was made to open the door although the street behind him was quite empty. “I am a friend from England,” Mark added in a low voice. The door opened softly inwards.

There was very little light in the hall, but enough to show to Mark’s astonishment that he was in a monastery, and speaking to a black-cassocked monk.

The door he entered by was shut and bolted before the monk spoke again. “This way,” he said briefly. Mark followed him into the usual visiting parlour of a monastery. No room in the world, except the visiting room of a prison, looks less lived in.

The four square walls contained a few stiff chairs, a dusty desk, and a crucifix. The silence after the monk went out, closing the door behind him, was absolute.

For a moment Mark had the wish—almost the intention—of getting up and rushing out before anyone came back. He did not like professionally religious people, and it seemed to make nonsense of his message to have to

give it to one. But the silence itself hemmed him in. The whole house was without the flicker of a sound, as if whoever was in it, had no need to be noticed—even by himself. It made Mark feel strangely aggressive and uncontrolled—two qualities which were highly unnatural and indeed antipathetic to him.

The door opened as noiselessly as it had shut; a tall vigorous figure of a man stood in front of him. A very virile figure for a habit, Mark thought to himself. The tall young monk had a handsome, innocent boy's face, but with a quality of absolute remoteness unknown to Mark's experience of men. Every boy Mark had known had something or other in common with every other boy; but this young man's clear, colourless face looked withdrawn from the common circulation of mankind.

Yet even Mark, who hated priests and thought them generally frustrated, timid or tyrannical, had to admit to himself that this man on coming into the room brought something extra with him. "I am Father Martin," the priest said, holding out his hand to Mark, and giving him a quick warm clasp. "Do sit down, you look tired."

"I am not tired," Mark said, "but I am just off the Habig."

"Then you must surely have something to eat and drink before we begin to talk," Father Martin said, turning swiftly towards the door. "I will bring you something in a moment!" Almost immediately he returned, carrying a tray with a tall slender bottle of Vöslauer and a plate of bread and cheese. Father Martin made no apology to Mark for the simplicity of the meal, but waited on him with an eager deftness. "Our own vineyards," he said with a pleased air. "We have a house in the wine district. We are Jesuits. Perhaps you are a Catholic as your friend Mr. Wintringham is?"

"No," Mark told him, "I'm afraid I'm not even a Protestant—I'm nothing. You are the first Jesuit—in fact the first monk—whom I have ever met." Father Martin had greeted Mark with the gravity of a strange child. Now as he smiled for the first time, his face shone as if a lantern had been suddenly lit behind his dark wide-open eyes.

"We have a bad reputation with those who do not know us," he murmured, "but eat! but eat! I have been up the Habig myself! He is a deceptive fellow and takes all one's strength. We shall soon know each other better—for your friends are ours. We have the same aim."

Mark frowned slightly. He had no wish to be rushed into any fellowship with a bunch of strange fanatics; nor did he think of himself as a person with

any particular aim; he was only a person with a message.

The monk sat down opposite him, with his hands clasped loosely in front of him, long firm artist's hands, Mark thought to himself, and he was pleased to notice that they were clean and well cared-for.

"The same aim?" he questioned, meeting the monk's friendly but speculative eyes. "Well yes—haven't we?" Father Martin answered. "We know evil when we see it and we both see it in the Nazis. That is why you have come to us, is it not—so that together, we may do something to stop it?"

"Politically," Mark said cautiously, because he thought that, politics limited him to the safe field of inaction, "I do think the Nazi system bad, but this question of being prepared to stop it—well, that's rather a different and much more serious thing, isn't it? My friend Reggie Wintringham simply wanted me to tell you that our Government is anxious—extremely anxious—about the way Hitler's policy seems expanding, and that if you should know of any way in which one of our agents could be more or less securely assisted to remain in this country, so as to study the situation at first hand—well we should be much obliged for any help you could give us!" Father Martin went on looking at him, with eyes that had ceased to smile. "Reggie told me he knew you very well," Mark went on after a pause, "and that I was to tell you he could send you someone you could use and trust as an agent. He would know the language like his own, and if he could be fitted into the situation before Hitler declared war against us—if he really means to have a war, or forces us to by further aggressions—he could remain here during the war, and perhaps send us out messages from time to time. Reggie simply wishes to be—well, rather beforehand with the situation; and I am only his messenger—to bring back any suggestions as to the placing of this person—when and where and how—that you have to offer. Reggie did not want to put anything in writing, and as I have often been here for my holidays, he thought I should be a suitable and unsuspected medium."

"You have often been here?" Father Martin said slowly, after rather a long pause. "It means something to you then—Austria?"

"Well yes," Mark admitted a little warily, because emotion always made him feel wary, and he really felt the loss of Austria deeply. "I am bound to say I am attached to this country. This sudden occupation of Hitler's is like seeing a friend strangled by some ghastly thug! Yes, I do dislike the Nazis very much—I think—I may as well say—that we as a people think this whole absurd set-up here, or in Italy, an atrocious nuisance."

“They are very well trained,” Father Martin observed, letting his eyes drop towards the floor. “You have taken account of that—perhaps in your country, besides disliking them?”

Mark pushed away his plate. He suddenly felt less hungry. “Yes,” he said uneasily, “yes, of course we realize that! But in a sense, it’s easier to train any set of people in a Dictator rather than in a Democratic country.”

“It is not easy to train any people under any system,” the monk said gently, “but by force it is quicker.”

“It’s strange,” Mark said after a pause which Father Martin left unbroken, “how this chap Hitler got his power over a whole nation, and he’s not even a German!”

“In spirit he is a German,” Father Martin said gently, “and it is not strange that he has got this power over the German people. You see, he has had a vision, and it is a vision that they are anxious to share. The Germans are a mystical timid people—what they want is to know that there is something Invincible upon their side. They have never had—for many centuries—the one invincible Power they might have had—God. Now Hitler offers them an army, that is invincible—an army against God. This is a very powerful thing to have to fight, Herr Chalmers—unless you have God upon your own side!” The silence deepened in the hot little room. It seemed almost to jostle Mark, sitting upon his small cane chair, as if there was no room for him and his unprotected civilized certainties. “When there is no very strong conviction,” Father Martin added quietly after a pause, “there is not the strength or even in some cases, the desire to be trained. The Nazis will overrun the whole world—unless there are enough people left who have an opposite conviction! To fight passion you must have as strong—even a stronger passion.”

Mark said nothing. He did not like talking about passion. It seemed to him an indecent word, and as applied to English activities an indecent subject. Naturally he disliked the Nazis—he specially disliked Hitler—they were a nuisance upsetting Europe—threatening an unwanted war upon more or less comfortably seated victors.

Something had to be done about it—but what—and by whom? The speculative eyes fastened upon his own had a strange uncanny power of suggestion; without any words at all, they seemed to prompt in Mark a sudden, absurd flurrying idea—an idea that he might have to do something about it himself. Something more active and personally involving than just carrying a message from Reggie about another man’s job. He put this idea

hastily behind him. "I didn't know," he said hesitatingly, almost defensively, "that—er—religious people got mixed up in these things."

"We take no part in politics," Father Martin answered gravely, "so long as those who govern the land we live in do not interfere with the laws of God. The Nazis *are* interfering with the laws of God—so they have, you see, become automatically our concern. We are the soldiers of God and so they have become our enemies. As to stopping them—well, naturally since they *are* against the laws of God, we believe they will be stopped. But we have a certain responsibility ourselves as instruments. We too, like the Nazis, must be trained to serve what we believe."

Mark dismissed the idea of any Divine interposition as childish; the idea of training was more sensible; but he believed himself to be already trained. He was an Eton master, and the Public School code was one he believed in, and had always practised. Father Martin was like a child, Mark thought, in his unexpected, rather drastic way of looking at things. He took a starting point that would be unobtainable to grown-up persons, as if his eyes were raw to objective fact; stripped clean of any personal pretensions. It was as if convention, good form, and above all the opinions and safeguards of interested persons, had not sullied the crystal clarity of his imagination. His consciousness of a fact—and the fact itself—stood alone, in the cleared space of his intelligence. "I suppose you think that the Nazis mean to attack England," Mark said crisply, with the intention of coming back into a world of maturity—that was at least his own, "and if they do, there are things that it would vitally concern us to know. I do not know what Reggie told you about me. I am a schoolmaster by profession—and of course I have never acted as a spy; and would not be in the least fitted for any such activities."

"One of God's spies perhaps," Father Martin said, smiling his slow enchanting smile. "Children too need finding out! We must see what their opinion of themselves is—in case it is a wrong one, and needs changing. But perhaps children discover more in us than we ever succeed in discovering in them; and perhaps too, sometimes there is more in us that needs changing! I too am untrained in this particular field of political spying—but I have friends, who are wiser than I—and with two of them I propose to put you in touch. The placing of agents—and I may say the choice of such agents is a vital one—it cannot be decided on the spur of the moment, between ourselves as it were. Nor do I think your friend Reggie expected us to make any quick decision—he said, 'You will find Mark Chalmers an excellent person with whom to consult about our plans!'" His eyes rested on Mark with a new watchfulness. He was not trying to find out anything against

him; only to make sure that Mark had something in himself that he would need.

To his dismay Mark found himself blushing, slowly and painfully. He could not remember having blushed since he was a small boy, and had lied to his father, who had—most disconcertingly—believed him. He had now the same unbearable consciousness of shame, as if he had lied favourably—about himself to Father Martin, who would also believe him—and Mark suddenly knew that the favourable version of himself was not true; and that he did not wish to deceive Father Martin into believing it.

Father Martin continued to observe him without comment. “The Nazis will not strike again yet,” Father Martin said at last quietly, “you will have some time—perhaps even a year, to make ready. It depends of course upon how your country treats the Czechs. If you have decided not to stand by them any more than you have stood by us, you will have a few months longer. But you will also lose the Skoda works—the Rumanian oilfields—the route to Baghdad, and of course the finest small army and air force in Europe.”

“But Hitler won’t try to take Czechoslovakia too, will he?” Mark demanded incredulously. “The Czechs aren’t Germans—he has no excuse!” “He will need no excuse. Nor are Austrians Germans, though they belong to the oldest and most cultured part of the Germanic race,” Father Martin said quietly but with firmness. “They are Austrians—but this country is also the threshold of Czechoslovakia. The Nazis stand in the doorway now—the German army on the borders is prepared, and nearly ready to strike. And you think they will not strike? If a girl puts on her ball dress—is it not to go to a ball? Nevertheless you, presumably, Herr Chalmers, can take your holiday in peace. You will be safe—until war is declared. But you will remember—will you not—that no Austrian will ever be safe again, until Germany has been pushed back into her own borders? Our people are now slaves and without any security whatever. Neither of person, nor property, nor what Calderon calls ‘the patrimony of a man’s soul; for the soul belongs to God’. It is this that the Nazis dispute with us!”

“A man must keep his honour by his courage,” Mark said firmly, although as he said it he began to wonder how. Had his own honour been infringed by what the Nazis were doing to Austria, for instance?—or would that only occur if they started the same plan with his own small island; and in any case how was he going to use his courage to defend it?

“Something quite new is happening,” Father Martin said slowly, looking away from Martin, out of the dusty window, into the darkening summer air. “There used to be that way of keeping honour by courage. But courage has ceased now, to be by itself, a virtue. It has to be connected up with other qualities to-day! You do not—if I may say so—have to pay alone. You have to pay collectively—universally—for others, as well as for yourself. You see, it is not you alone—it is your nearest and dearest—or it is innocent unknown people, perhaps by the hundred, whom the Nazis will torture and kill—for one man’s act of courage. You will have to remember that it might be dangerous for these others, for you to be a hero. Courage is still courage—one has only to interpret it differently. It is, you see, what we use it *for*, that matters now! If it is better for the good of our cause that you should seem a coward, then you must seem a coward—and only if courage is required of you, for the *sake* of our cause can you afford to be a hero. It is required of us now to readjust the armour of our virtues, and sometimes even to fight without any armour at all.”

Far off in the distant body of the house, the silence broke under the harsh jangle of a bell.

Father Martin rose to his feet. “To-morrow,” he said, “we will meet again. I will telephone my friends this evening so that they will join us. Please take a train at the Mittenwald Bahn to Seefeld. You will find me at the village post office. But do not greet me—only when I move, follow me. It is enough that you keep me in sight, until we reach some place where I can safely stop for you to catch up with me. Do not expect either to see me in a habit!

“We will go out now—another way if you will follow me. If you have friends here—as I believe you have—remember what I have told you—no Austrians are safe! See them as carefully, as seldom and as secretly as possible. Never use any but public telephone boxes and do not mention names or addresses. We have no army but we are a people at war nevertheless!”

At the end of a long passage, Mark saw a procession of black habited figures passing two by two, into an open doorway. He caught a glimpse of a dim chapel, with red lamps lit before a faintly gleaming altar. Father Martin took him swiftly past the chapel door, but though they passed close to the silent procession, none of the monks looked back at them. They turned down a second, and then a third passage, before Father Martin opened a door that led directly into the street. Mark found himself standing alone close by the river. He felt strangely perturbed and irritated by this interview. He had

thought that once he had given his message, he would be free and need trouble no more about the matter. But Reggie seemed to have involved him further than he had intended. It was as if, from his static, intelligent twentieth-century life, he had fallen into a dark, fantastic, swiftly moving medieval stream.

Were the Nazis really going to go on body-snatching small countries all over Europe, or were the Jesuits for purposes of their own exaggerating and cooking up the whole tiresome business? Of course, war *was* probable, or Reggie wouldn't have sent him on any such errand. But this secret business—this curious sense of a suffocating masked horror about to spring again—was it actual? Had he got to take the priest's word for it? And if it were true—then what part had he—Mark—to play in it? His holiday seemed to have shrunk away from him, into a child's toy. He couldn't just purposelessly climb, in the clean mountain air—for the fun of the thing—with the whole of Europe rocking beneath him—and if Europe, then sooner or later, that small island off it for which he was as its citizen—personally responsible—"the envy of less happier lands". Mark was tired now, more tired than he had admitted, and with a deeper, spiritual fatigue. The Habig he told himself impatiently, had taken all he had; but something, not the Habig, had also robbed him. It was late. To-morrow everything would look differently. Suddenly he heard a shrill ghastly cry—and then another—and another—the road he was on seemed to palpitate and shake with the cruel sound. Mark had barely time to flatten himself against the wall of a house, before a large armoured car shot past him. The blaze of the car's lights showed him a row of machine-guns, and beyond them, the stiff faces of a party of young Nazis—between them they held a stout little man, very neatly dressed, who wore spectacles. Mark caught the gleam on them from the reflected lights. Someone slugged the fat little man and he stopped screaming. The car vanished, and the dust blew back blinding and suffocating, against Mark's face. The exhaust barked itself out, and there was no other sound but the swift flowing little river chuckling at his feet. He turned left sharply, into the lit town. The streets were very quiet, very empty. But there was a tension in the peaceful summer evening. Nobody strolled by, as if they were relaxed or aimless. Each passer-by moved quickly, and with the evident intention of getting home as soon as possible.

The hall porter at the Tiroler Hof was full of kindly concern for Mark. They had begun to be anxious. The manager had inquired. Mountaineers usually got back well before dark. His dinner too, where had the Gnädiger Herr had his dinner? A poor one no doubt! Would he like anything more? Had he seen the evening papers. Such a catastrophe, the sinking of a new

French submarine. The loss of life too—terrible! Mark had not seen the evening paper.

He thanked the German porter, refused food, gave no information as to his own movements, and took the paper up to his room to read. A French submarine lost on its trial trip. With a sudden sense of cold actuality Mark saw Father Martin's intent, unsmiling eyes again fixed upon his own. "Something quite new is happening." Again he heard the deep quiet voice saying: "It is required of each one of us now to readjust the armour of his virtues, and sometimes even to fight without any armour at all."

A little man in spectacles screaming on his way to death. A French submarine sunk. A message which had been delivered but which seemed still to be going on inside his own unquiet mind! What was the link between them? "Oh Lord!" Mark said impatiently, "oh Lord!" It was not a prayer—it was an expletive, and not even a very satisfactory expletive. Nor was it with any feeling of satisfaction that the self-contained, and usually self-complacent, young schoolmaster sank at last into a troubled sleep.

Chapter 2

The day was drenched in light; the near and distant mountains shone like walls of amethyst and rose; but Mark, gazing out into the clear June day, felt a deep inner discomfort.

A man who has early in life adapted his powers with pleasure and success, to a certain fixed code which shows him to great personal advantage, seldom feels any sense of inner distraction. Obstacles in living, Mark had no hesitation in tackling—but to be himself an obstacle to his own living shocked as well as surprised him.

“Am I going to be ill?” he asked himself anxiously. Only once before, when he had fallen wildly, hopelessly in love, and for a very short time, could he remember having this shaken feeling of uncontrollable dismay. It was as if the goal ahead of him, though overwhelmingly desirable, was not within his powers.

There was, however, no special goal before him now and nothing in his life about which he need feel personally unhappy. He had not overdrawn his banking account. His holiday was beginning, not ending. Nobody that he disliked was determined to be with him.

On the contrary it was a fine day; he had already executed his mission, and part of the day at least, he expected to spend in no worse company than his own. His dejection however still clung to him, even after he had eaten a light breakfast and caught the little mountain train that was to take him up to Seefeld.

The second crop of hay was near its cutting. The long grass was brilliant with the last flowers; sheets of pink ragged robin, interspersed with dark columbines and gold and purple heartsease, filled the meadows to the brim. As the train climbed higher, sulphur-coloured anemones waved gracefully above the smaller flowers, while here and there an orchid stood erect and separate; sometimes a delicately carved spray of pure white blossoms with a fragrant scent; sometimes a wickedly natural bee or fly on a short vivid green stem. Vetches—yellow, purple, pink, orange and blood-red—tangled their way through the tall grasses. Marguerites, their gold and white heads clustered together like children planning a game, stood in groups about the

meadows, and in the cuttings, in the cool shadow of a wet rock, a clump of lilies bloomed against a background of blue air.

Mark's eyes moved upwards in restless longing, over the slopes of the mountains. He was going to waste a perfect climbing day he told himself—that must be the source of his discomfort. Here was Martin's Wand, and there across the valley stood Hoch Eder, the highest peak of the group. Mark had climbed this mountain once in a thunderstorm. Never had he felt so small and vulnerable, as on that stark height, where the rain dislodged great stones, and sent them bowling down the mountainside at him. Just beneath Eder, was a curious small nameless pyramid, beneath which he had found shelter.

To the left of the valley, if he leaned far enough out of the train window, Mark could just catch a glimpse of that round bare-backed peak, the Hohe Mund. Mark had always liked the great shaggy Solitary, standing in lonely grandeur, with a long row of Seven Sisters streaming away from him down into the valley, at a respectful distance—rather like the kneeling daughters of a sculptured knight—well to the left of their spectacular brother. There was nothing between the Hohe Mund's round head—touched with a light scattering of new fallen snow—and the deep blueness of the sky. It was still early in the morning; but the light had already had long hours to soak into every shape and colour of the summer day.

Station by small station, the peasants dropped in about their daily business from the fields below, or returned from having sold their animals in the market town of Telfs. These were Austrians at last—the same, unstressed, simple people Mark had always loved. They said “Grüss Gott!” to him; and to each other; but not quite as they used to say it. Their eyes seemed to weigh Mark before they received his answer.

These were men and women who were used to dealing with major misfortunes. Storms; floods; houses struck by lightning; crop failures that meant half-starved winters. They could endure the Nazis, but they did not believe in them, except as misfortunes to endure.

What they believed in was their own plain lives and hearts; and the little church which was the centre of their village. They had no weapons nor were they trained to fight. They could do nothing to prevent the armed might of Hitler; but their slow hearts burned against him.

Their eyes meeting Mark's, instantly divined that here was an Englishman—a potential enemy of the Nazis, and the old subtle friendliness Mark had always felt between himself and the peasants of North Tirol,

deepened. The eyes of the women smiled at him; they let their children rest against his shoulder. The men smoked tranquilly in his presence.

Mark suddenly knew why he had come with Reggie's message, he couldn't have stayed away, and this discomfort that lingered about his heart, he knew too now, what that was—he could not be in this beloved country, and not share its silent pain.

Up through the short dark tunnel out into the golden day, from waterfall to waterfall the mountain train zig-zagged and jerked its unhurried way. The little stations flickered past, each with a loved familiar name—Zirl—Hoch Zirl—Drei Heiligen—at last Seefeld, a morose flat little station, with its nearest beauty half a mile away.

Mark remembered the little slope with the larches crowning it, on the way to the village. The grassy slopes were a mass of pale pink crocus, their frail petals lifted to the day, as if to draw the strong golden light down into the depths of their living cups. The larches wore their first bright plumage; they looked so lightly tethered to the earth that they might at any moment have taken flight into the sunny air.

“They are going to cut our larches down,” an expressionless voice said close to him. Mark glanced quickly at the speaker, a heavily built farmer who had got out of the train with him. “Why?” Mark asked. “Surely the woods are full of larches that would not be noticed—if they must cut larches down!” The farmer shrugged his shoulders. “What do they care whether we notice our trees or not?” he growled. “They are out to destroy whatever other men notice! And I tell you, Brother, that what they themselves notice, is *really* worth destroying!” His heart spat out the words before his lips could stop them. He gave Mark a sudden suspicious glance and lurched away from him down the platform.

“Of course I can't *do* anything about it!” Mark told himself savagely, as he turned down the road towards the post office. “I'm not even a soldier!”

There seemed at first no sign of Father Martin when Mark reached the centre of the village, so he sat down in front of the Café Lamm and drank a coffee. The post office was just opposite, and after a time, he saw a youth separate himself casually from a group that stood about its doors, and stroll off towards the mountains.

Mark finished his coffee, and started off down a parallel road, to join him. When he came out on the slopes, the figure of the village youth was just visible, some way ahead. At last on the verge of being swallowed up by

the trees, the figure stopped, and Mark caught up with him. It seemed to Mark as if besides the disguise of his peasant clothes, Father Martin had made his very face look expressionless and solid. His erect disciplined figure slouched easily, like that of a man who has learned the path of least resistance to physical effort.

“I wasn’t sure it *was* you,” Mark told him.

“It would have been dangerous to be too sure,” Father Martin said with a smile, “but now we are safe. The pine trees will cover us as far as we go. No one from the village visits scenery unless his business takes him into it. We shall have to do a little climbing, but the slopes of the Wetterstein are easy going after the Habig.” Puffs of sun-backed resin floated through the trees, the path wound too steeply up the mountainside for speech. They climbed for some time through the warm, scented silence, until the pines abruptly stopped, as if they had been cut off by a knife; and they found themselves standing in the blazing light of the high meadows.

There was no sign of human life, except an empty hut, set in a tapestry of flowers. Leaning against it, they could look down two thousand feet below them into the little motionless valley.

“Here we can talk easily,” Father Martin explained, “for there is no one to listen to us but an eagle, or a mountain hare; and they have no links with the Gestapo. Our friends will join us soon. One comes over the mountains from Larchenfeld—and one by train from Mittenwald.” Father Martin sank into silence. He sat very still, looking at the great motionless shapes of the high mountains. Every small shining flower among the rocks beside him—stonecrop, or mountain buttercup, or the slim trembling harebells—fixed his fascinated gaze in turn. If a bird plunged or darted into the woods, it was as if his heart flew with them. The spiders’ webs alive and sparkling with dew on a bramble, found a fellow pattern shining in the monk’s heart. When Mark spoke to him, he brought his eyes back reluctantly from the beauty of the earth, with human friendliness, but with a less vivid attention than he had to spare for a squirrel or a butterfly.

“Do you think,” Mark asked abruptly, “that we *belong* to the earth?” “But certainly,” Father Martin said smiling, “do not you?” “Not quite in the same way,” Mark explained. “I belong—or feel as if I belonged—more to myself—or to mankind. However I am bound to admit that just at the moment I find myself preferring the earth—to the men on it!” “Well, there you are,” agreed the monk. “It is more obedient! I can imagine your feeling like that. Sometimes it is true one comes on something ramshackle. There is

decay and destruction after a storm, for instance, but these get cleared away in time. About the earth one is always more or less sure that it will do its business. It is better trained than we are. A little extravagant here and there perhaps—or shall we say lavish! But almost every growing thing faces its difficulties with great ingenuity and courage. See how high these trees climb against the forces of wind and snow, and how clever they are to spread low, where they are most exposed, and as unconflictingly as they can against its terrible power. These small plants too about us—they have very little water and almost no soil to grow on—but look how they manage with snow and rock for their dwelling-place. Their beauty and their brightness one might fancy are the more brilliant because of their discipline.”

“They grow in clearer air—and nearer the sun,” Mark objected. “Those are also good reasons,” Father Martin agreed cheerfully, “and yet I can believe also that struggle adds to glory in men or flowers. We have before us, I think, in Europe a time of very great hardship, and exposure to cruel forces. When I see part of creation performing with grace and endurance, I am reassured as to what man too may find within his powers.”

“You can have too many difficulties and dangers,” Mark said sombrely. “As we climbed up through the woods, I was thinking about Austria—what men must feel like under the harrow of absolute power—controlled by brutes like these Nazis—it must be a pretty horrible sensation—for these Tirolers are men!”

Father Martin said nothing for a moment, the light did not leave his happy eyes, but his jaw set resolutely.

“What you say about the misery of our people is very true,” he said quietly, “and it will become true I believe soon—for all Europe—perhaps for all the world. Yet this is also true, though one seldom has a chance to remember it—this beauty that we see, this inner rapture—the Life that is behind and breaks through the outer covering for the world—is a creative power. There is no end to it; and it is our mother. The Forces that make the world are at our disposal. You may say ‘Are they not also at the disposal of the Nazis?’ but I do not think they are. Love is the only creative power there is. Hate is what the Nazis use, and I think—though hate is very powerful when it is used consistently and with modern equipment—that it is less strong than love. I can believe there will be in the coming years—for all their darkness—uprushes and breaks through, of just such stubborn beauty as nature gives us. There will be in the loneliness of strong hearts in danger, a passion for truth, a pure and single-hearted freedom! These forces in men have long been overlaid or hidden away from us, by selfish love of comfort

—a Lie has plastered our moral standards into empty advertisements on public hoardings. We have not shared our love, or our comforts, with our poorer brothers, nor have we cared that they should be shared—or that they should be poor. Now we shall have to fight for virtue with our lives, sharing all we have as we go, and we shall see—when virtue *is* fought for—as much splendour in the heart of man, as in this summer day.”

Mark was silent. He had an uncomfortable feeling as if the virtue of being gloomy about the trials of his friends was perhaps not quite enough. Father Martin’s joy had about it a dual quality. It did not seem to release him from implicating himself in dangerous and disagreeable things, and yet kept him cheerful while he did them. It was as if his pleasure was no more irresponsible than his pity. When Mark was happy he forgot there were such things as duties; but he was not often happy. He was simply as he suddenly told himself, ready to do what he thought right when he knew what it was; if it did not go beyond what he thought sensible, and was his own concern. He was just about to explain what he felt about his duty and how it should—if it were to be done properly and in order, begin and end at home—when he saw that Father Martin’s attention had become fixed on the wood. “That must be Oskar Pirschl,” he explained, “and I have as yet told you nothing about him—he is Pirschl the painter—you have heard of him perhaps—many countries have—he is a great artist.”

Mark nodded. He had heard of Pirschl. He had even been to an exhibition in Paris and seen some of his pictures. He looked with interest at the figure emerging from the pines. Just, Mark said to himself, what one might expect from his odd, savage, unkempt pictures. He didn’t know how to take a steep slope. He was an untidy sloppy fellow—just clean apparently, but as far as he himself was concerned, he might have been just dirty. His clothes were worn, and unmended. His boots had not been cleaned before the fresh dust of the day had coated them. Only one thing about him was trained, and that was his astonishing huge myopic eyes, looking at the world as though to devour it alive. The eyes that raked Mark had a fearful power. “Mein Gott!” Pirschl exclaimed, as he flung himself panting down beside them, “you expect a man to have wings, Father, before he reaches Paradise. This is the third time you have brought me to the height of the Angels—and what merit do I acquire from it? None! My sins remain the same, my stomach kicks against my back, and I hate bird’s-eye views.

“I knew it didn’t matter really how late I was,” Pirschl went on in a tone of grim complacency. “I shouldn’t be the last anyhow.”

“You are not late,” Father Martin said gently. “Indeed we have the whole day before us, and the June light is long. Nothing need hurry us.”

Pirschl drew out a pipe and a tattered pouch from which he pulled a scanty chunk of ragged tobacco. He looked longingly at Mark. “Matches,” he murmured. “War or no war! Nazis or no Nazis! I foretell the English will be the last in Europe to have matches! A thousand thanks. I am to keep the box? I suppose you have grasped that we are going to shed one by one—all our little conveniences—decencies and privacies? To save time I have shed mine already. Father Martin gave up his long ago, and the third of our friends who is about to drop down on us from the gap, never had any. But I rather wonder what you—and that neat little island of yours, are going to do—when the Nazis overrun the earth, and you have to give up all your comfortable ways!”

Mark stared at him—did he really suppose that there was any danger to Great Britain and the French Empire, from these deluded and obstreperous Nazi maniacs? Probably he knew nothing about politics, this artist—and had never even heard of the Maginot Line.

“We are a small island,” Mark gracefully admitted, “no matter what we own. But we are fortunate in this—that our next-door neighbour is our friend—whereas you had two next-door neighbours who were both your enemies.”

“Ach!” said Pirschl, puffing slowly and contentedly at his pipe, “so *you* see it! But better perhaps to have two enemies—than one friend, who isn’t one at heart!”

“You think France isn’t our friend?” Mark questioned a little superciliously. He did not himself care much for the French, but it had not occurred to him that the French had no particular affection for the English either. Besides, were not their mutual interests enough?

“France hates you,” Pirschl said, “perhaps just less than she hates Germany. That is no doubt what you are relying upon. But why should France not hate you? If there is a war—*all* her men have to fight! A nation of thirty-five million against a nation of sixty-five million—all armed; and you her Ally offer her your own security from invasion—and a blockade that only acts as an indirect weapon against a ruffian half over her threshold! You will send her your handful of amateur soldiers no doubt—not fighting on their own soil, and not fighting under her command. France gets too little out of it! All her country has to be overrun! What percentage of *your* men will fight, or know how to? and how much of your land and how many of

your houses will be devastated compared to hers? The French are logical and accurate, they count up everything for—and everything against. I grant you, air warfare will lessen some of your securities. But you need some place in which to build armaments. The Skoda Works, for instance, of which you have just made so handsome a present to Hitler! These might have helped to arm you!

“Then there is also Italy to consider—and be very sure Laval considers it! You are not even helping to maintain Republican Spain—which is the best Ally you could have had, and which when destroyed will expose the Flank of France. Why Hitler—he has nothing to do, but wait for his good friends, Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier, to finish his work for him! You have heard that the Nazis boast a secret weapon? I can tell you all about it. Hitler has found out how to make his enemies destroy their own friends! That is the secret weapon of the Nazis. Once I made a portrait of Hitler. It was very amusing. He sat well—thinking his own thoughts—and I saw them. One by one in his face—all lies! and he with the art of making them his slaves! Truth is no man’s slave—but lies—what magnificent servants they make, and how well they can be used, to carry out a man’s Wish Dreams! I saw all these serviceable lies in Hitler’s face—and the glow of the pleasure they gave him—and I painted them under the glow. He was as pleased as Punch with the portrait. But then I fell from favour by painting Goebbels. He was not so pleased with his portrait! He had too much sense. He saw that I had painted him as he really was—no man likes that when he sees it! You can deceive Hitler, for he lives at the centre of his own delusions, like a spider at the heart of his web; but Goebbels stands outside his lies; and he remains outside them. It was a blunder that portrait! But I retrieved it by painting his wife, who is picture-pretty and belongs to other men. That restored me to favour. Now I come and go among the highest, so I can be of use to you perhaps!”

After all, this artist, Mark concluded, did know something about politics. But he seemed to know nothing about Mark.

“I must tell him at once that I shall have nothing to do with this business of Reggie’s,” Mark said to himself. “It is preposterous. Father Martin should have told him already!”

“I am afraid,” Mark said stiffly, “that my job will not lead me to any such exalted quarters. My business here is a very small affair, and has already been accomplished.” It was extraordinary, but neither of the men were listening to him. Instead they had once more become absolutely motionless, as if they were part of the mountain silence.

They had heard something that Mark himself had not heard though he prided himself upon his hunter's ears. Perhaps the ears of the hunted grow even keener. But Father Martin turned to Pirschl with evident relief. "It is Ida, I am sure," he said, "she has climbed the Pass—what we hear are stones falling. She must have skirted the drop, and come down one of the gulleys. She will have no skin on her hands or her heels, and she *should* have broken her neck; but she will not have broken it!"

Even as he spoke, a slight, hatless figure in knee breeches, with a short blue canvas coat, scrambled over the rocks towards them. She was, Mark saw with disapproval, as she came nearer, exactly the kind of woman he didn't like. Her thick untidy ginger-coloured hair was cut close to her head, her face was inordinately white; she had not painted her lips, and she had the cold wild eyes of a sea bird. Her figure was wiry and without curves; she had no allure; no poise. "A mind of her own—and what a place to put it in!" Mark thought discouragingly.

"I came over the gap," she said to Father Martin, when she reached them. "People notice one so now in trains. I've finished my cigarettes. Has anyone got some to spare?"

"In this country—a cigarette to spare?" laughed Pirschl. "Ask the Englishman—he even has matches!"

"This is Doctor Eichhorn, Herr Chalmers," Father Martin said courteously. "We call her 'doctor', but she was once a Gräfin as well—were you not, Ida?"

"If that makes it easier for him to bear—I still am," Dr. Eichhorn said with a twist of her strong ugly mouth. "It impressed the Nazis so that they allowed me to retain my job; nor did they discover that I have tucked away somewhere in the sane past, when we did not know our dangers—a Jewish grandmother! I suppose you, Pirschl, are also a Jew—as much as you are anything!"

"Not at all," Pirschl replied with a friendly grin. "I only happen to look intelligent. I am of peasant origin, and I don't know where I was born—nor strictly speaking, who my father was—nor do I mean to try to find out—I leave these cheerless riddles to the Nazis, who have been so kind as to assure me that I am a pure Aryan. Father Martin is of course *not* pure—since he is a Jesuit; but as far as I know, he has not yet been accused of being a Jew! Now you know all that matters about us—in what is now called 'Greater Germany', Herr Chalmers, and we know all that matters about you—since you are an Englishman, and Austrians have made for years a study

of Englishmen. We collect them like postage stamps. It is our favourite hobby. I begin to grow tired of the sound of my own voice; and I am so hungry. May we now eat? I brought with me two sausage rolls and a bottle of beer—and I do not intend to share them!” “Doch! eat, Pig!” Ida told him dispassionately. “Knowing your appetite I have brought with me an extra salad and a whole chocolate Torte. Let us hope that they did not come to an understanding together—in my rucksack. You, Father Martin, will no doubt have forgotten to bring anything—except perhaps a crust of bread, therefore I doubled my portion of ham. The Englishman we will presume came from a good hotel, in this case he will have in his rucksack a stale roll and butter; one hard boiled egg; some very tough salamè and an age-old Ementhaler cheese. He may—if he has lived long enough in Austria—have bought himself also a bottle of wine or at worst of beer. No! Wine! Good, and a whole bottle! You are an intelligent Englishman it seems, and better yet you have chosen a Gumpoldskirchner—a very good wine to drink on a mountainside. Heil everything—and everybody—except Hitler and the German Reich!”

They drank the toast in silence, a queer good-tempered exuberant silence. Everything about these people Mark felt, was redundant and exaggerated. Even Father Martin need not have looked so happy. Mark’s austere senses were shocked by the way in which these Austrians wanted to go further in a shorter while than seemed to him decent. They showed off too much, talked too easily, were too attentive. The quality of their observation was too keen. This woman’s eyes for instance constantly strayed over Mark, with a curious piercing but impersonal quality. Not as if she was pleased with what she saw, but as if she were looking for rather an important needle in a haystack. There was no needle; and he had no haystack, but Mark felt as if he had never, in so short an interval, been so thoroughly taken in before. They none of them waited for him to make any advances. Not that he would have made them if they had. He disliked rushing human approaches; and he hoped that after to-day he would never see any of these three fantastic creatures again. What a crew, with whom to conduct a serious consultation on espionage—a monk, an artist, and a woman!

The clouds sailed on over their heads in the deep blue heavens, little rounded shining puffs of cloud, or long lazy streamers transparently white, girdling the dark wooded mountains.

The sun burned down upon the small jewelled flowers between the rocks. The valley swam far below them in an apricot haze.

Ida leaned back against a rock, close to Mark's side. She shared his wine abstemiously, with a good-humoured air.

Something instinctive and exasperated within himself warned Mark that she was aware of his feeling about her—aware but not annoyed. She was not any more anxious to impress him than she was to be impressed by him. She looked on him as part of the day's work—a highly important part—so that she would take trouble, whatever he felt like, to understand him. But she did not really care if the material she had to work with was pleasant or unpleasant to handle. The question, her cold speculative eyes demanded, was simply whether Mark could be useful or not.

Far below them a black dot broke the still air, till it grew into the shape of a bird; the bird came and went from their vision, in long zig-zagging flights, increasing in size with each rounded circle, till suddenly the air seemed to fall away from the width of his great wings; and they saw he was an eagle, touched by the sun into pure gold. He must have seen them, for without the tribute of an instant's pause, his flight changed its direction and he sank away into bottomless light.

“Now he has gone, that great splendid one,” Father Martin said regretfully, “and it is time perhaps that we began to talk of Herr Chalmers' mission. He tells us he is only a messenger. It is enough for us that he is with us, against the Nazis. Until war is declared he is freer than we are. He may go where he likes and find out what he can. He will not need our help now—and we must none of us be seen with him *as* an Englishman. That is why I chose this mountain height—to which we could all come and go unobserved and from different directions. But if war were to be declared—well, then it will be of vital importance for his country—and for us—that he, or some other messenger—but preferably Herr Chalmers himself, since we now already know him—should return to us as an Austrian! We must make a plan now beforehand, to bring him in and keep him here as one of ourselves. Have you any ideas to offer us, Oskar—it is a moment for good ideas—and it is to you, as a creative artist, that I turn first.”

“Mein Gott! but I am not a conjuror,” Oskar said in mock dismay. “I produce rabbits where there are rabbits and pocket handkerchiefs where there are pocket handkerchiefs—not one instead of the other! Still for what it is worth, I have an idea. Since, as all Europe knows, even before the little old gentleman with the umbrella demonstrated it afresh, by flying to meet our gangster in Berchtesgaden, with a business proposition instead of a gun—all Englishmen are mad—why not profit by this well earned reputation yourself, Herr Chalmers, and become mad on purpose? You could then

qualify as a lodger for Ida's Nervenheilanstalt? From there you could learn many useful things—without appearing any saner than you are! I myself should not—except from one or two slight character traits of the English noticeable to an artist—have failed to accept you as one of ourselves. It is true I never saw an Austrian lift his feet with such care, or look as if he were saying with so much modesty, 'Believe me—I am not proud. I know I am an Englishman—but don't let us make any fuss about it! We will overlook, just this once, the honour I am doing you in remaining alive!'

"Oskar, you are sometimes unbearably rude!" Father Martin told him severely.

"No, I am not rude," Pirschl contradicted him, with a good-natured wink in Mark's direction, "I am only uncontrollably witty! Besides, I realize that Mr. Chalmers will laugh at himself! Does it not prove that he has a sense of humour; and might it not be overlooked—if he couldn't prove it?"

Mark frowned, he was so disconcerted by being, as it were, flung into this personal intimacy, without so much as a chance to explain that he himself had nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand, that for a moment or two, he let Oskar run on as he chose; then he sat up straight, and said briskly: "But I haven't the slightest intention of coming back to Austria myself! I've done already what I set out to do—I've given Father Martin my friend in London's message. It is true I agreed to talk over with you to-day what sort of a place an Englishman could find, if war broke out—where he could pass on information that would be useful to us, but I begin to see that the whole situation is impracticable!" He paused, the eyes of all three Austrians were fixed on him. Father Martin's in pained wonder, Ida's in open scorn, and Pirschl's with angry incredulity.

"What did you come here for then?" he demanded, "to look at a worm cut in half—and then go back to your country—which is at present a whole worm—and warn it what it will feel like, when the shears reach it?"

Ida laughed contemptuously. "You need not ask him why he is going away," she said, "that explains itself!"

Father Martin intervened, "It is true what Herr Chalmers says," he explained. "We should be grateful to him. He gave us his message. He will take back ours. But there is something else that perhaps he has not fully realized. Herr Chalmers loves our country. I do not think he yet understands what this love involves. Nor that this country is more than a country—it is a portrait of what is to happen to all helpless, free and harmless lands. They are to be trapped, as Austria has been trapped, set upon and enslaved by

force. We cannot limit ourselves any more, Herr Chalmers. Each must give what he can in such an emergency.”

“If you don’t,” Ida said bitterly, “I hope you will suffer as I think you will Herr Chalmers! Remember *that* when your own country is overrun—how you would not stand by Austria—when perhaps you could have saved both her, and yourself!”

Pirschl said suddenly, “But perhaps he does not mean this! It is only that he does not yet quite understand the Nazis. It is a lovely day to-day, Mr. Chalmers, isn’t it? We are having a fine time up here in the mountains! Twenty miles from here there is a concentration camp, where men are throwing themselves against live wires so as to die easily. In Vienna there are a hundred suicides a week. My best friend cut his throat yesterday. Both Ida’s brothers are in prison—none of us know which prison—Father Martin’s mother died of heart failure two months ago, when a Nazi breaking into her house to pillage, struck her across the mouth. You say you ‘care’ for our country—well, this is our country. What do you intend to do about it?” This personal, emotional way of forcing opinion upon him, shocked Mark deeply. The worst of it was that besides feeling shocked, he found that he felt a sense of angry shame at *not* being prepared to take a dangerous risk for a cause which was not, as yet, if it ever would be—his own.

Perhaps there were things in the heart of man that had hitherto escaped him. Even in his own heart. He looked up at Ida and said sharply, “I am not trained as a spy—I should be of no use to you—even if I wished to stay!”

Ida’s eyes sparkled with scorn. “Are we?” she demanded. “In what school were we trained? We are training ourselves, Herr Chalmers—by danger—by persecution—by pity, and yes—by rage! Father Martin may talk of love if he likes—but I train myself by hate! Those who are suffering as we have not yet suffered, *have* something to do with us—we still think! There in the road is the man set upon by thieves—wounded and robbed! We see the priest go by, and the Levite lift his skirts—but lying in our dust, and our blood—trying to stanch the worse wounds of our own brothers—do you suppose we have yet seen a glimpse of the good Samaritan! How I should laugh at Christians if I were a Jew! I should *die* of laughing!”

There was a long silence. Pirschl broke it at last by humming a little Viennese song of the day—a curious, lilting tune that was both gay and sad. Something in it, or in Pirschl’s unexpectedly true and charming voice, twisted Mark’s heart. It is true these people were excited, exaggerated, roused to a frenzy of strange emotions, but it was because their love of life

—their life itself—was threatened. Mark suddenly felt himself nothing but a shadow in a world of cruel actuality. It had nothing to do with him—all this ponderable anguish—he could get out of it to-morrow. He need never return. But had it nothing to do with him? Something was happening to human beings that simply ought not to happen to any human beings.

Mark met Father Martin's eyes. There was no disapproval in them. He seemed to be waiting without impatience for something he was quite sure would come.

"I don't know," Mark found himself saying, "I just don't know what to do!" They were all three silent. "You must see for yourselves," he went on desperately, "that my own country—well, what I mean to say is—they haven't expected it of me! I simply took the message to oblige my friend, who hadn't at the moment, a more convenient messenger."

"It is convenient," Pirschl said, giving up his tune, and becoming suddenly grim, "that you speak German—German too, not as we Austrians speak it, but as Hanoverian Germans speak it. It is convenient that as I understand you can climb mountains, and know our ways and our peaks. It is convenient that you are here *now*—that we have all seen you, and that what we are saying takes the place of any further need of communication. You see, there are almost too many conveniences to overlook, Herr Chalmers. We understand your disinclination to act, but after all it *is* your country as well as ours, that you will be serving. What happened to us yesterday, may well happen to you to-morrow. That's it, you see. You haven't yet quite taken in the Nazis! But they will take *you* in first if you do not hurry!"

"It is useless to bother him," Ida said contemptuously. "After all, perhaps he is right—if he is afraid he would be useless. Why is my house full of madmen? Because they found it too hard to be sane. They are irresponsible—they like to be taken care of. Let him go back to his English mad-house then, and be taken care of—till the last!"

"If I can really be of any use——" Mark said stiffly, "I will consider it." None of them moved, they were still as wild things. Was even relief to their shaken nerves, now a new kind of danger?

Father Martin spoke first. He said gently, "I think it is certain you can be of use. But this idea of entering an insane hospital—it is a terrible one. You should know, Ida, if it is also possible. Could Mr. Chalmers really pass as one of your patients?"

“He can train himself,” she said, with a shrug of her lean shoulders. “Many of my patients look as sane as those outside. Of course, Mr. Chalmers looks healthy—but morbid children are often very strong indeed physically. His blood cannot be wrong, but there are cyclic patients, or paranoiacs, or early stages of dementia praecox who can look healthy. Perhaps as he is youngish dementia praecox would be the widest field with the least opportunity of being caught out. He has some months, at least I should think, in which he could study—a mania depressive would be the easiest type. I will lend him books. He must remember that a mental disease is as distinct and separate from other mental diseases, as the separate illnesses of the body. It is important that he should not try to be half a dozen different kinds of lunatic at the same time. Each of us, whether we know what it is or not, has made himself a life pattern as distinct as a criminal’s fingerprints. But if we are sane, we hold less rigidly to our pattern, and we alter it to suit the demands of life. Also we can hide our pattern from others—or from ourselves. But the insane have a rigid pattern. They cannot alter it. Nor hide it. So what you must present, Herr Chalmers, is something a little more distinct, but always the same as your own!”

Was she still mocking him? Mark was highly sensitive to fear—and of all fears, that of the insane was the most terrifying to him. The base of his spine froze at the mere thought of what he might be undertaking. Yet he could not bear that this cold and singular woman should think him afraid. Better be mad then yield up his secret fear to those dancing scornful eyes.

“It seems a very good idea,” Mark said slowly.

“But it is horrible!” Oskar interrupted angrily. “I did not even mean it seriously! How can a sane man live with the insane—days and nights—for weeks—for months—treated like them—surrounded by them—and not go mad himself—the very idea nearly sends me off my head!”

“You have never been very much on it!” Ida told him drily. “A man who is sane in himself, does not go mad. Herr Chalmers is a much steadier person than you are. Besides I shall be there, knowing that he is sane. If you can think of a better idea, certainly let us hear it. Can you, Father Martin?”

“Any idea is difficult,” Father Martin said sadly. “You see no one in this country will fail to be, in some way or other, known to the police. The Germans are very thorough. Their whole life as a people is at stake. They will leave no loophole. They know we are their enemies. When war is declared on the rest of Europe, very few of us will be allowed to move. We shall be tied down to our own job and our neighbours. A man without a

docketed history will not exist outside a concentration camp. Perhaps a trained spy will wriggle in and out for a few days, but Herr Chalmers is not trained. I cannot think the fearful life of a fugitive very possible for him. If he could not prove himself an Austrian he would be promptly shot—and if he was able to prove it, he would be forced into the army. I am very doubtful if there is any possibility for a foreigner not already accepted on his history, to remain in this country at all—once war is set loose in Europe. Are you not also, Oskar?”

“Yes,” Pirschl admitted. “For such a stupid people—and they are so stupid they must make God yawn—the Germans are incredibly skilled at self-preservation. They have already an army that hasn’t left so much as a heel to strike at. Of course they have had the hardihood to invent danger, for if they were not so bloody-minded—they—and all the world with them, would be safe. But that is only another proof of their stupidity! God! what damned, mad stupidity it is in such a world as this—to start a war! Imagine to yourself—Great Britain launching a war to uphold the majesty of the House of Commons, or the thrifty French thinking the Chamber of Deputies worth fighting about—yet this ‘Reich’—this empty flatulent word, is for every German a signal to kill or die!

“I hate to return to this mad idea, Herr Chalmers, but it is less mad than any other. I could also give you a start out of my own history. I do not know where I was born—my mother is dead. I had—or I had not a brother. It cannot be proved that he never existed. Perhaps my father was Viennese. Perhaps a Czech—or a Hungarian. Perhaps my brother and myself, equally evaded birth certificates. The Nazis have already agreed to overlook this inadvertence on my part, and would that of my brother. I will therefore baptize you—saving your presence, Father Martin, and not meant impiously, ‘Anton Pirschl’! I can already see the fellow! I can swear to your identity! You can very easily be considered mad—for you are now my brother, and I have never been considered particularly sane.”

Ida laughed. “Very true,” she said. “I would take you into my establishment to-morrow, on your looks alone. An outside doctor whom I will procure for you myself, and your next of kin—that will procure you a certificate, Herr Chalmers. Once certified and your papers already in the institution, you can remain there until Hitler overturns the world—or the world overturns Hitler. Personally I think it a hideous plan—why not give it up?”

Father Martin said nothing. Mark felt that Ida alone was challenging him—it was a duel between her and himself. Between his fear and her scorn of

fear. The two men would be relieved if he refused, but Ida would be triumphant. She would have proved to herself that he was the cold-hearted coward she had made up her mind to believe him to be.

The light round them had grown softer; the shadows were less deep; the heaviness of noon had lightened into an exquisite freshness.

“What I have agreed to do,” Mark said slowly, after a long pause, and looking towards Father Martin, “is not particularly agreeable; nor can any method be considered safe—all therefore that seems to matter is that I should accept this plan as it is the only one we can think of, that gives me a permanent place to be in without suspicion, while I gather what information can be brought me. I think we need waste no more time about the matter. Where is this Nervenheilstalt of yours, Dr. Eichhorn?”

“It is in the mountains near Innsbruck—in a village called Obersdorf,” Ida said promptly. “The main line runs fairly close to us, and I have permission to run a car. Ours is not a state-run affair, as you will gather, but a private hospital of some forty to fifty patients. The Nazis have already visited us, and approved of our arrangements. They have, as you know, dangerous ideas about the insane; but less dangerous about those who pay well, than about those who are an expense to the state. We have a good estate, and many of our patients are good gardeners. We also run a farm, and think highly of our cows, pigs and chickens. I can recommend our Nervenheilstalt, Herr Chalmers, for its physical comforts—especially in wartime. When whatever there is to eat in the shops will be sent to Berlin.”

“It is nevertheless a terrible place,” Oskar Pirschl muttered. “Each man in his own separate Hell, unable to get out or to communicate with others! Father Martin, you—who believe in a good God—how do you explain the insane?”

“Perhaps,” Father Martin said cautiously, “they are as Ida has pointed out to us, less irresponsible than is always supposed. You say very truly, they cannot communicate; but have they ever—when they could—before they were insane—wanted to? Man was told to love his brother as himself. If he will not do this, then he may very well become mad. We cannot make God responsible for what happens when we break His laws.”

In the distance the rocks ceased to fall, no bird sang; only the waterfalls casually rustled in the still air—until their cool sound became part of the mountain silence.

Oskar Pirschl stood up. "The sun is sinking behind the Hohe Mund," he said. "We can go by train together, Ida, and travel third class, for I have no money. Father Martin will give us notice when Herr Chalmers is to become my brother. Meanwhile I will prepare the Nazis for his future existence. Good-bye, Father, good-bye, my mad brother Anton."

Ida met Mark's eyes, her own still taunted him as she rose and held out her hand. "I will send you some books. Study them well and choose your type!" she said. "You will not need to become an idiot, you know—you can be quite intelligent. Only it must be the intelligence of a blind man in a fog. For the insane the fog is always there—the rest of mankind—that is the fog! Only their own ego, and its desires are clear to them. That is what has happened to the German nation—they have as a people gone completely mad. They were never in fact very sane—those Force-lovers! Well, good-bye and good luck to you."

Mark watched them in silence disappear into the pines, the heavy shambling figure of the artist, the slim, taut, sexless creature by his side. They were laughing and joking together, as if nothing had happened.

Mark felt as if there was a great deal he wanted to talk about with Father Martin; but the monk said nothing, and Mark did not feel able to break the silence.

The shadows began to stretch longer and longer up the mountainside, till they reached and engulfed the hut. "Darkness comes from below," Father Martin murmured half to himself and half to Mark, as he slowly rose to his feet, "the last place it reaches is the sky! We must go down quickly before it overtakes us. To-day we have learned all that we need to know about each other—have we not? We have discovered that we are friends. That is all that any human being needs to know about another."

"Why didn't you tell them I was only Reggie's messenger *first*?" Mark burst out. "I never meant to do this thing! Had you decided yesterday that I *should*?"

"I decided nothing for you," Father Martin said gently. "But I suspect that perhaps you had already taken your decision before you realized that you had taken it—when, for instance, you came out to Austria with your friend's message.

"It was, I think, out of friendship that you came, but you have found—as we often find about a friendship—that it is deeper than we know. That is

why what you have decided to give us is greater than what you intended to give us! I know that it is very great.”

Mark frowned. He wanted to make light of his services, and all its risks. The atmosphere about him, continually deepening into emotion, disconcerted him.

“We have very little time,” Father Martin said quietly, “to do anything now but plan,” and with extreme clarity and judgment he laid before Mark each practical step that they must take, to anticipate his return.

Before they reached the village they separated. Mark found himself once more sitting before the Lamm Inn, eating a *Natur-Schnitzel* and drinking red *Magdalena* wine. Star after star cut its clear way through the darkening blue of the sky. The whole long fantastic golden day seemed like a dream. Could it be true that he had met a white-faced woman with ginger hair who, in a few months’ time, was going to turn him into a madman?

Chapter 3

The London traffic roared and spluttered past him. Dim and familiar, noisy and harmless, ugly and yet with a strange nostalgic charm the London of 1938 drew Mark back into her ponderous bosom.

The blackened sheep grazed placidly beneath the incredible green of the late summer trees in St. James's Park. The tropical birds by the lakeside were perfectly adjusted to their Park limitations. A little inconspicuous litter defied the park-keeper and the dustbins. The shapes of a few worn-out, defeated human beings lay on the dusty grass close to the splendid field of scarlet geraniums in front of the smug Victorian Palace.

What a shoddy capital and yet how solid, with how much ancient pride, and with what unmanageable modern shames! London was just as vast, as soft, as rich, selfish and helpless as Mark had remembered it. "What a target," he whispered to himself bitterly, as he walked across Buckingham Palace Road, and turned down Buckingham Gate.

Downing Street was empty except for a single policeman outside the Foreign Office confronted by a single pigeon.

Mark found no difficulty in entering the comfortable, shabby old mansion that housed the foreign policy of Great Britain.

An old porter took Mark's card with friendly courtesy, and pressed him to take a seat on a spacious couch, beneath the great staircase.

Dear old menservants shuffled about the dusty corridors, carefully balancing tea trays. The broad empty staircase was lined with bad pictures in dim golden frames. They held no figure more tangible than History. There was an almost unthinkable absence of weapons or uniforms anywhere in the great muffled building.

Reggie, though he wasn't at all grand and didn't keep him waiting a moment, had a high-ceilinged spacious room to himself; and pushed Mark at once with friendly hands into a cavernous leather armchair. He was grand enough, Mark supposed, for the sickening repercussions of world crisis after world crisis to reach him sooner than they reached the outside world and with more authentic force.

There had been such a crisis yesterday—and there would be another one to-morrow—even more terrifying, and a step nearer to the edge of doom. But was anyone under this somnolent roof anxious about it? Did anyone, however lofty, urge the need of hurry?

Reggie greeted Mark as if they had just parted an hour ago over an hilarious lunch at the Ritz. “Hullo,” he murmured, “you back? Nice of you to look me up.” Their eyes met briefly and glanced away again, as if anything in the solid, upholstered room was more significant to them, than the intimate friendship of a lifetime.

Nor did Reggie grow any graver or less casually genial, as Mark disclosed drily and with no effort to lessen its gloom, the painful, threatening and conclusive facts he had brought back from the simmering Continent.

It was inescapable Mark finished, that Hitler meant war. Slaves or enemies was Hitler’s fixed idea, and the one peace available for the British Empire was complete and abject surrender to an arch-criminal with a paranoiac mind.

Reggie sat at his desk, and drummed his thin alert-looking fingers lightly on its surface. After a long pause he said in a low voice, “‘But-I-don’t-want-to-fight-and-I’m-sure-it’s-wrong’ that’s as far, my dear old chap, as our present leaders have got to—and nothing you or I can say will shake them! So it *is* wrong, of course. War, at our stage of game, is worse than wrong—it’s silly. But you’ve got to take the right steps in order to avoid it. I needn’t tell you—and I shouldn’t tell anyone else—that we haven’t taken them. It is our amazing arrogance in thinking we can get away with what we want—without paying for it—that has me beat. Nine years of easy optimism has brought us into this back alley, and God knows whether even Hitler will pull us out of it in time!”

Mark felt half relief and half a deeper clutch of fear, to see that Reggie hadn’t been fooled by any delusive wish-dream. There was no ace then up his sleeve; and he had got to play the worst hand any gambler ever held, without it.

“Why on earth then——” Mark murmured. Reggie shook his head.

“We all know—here in the Foreign Office,” he explained wearily, “exactly where we are—well over the jaws of Hell and half-way down Hitler’s throat, but we can’t do anything more about it than we have done. Against us we’ve got the Chamberlain Government, The Red-Bogey

haunted Tory Houses, and the slap-happy Punch-drunk Public all muddling along in a rosy glow together. While the few enlightened people, like ourselves, become more and more like figures in a nightmare dressed in scanty and unsuitable clothing—trying to catch a train that has already left the station!”

Even Mark’s fantastic plan seemed no great surprise to Reggie. Naturally he didn’t like the idea of sending his best friend as a lunatic into an enemy country. Still, he explained gently, puffing away at his pleasant cigarette and jogging a beautifully polished patent leather shoe, when you had a small and overpopulated island on your mind, loosely attached through threatened oceans to an equally undefended and undependable empire, if you had no army to speak of, a mere handful of boys in the air, and a navy which however powerful in armament and personnel had to be thought about in terms of what would blow it up simultaneously, from above and below—it was apt to make you feel both groggy and ruthless. You used what you’d got. An Eton master who spoke German like a native and climbed mountains like a chamois, was not to be sneezed at.

“You’re a straw, my dear chap,” Reggie dispassionately told him, “rather a good straw that’s floated my way. Naturally I clutch you! You’ve got a clean slate, your mother’s dead, and you’re not married. You’ve been brought up not to tell anybody anything. Chaps across the way would say ‘an ideal enemy agent’.

“Naturally they’ll have to build you up. In a sense our having been to school together and all that, makes it a nasty idea having to shove you out into the danger zone, while I sit here pot-boiling in whatever security London has to offer. Which in a few months’ time—might—as we both know—not be much. We want someone badly in enemy country, and though of course we already have some good men wandering about, we shall want more, just when it gets most difficult to keep ’em there. They think the world of Father Martin across the way, and whoever he passes on to you, should be foolproof. I’ve never heard of your ginger-haired Circe, but I daresay she’ll come up to scratch. We think we’re good for a few months yet, before the bust-up. The date we have in our minds is somewhere round 1939. Probably Hitler will want to wait till Republican Spain is off the map and Stalin a shade less peppery. France is our main problem. She’s an unhealthy country politically just now, and the way Abetz and Laval are working it, she may go a good deal more unhealthy yet. No one can tell till the fight starts, whether all this Cagoulard versus Communist stuff is just a

benevolent tumour that'll clear up under the knife or a malignant cancer closing in on a vital organ."

"But Gamelin and the army are all right, aren't they?" Mark anxiously demanded, "and the Maginot Line? Even the Germans speak respectfully of it!"

"Well, we hope so," Reggie murmured. "We do quite a lot of hoping one way or another."

It struck Mark that Reggie knew what was going to happen without quite taking it in. He had not felt the deadly grip of living in a country already successfully strangled. He didn't want to make a fuss, and to try to take it in would seem to him equivalent to making a fuss. But was it? Mark felt an uncomfortable new pang assail him—was it really so awfully clever to avoid looking facts in the face in order to show a control that took up strength, that might better be used to meet them?

"History," Reggie went on, pacing slowly up and down between his desk and the window, as if the slight movement relieved him of any unnecessary strain, "is chock-a-block with the tight corners our old Lady Britannia has turned! In my opinion she'll do it again. Elizabeth's reign was one long see-saw over a precipice with Philip of Spain sitting pretty on the lighter beam. Think of Chatham and Pitt! They had something to worry about with their little Corsican and his flat-bottomed barges just round the corner. Let's reckon up our mercies and go out to dinner! There's the channel—a good tank trap—and we've Churchill waiting in the wings, to take the helm when the storm breaks. There's our own Chief with the locked-up grit and common sense of eight years unused and ready to go in with him. We've next to no Communists and what we have the British working-man very sensibly won't touch with a barge pole. Our Fascists have started us laughing and half the time our Reactionaries—though a heavy lot—don't react. Of course nobody knows whether a country is sound or not till it's punched in the ribs. Wait till our punch comes—and between ourselves we're not wholly supine! We don't talk about what's going on, but quite a lot is!"

Mark too got up, and peered out of the window—the pigeon and the policeman still confronted each other with placid unconcern on the pavement below.

"But what are we waiting for?" he murmured half to himself, half to Reggie, who was swiftly and neatly tidying up his desk preparatory to departure. "Is it only the war with Hitler? What is Hitler? Why does a big,

sound, prosperous people like the Germans go all woozy over a Viennese house-painter, kept by women—who can't paint? And why do we—who with France held every card in the pack in 1919—never play one of them, and stop this Mr. Hitler?

“I have an idea that it isn't only Hitler! Something's got loose, Reggie, and scudded past us—at the funeral of good old George the Fifth.

“Do you remember standing with me on the roof of Scottish House and looking up Whitehall? There was a damned swastika floating from a pole in Piccadilly, above the German Embassy! Even then it gave me a queer feeling in the pit of my stomach. Poor old Beatty tottered past us like a shrivelled-up eagle dying on his feet. Our Edward too—white as a sheet—and not much more solid; blown off his throne by a puff from old Baldwin's pipe! I remember thinking to myself as we stood there, ‘What is this procession marching *into*—and what is the British Empire—after all?’ ”

“Um!” agreed Reggie. “Well—no doubt compared to that cursed efficient arsenal you've just got out of, this all does seem rather antediluvian. Still you know, there was the ark and after starving for a few months on end cheek by jowl, the funny old Noah's outfit did survive—out they came, dove and all!”

“Mud and rivers, that's what they survived to,” Mark reminded him.

“You always were a lousy old pessimist,” Reggie replied. “Let's go across the way and tell your bed-time story to old B. He'll like all that Hollywood stuff about the ginger-haired woman—the monk and the artist! Quite sure she's as ugly as you make out?”

“As ugly as sin, and as cold as a winter wave,” Mark said with decreasing gloom, “and I'm not at all sure now that I didn't dream the whole thing! Only I've got half a dozen of the damned woman's medical books; and she's kindly marked the passages referring to Manic Depressives.”

“She must be a cinch of a psychologist,” Reggie told him. “I spotted that was your type in prep. school myself. Don't you remember going down with mumps before the most important match of the season—and you my best centre-forward?”

“I'd like to think I'd got mumps to fall back on now,” Mark murmured, as Reggie gently shepherded him into the lifeless corridor.

Chapter 4

Mark had left his luggage at the station, so that he could walk up through the late dusk, watching the bats cut their velvet bodies into the darkening gold.

The boys weren't about, and wouldn't be till late to-morrow, but as he walked through the hot noisy street, he seemed to see them hurrying along hatless, in their antediluvian jackets, absorbed and thrilled in their share of the steady human stream all moving in the same direction—and yet with how many utterly different goals.

He couldn't help comparing the boys, and what the Head was trying to make of them, with what Hitler had made of the Hitler youth leaders.

Hitler airily stated that an English public school was the best training-ground for Nazi doctrines. Certainly the Herrenvolk delusion was at the basis of both, though to Mack himself it was more than a delusion. But the direction—the training—hadn't, he told himself, the fantastic Nazi aim. The Nazis wanted a boy that would toe their line—the College wanted a boy that would toe his own. Yet was not the College too special, too privileged to be quite sane? He had only begun to ask himself these questions so it was a relief, when suddenly the rose-red wall of the College, like a small wave shouldering itself gently forward, filled in the opening space.

The College was not as large as Mark remembered it; but it was even more beautiful. Pushed to one side of the crowded town on the outskirts of the Castle grounds, almost part of the great park itself, the school was modest about its own significance. You could not, Mark thought, get a real impression of it from any one spot. It was like everything else in England of any special importance—only half visible—not as it would have been in any other great country, purposely presented.

The masters' houses were mostly Georgian or Queen Anne. They were all much larger than they looked; but they weren't there to attract attention, because they knew they would get all the attention they needed without taking any trouble over it. They hung about like attendants at Court who may be called upon at any moment to fulfil important duties—duties with

which they are perfectly familiar, and therefore need feel no anxiety when the call comes.

The sense of the Court, of the Castle, of what went on behind the solid yellow walls was always rather overpowering. Not, as Mark reminded himself, that the school really had anything to do with Windsor Castle. Yet for hundreds of years there had been that sense of a special tie, of being nearer to the Crown—more its special training ground and adherent than any other of the Island schools.

You said the word “Eton” and instantly, Mark thought, the Castle walls were there, the Park, the silver gleam, the Castle itself, moving silently into the mind with the stateliness of a swan rounding the curve of a river.

You could turn your back on them—as many boys did—oblivious, contemptuous, self-absorbed; but long years afterwards—all over the world in the strangest places, if someone said that word again, up the picture sprang and there was an emotion at the bottom of the heart to match it—so that for ever and wherever you were, you felt fundamentally linked to that unspoken symbol.

You might even hate the Castle, Mark told himself, and all that it stood for—but you could not forget it.

Nor could you believe that the effect of the College itself was always that of snobbery. Perhaps half of the boys went to Eton because their parents wanted them to be grand—and the other half because it was a family tradition to go there if you could. The boys that wanted to be grand—if they were like their parents, and it had to be remembered that boys very often weren't—*did* pick up all Eton's strange faults and absurdities; its isolationism; its defensive arrogance; its inconsiderate insolence; and its deep unconscious selfishness.

These boys would leave with harder hearts, more individual senses, less moral and social honesty than had they belonged to any other school; but the other half took what the school had to give them in a different way. It was for them, Mark told himself, that he and the other masters toiled so eagerly—for in the end, partly as the fruit of their toil—these boys would gain more than they could have gained from any other school in the world.

Mark couldn't say quite how they would have gained it. Certainly from no particular master—not even from the very best Head—it was a spirit in the school itself that seemed to reach a special kind of boy.

You knew almost at once if you were a good master—and Mark *was* a good master, and had studied with sensitiveness and understanding the stuff of youth—exactly which of the hurrying flock beneath his observant eyes was going to turn into that special brand—strong, gentle, modest, reliable, with that adjustable dignity that seemed to come from something unbreakable and indomitable that was at the very core of the heart.

Mark knew that out of the thirty boys who were coming back to his House, this term, there were perhaps a dozen who would form this fine, indelible pattern.

They would form it spontaneously and of their own accord, out of what they found under their hand. Mark had swiftly, once in a blue moon—no oftener—to nudge them spiritually. Sometimes a look would do it; sometimes a half-dropped word opened the door into the Mystic Silence, but they went in by themselves, and at their own volition came out—Etonians. After this secret initiation, Mark thought, they seemed to know effortlessly how to behave to everybody, and how to meet without apparent flurry, all the emergencies of life.

No doubt many of these self-elected boys had good parents and so already had something to go on. They *wanted* to find out the secret. But sometimes—quite mysteriously—they had bad parents, and didn't know there was a secret, yet they found it. They became clear-eyed, competent and absolutely trustworthy. But where did this spirit come from? There were rules but as few as possible, and certainly no more effective than any other school rules. Mark himself drew the attention of each new boy once—and seldom more than once—to what was expected of him; but he used the fewest possible words, and made the fewest possible suggestions. They were to go to their Dame about their clothes and their health. Older boys told them most that they needed to know. They were squires waiting on knights who would, in the fullness of time, accept them into their glorious company. They were not free—but freedom was one day to be theirs. Some of them hated being fags of course; but remarkably few really; and then, seldom for the best of reasons. At the end of their training all of them knew how to behave superficially well—and some of them how to behave superlatively well—and did so—for the rest of their lives. Yet why they did so remained a secret. The Head's way of dealing with the boys was simply to take them and their behaviour completely for granted. He seldom asked questions, though he was always prepared, at the proper time and place, to answer them. If there was any trouble, he generally knew what it was without asking. He always waited to be told what either masters or boys wanted to

impart. Personal questions, personal behaviour were what—unless he was obliged to take them up—he ignored. He was anonymous to the core. The gimlet eyes of a thousand boys observed nothing pretentious about him. Half of his dignity (he had no “side”, but his quietness was a sort of dignity) they could use for themselves. Many of them used it, and became in their turn dignified. But not until they had guessed what the Head’s dignity really sprang from—an ability to meet adequately whatever turned up. Not to make a fuss! Wasn’t that, Mark asked himself almost savagely—for he felt somehow or other vaguely threatened—*enough?* Enough to hold England—enough to hold an empire safe? Or should there be a little more of something else—that he hadn’t got? For Mark himself was rather like the Head—he was not pretentious; he was very quiet; he could tackle every difficulty he had yet met, except one—that of falling in love—adequately.

He hadn’t been adequate to the love that had nearly swept him off his feet, and for fear of being swept quite off, he’d run away from it. Morally, he told himself, as he reached his own garden gate, he had even felt justified; for a man should not make love to his cousin’s wife.

It was a pleasant inconspicuous house behind good red walls, standing in the middle of a smooth green lawn. There was nothing shadowy about it, even in the dusk, and yet it suddenly seemed to Mark as unsubstantial as a dream. Something had happened to Mark during his European holiday—the foundations of life itself had been shaken.

Miss Totness, however, wasn’t shaken. Miss Totness was his Dame. She stood in the hall, smiling and calm, with her kind, plain face set in sober greeting. “Your train was a little late,” she told him, “but not later than I had expected.”

Slowly the house came back to Mark in all its secure, common-sense beauty. He had forgotten how airy and light it was, how pleasantly austere, and how little cumbered up by anything that wasn’t useful.

There was very little furniture in any of the rooms—almost no softness, yet it was comfortable enough; and dazzlingly clean.

Miss Totness, when she found Mark was alone—as yet none of the other masters had turned up, they all would of course to-morrow with the boys, and everything was ready for them—sat by Mark’s side and waited on him herself, while he ate his dinner. Matchett had given him clear soup, a sole, and a fruit salad; she had cooked them as well as if they had been cooked in France. Miss Totness told him, in her usual composed and sensible way, news of the school, and the staff. It was all very soothing and

companionable; and the kind of news a man likes to hear when he has been away for several months in a strange land. Sometimes Miss Totness had to bring him problems, but never in a way that made them sound insoluble. They were simply things that it was Mark's place to put right. Any problem that wasn't his place to put right never came before him. But to-night apparently there were no problems at all. Miss Totness had been a Dame for twenty years and she was incapable of not understanding practically everything that came her way. As to the boys themselves, she might have invented them, she knew them so intimately, so unerringly, with such a kindly humour for their frailties, and with so much wise unconcern for their dramas. She made no distinctions. She had no pets, except perhaps Mark himself. A housemaster, she considered, needed special attention. The responsibility of the whole house after all rested upon him; and he had to be understood and kept calm. Miss Totness understood Mark; and kept him calm. She saw this evening that he was *not* calm. It might be because of the new term beginning to-morrow; but probably not because of it. Mark liked his profession and she had never seen him upset at a new term before. Upset at the end, if things hadn't gone well, of course—they all were, but not at the start.

The Head, she told him, had been back several days; it was quite possible that he might be free to see Mark for a short while, before going to bed.

Probably everything was already in hand, but Mark might like to ring up after dinner and find out—or perhaps he would like to have what was left of the evening quietly to himself?

Miss Dale, his secretary, had been in this morning. She had come over on her bicycle and sorted out all his letters. There was nothing, she had said, that wouldn't keep till to-morrow. Almost all parents' letters. One knew what they were before a term began. Especially the new ones—thinking they had to explain each new boy separately—as if boys didn't explain themselves, almost the moment you first set eyes on them. Young Talbot had whooping cough—he ought to have had it earlier, so he wouldn't be coming back till half-term, if then. There was a new Hindu prince. Special care would have to be taken of him, of course, just to begin with—probably that nice young Desmond might keep an eye on him; and then there was his food. Miss Totness would see about his food. She knew all about Hindu food—it was quite simple really. As long as he wasn't teased. Young Hindus—and this was a very young one, not much over twelve but highly intelligent of course—were rather touchy; and felt the cold a good deal too!

Mr. Halstead had telegraphed he might be late—his mother was dying; and if she actually *did* die, he would have to ask for an extension because of the funeral. He had let the Head know already, so there was nothing to be done about it. It was very sad—just at the beginning of a new term too—and attached to his mother as most young men were, whether they were good mothers or not. “Oh, I think most of them are,” Mark murmured politely.

“Too good most of them,” Miss Totness cryptically remarked. “That’s just the trouble! They think that’s all that’s necessary. They should know how to make their boys good too, and boys can’t be good if their mothers do the whole thing for them!”

“Still, that’s better than those fliberty-gibbets,” Mark reminded her, “who never look after their sons at all!” Yes, Miss Totness agreed, anything *was* better than a fliberty-gibbet. Did Mark really think there was going to be a war?

Mark tipped the cream jug thoughtfully over the cool, firm fruit. How much better, he thought, his own food tasted than anybody else’s. It was a pity that he had missed both his asparagus and his strawberries.

“Yes,” he said, meeting her eyes for one swift, curiously honest second. “There will be war I think, Miss Totness, probably quite soon. It doesn’t do to talk about it of course.”

“Ah,” Miss Totness thought to herself, “so that’s what it is—poor young man—it’s the boys he’s thinking of!” She was knitting a small boy’s pullover as she talked, and she clicked on without a pause. “It’s very unsuitable,” she remarked finally with quiet disapproval. “I can’t think why we didn’t keep those Germans down, when we *could* of course! Naturally I don’t wish to criticize dear Mr. Chamberlain, but it hardly seems to have been worth while—at his age—going all that way to Munich, does it?”

Mark agreed without comment, that it didn’t. Miss Totness put down her knitting and made Mark a cup of perfectly clear, hot and tasteless black coffee from a machine on a tray, the sort that looks nice while you are making it, on a drawing-room table.

Then Mark rang up the Head. The Head himself answered the telephone, and said, “Yes—do come over for half an hour or so before going to bed.” So Mark went out again, into the misty darkness. The air was a little sticky and a little chilly at the same time, with river fog, yet it was sweet. The sky was ribboned over with searchlights. They stabbed stealthily into the soft

mass of the dark; little pools of opalescent light followed their wake. Neither the moon nor any stars were visible.

The Head's house was close by, and except for the fact that the rooms were larger, it looked very much the same as Mark's. Both men knew Europe; both climbed mountains; both spoke foreign languages extremely well; and both were inalienably British. They simply couldn't help being what they were; and they would rather have died than help it. That was the trouble, Mark told himself, as he found the familiar gatepost almost by the sense of touch, and took his familiar way up to the Head's front door—why should any of them have to die—in order to help it? Sheepdogs seldom think much about their own danger, when they smell wolves close to the fold—and it was not of his own dangerous plan that Mark thought, only of his boys.

The Head too, he well knew, had the same gnawing constant dread, at the pit of his stomach. "It's such a little place to keep, really," Mark thought rather wistfully, as he waited for the door to open. "This Island is just a sort of front doorstep to Europe—yet if it were to go—well then, damned well everything else goes with it!"

The Head was ten years older than Mark, but he was too fit physically to have ceased to look rather a young man still. They both assured each other that they had enjoyed their holidays. The Head had been climbing in Wales, Mark in North Tirol. They described their climbs; and their weather. "One more summer in Tirol," Mark said with an emphasis he made as light as possible. "You mean you don't think," the Head said, pausing over filling his pipe, and looking up at Mark with his faintly raised eyebrows, which he always expected to put at least half his question for him. "Well, perhaps not," Mark admitted slowly. "Perhaps *not* another summer!" He didn't want actually to say that Europe would not have another free and happy summer during their lifetimes, but sooner or later that was what he had come over to say. B. had said Mark could go back to Eton till Christmas—then he wanted him for six months' training—on odd business, very intensive—shipyards, airplane factories, how to blow up railway lines, how to run a printing press—otherwise Mark wouldn't be much use. He wasn't to tell anybody anything—except the Head. B. had said he could tell the Head anything he liked; for B. knew the Head—he had been one of his boys. The Head took it exactly as Mark had hoped he would, with a mere nod of calm acceptance. It was a pity. He had hoped to keep Mark, he thought that Mark was the sort of schoolmaster that was wanted. "We may have to change a good deal," he said consideringly, "I don't quite know how—but we may have to—and I

should have liked to have kept you specially because I know you *can* change. Some people can't. But that of course will make you specially valuable to them as well. It will be very important to have the right kind of masters here for the next few years. The boys are bound to be badly shaken. I think they have begun to feel it already. They're getting rather confused—and without knowing quite why—discouraged. War is in the air—all these crises! War means their sudden and probable death. They oughtn't to have to think about death so much, at their age. What we've got them here for is to think about life! The preparations all wrong too—and the work doesn't seem worth while. And yet I suppose it needn't be any different in its deepest sense—if we can get them to understand it. 'The readiness is all.' ” “Even Hamlet didn't understand that till just before he went into the banqueting hall,” Mark reminded him, “and he said to Horatio even then, 'Thou canst not think how ill all feels about my heart!' ” “Yes, but only to Horatio,” the Head murmured, “and then he went in.” “Yes, I know,” Mark agreed without looking at the Head. “I was wondering as I came up from the station—you can't help wondering somehow—you say we shall have to change—so I suppose you've been wondering too—whether we *are* on the right lines here or not? We do teach them service I know—we do teach them the values we think they ought to have—but are they the real values? Are there *any* special values belonging to one class rather than another? Of course we may say what we like about Democracy—but we *are* out to make men here who can rule an Empire—they always have. They're not the *only* rulers of course, but they're most of them the sort of people rulers get chosen from!”

“I don't see why they shouldn't be,” the Head said between puffs of his pipe, leaning back in a chair that wasn't particularly comfortable, but it was the kind he liked in the evenings, “somebody has got to rule an empire. We have got one—and it takes ruling. But I admit there may have to be new ways of ruling. We may have to change what we teach—and even the spirit of our teaching. We may have to open up the school—and have a different kind of boy let in on us. We must be on the look-out for the right kind of stuff, and not suppose that it's all confined to any one class. It's just this melting-pot feeling in the air that makes me want younger men on the staff, but if there is war, I shall have to lose 'em—as I am losing you. Do what you can before you go.”

“Do what?” Mark asked abruptly, with almost too much earnestness.

The Head shifted his eyes a little, to the open window and the wandering searchlights. He had lit nothing but a small reading-lamp, when Mark came in, so that they could still watch the pierced uneasy sky.

“Oh well,” he said, “I expect you know what I mean! You’ll be preparing yourself—that’ll help to prepare them.”

“The people I’ve got to mix with are awfully odd,” Mark said after a pause, “a Jesuit priest—that artist Pirschl—we saw his show in Paris together last spring—an awfully rum emotional sort of fellow—and a woman—a sort of psychiatrist doctor. I don’t like her—but I think she’s honest. I’ve got to see a lot of her, that’s the worst of it. I don’t like women.”

“My wife,” the Head observed quietly, “I find is just another human being—most of the time she’s only that—but of course she’s a woman too, and that I think rather improves her status as a human being. You liked your mother, didn’t you? I remember her. I know you like Miss Totness. Isn’t it perhaps *not* women you dislike so much, as being attracted by them? You think you have to let something go when you’re attracted. Well—I suppose that’s true. Something has to go—but something comes that rather more than takes its place.”

“Well, I never have liked coming and going,” Mark admitted, “I like to stay put; and I’m exactly happy where and how I am.”

The Head sighed. He made no comment upon that particular happiness, or indeed upon any other. He felt to-night, an extremely unhappy man; and vulnerable in a thousand different ways. Each way the life of a boy; but he did not say so to Mark, because he saw in his eyes exactly the same kind of unhappiness; and he knew that neither of them could alter it, until the war which had not yet begun—was over.

Chapter 5

When the Pilot's cheery voice reached Mark through the intercom, "O.K. old boy—jump!" Mark's disciplined body pitched forward into the roaring stream of air, although his taut mind still hung over the sickening abyss. Orders went on in some strange part of his bewildered consciousness. Something that still belonged to him ticked the count. But hands, arms, legs, his mind—where were they? How could they make any voluntary, consecutive action? Was not his tossed body, hurtling through space, already beyond action? No! amazingly his hands still functioned. He turned the handle on his chest. The wild rush of the air stream slackened, the hideous will-less scramble grew controlled. Something selective had taken place. The wavering silk was slowly opening above his head. He no longer felt strangled, blood-confused and helpless. He was in fact suddenly serene, and hanging in a bottomless security. A solid ecstasy cushioned his heart and mind. Whatever happened now was beautifully beyond debate. It was the moment when, under an anaesthetic, the consenting, timorous will feels the close-up of a greater power wafting it into oblivion. But this anaesthetic only took hold—there was no oblivion. Nothing lay ahead or behind Mark. Time slipped away from him. He was one with a placid, unmoving eternity. On and on he floated without obstruction, devoid of conflict or anticipation.

He was in the hands of something infinitely beneficent—perhaps God. But no thought of God took hold of him—any thought would have been a resistance to the limitless consent of his will. He was equally unconscious of light and air, though there was nothing else but light and air. If he had a wish it was that nothing should disturb his sense of floating in a flawless crystal, or break up the endless security of his relieved mind. But something suddenly interrupted all this loose felicity—it was the earth itself, giving chase to the atom that was still its own. The earth appearing from a blissful nowhere, suddenly rushed up at Mark, savage, omnivorous, solid, "What, you dare to try to get away from me?" shrieked the irate monster.

Now a thought slid swiftly back into his conscious mind. He must fall and—there was a way to fall. He must hold himself loosely, turn sideways towards the appalling Hunter—crash! The earth had caught him. No doubt he was dead. The terrific impact had taken place—or hadn't it? Had he

merely imagined beforehand what it would be like, as an awakening sleeper wonders whether he has really got out of bed or not?

Mark put out his hand and felt the stiff wet grass between his heavy fingers. He was what people call “All right”—no bones were broken. He rose heavily and incredulously to his feet. He found himself among the foothills of a range of mountains very well known to him, between Italy and Austria.

It was a March dawn in the year 1940, and a late snowfall had greatly eased his descent. After a moment or two, he knew where he was, and exactly what he must do.

There was a pinewood quite close in which he hastily took cover. Everything was breathlessly still, and perfectly clear. No human being was in sight.

Snow mountains in the near distance rose up like walls of hard, blue sapphire. The air was a softer, lighter blue; blue shadows drank up the snow-covered earth. Only the pinewoods scrawled a black jagged line across the ethereal surface, ruthlessly breaking up the universal azure. The powdered snow lay soft and thick, but in the wood it was much less deep. The air was as cold as man’s inhumanity to man.

Mark found a place in a hollow tree in which he could hide his parachute and his flying kit. Now he was not Mark any more. He was Anton Pirschl, a wandering vagabond, the mad brother of a great artist, loose on a forbidden frontier, but with nothing worse to be said against him than his looseness. He had his identity card on him, and the clothes, under his flying kit, were Austrian. He must not think or use any thoughts or words that weren’t Austrian.

Mark made his way deeper into the wood until he came on a path leading upwards. He had a four-hours’ climb ahead of him, before the sun would become his enemy. The dead cold air bit into him silently. Nothing stirred in the wood or on the snow-clad, compressed and lifeless fields that surrounded it. No birds so much as fluttered to greet the icy dawn. Only from time to time a garland of new soft snow, loading the trees, fell with a muffled crash. Mark stopped dead in his tracks and the sound and everything stopped with him. The mountains were as breathless as he—they listened as he listened. When he moved on they seemed to give a faint sigh of relief, as if they were on his side against the Nazis.

He was without climbing equipment, except for the boots on his feet. Fortunately the snow was not thick, except on the high meadows; and before he came to where he would have had to wade waist-deep into it again, he would have reached his destination. The Planer Farm lay just on the Austrian side of the frontier. No one expected him; and frontier guards might be stationed there. There was even the dreadful possibility that the whole family Planer had been carried away to a concentration camp. But Mark thought it unlikely that the Planers had become the prey of the Gestapo.

Peasants, who have all their lives been confronted by the problems of nature in a hard land, and made their scanty livelihood from their care of the stubborn earth, are not easily defeated by man. When confronted by an overwhelming hostile force, they do not antagonize it any further than they need. They let it roll over them, and trust to their natural resilience, to come up in the same place as soon as the storm is over—very much as, and where, they were before it started.

No disaster was likely to make a Planer give himself—or anyone else—away. They would take what they had to take, and lose what they had to lose, without alteration.

They were Mark's friends. Peter and Andreas, the two sons, had climbed their mountains and the more tricky Dolomites with him, and they had shared alike hardship, triumph and danger. Mother Planer and her daughter, Lisa, had slowly and rootedly accepted Mark on his occasional visits as an agreeable and natural portent. He was always satisfied with what they gave him; he helped them make hay; he had no bad habits. He was a heathen, but this was more his misfortune than his fault—since he had been born in a heathen country. Father Planer admitted to Mother Planer in a moment of unusual expansion, "He does no harm, that one—let him live." Father Planer would not, if he could have helped it, willingly have let any stranger live except where they belonged. Something, he vaguely felt, must be wrong with any person who turned up on another person's land. Mark, however, brought money into the family, and had explained to Father Planer that where he lived, there were no mountains. There was therefore some slight excuse for Mark in seeking the mountains of others.

Five thousand feet of tedious and difficult climbing stood between the Planers and their nearest neighbours. A little fringe of burning trees sprang out against the whiteness of the snow summit. There were no other signs yet of the sun, but slowly, a flock of small rose-coloured clouds, curled like a baby's fingers, moved out into the emptiness of the sky.

They did nothing to warm the air, but Mark felt his heart the warmer for their distant company.

Suddenly the sun hoisted himself above a distant peak, and flooded the snowfields below him with a spreading cloud of gold.

Mark climbed faster, soon the snow would melt and grow unsafe as well as harder to get through. The trees thinned to a sudden finish. Now he must venture out on to the wide sea of emptiness. There was no sign or sound of man, but there might be frontier guards liable to appear on sudden excursions. Under the nearest peaks, in a sheltered hollow, on an eyelid of Alpine meadows, lay the Planers' farm. Nothing had ever seemed to Mark more serene, nothing more indestructible by man. Except for some unheeded or catastrophic break in a law of nature, the Planer farm was as near invulnerability as an eagle's nest.

A man who, since his boyhood, had spent months out of every year in the high mountains, has a special respect for space and solitude. To Mark they had become his religion. To have to feel exposed, hunted and helpless on a snow slope, where he was accustomed to rely on his trained senses and his knowledge of nature, was like a physical insult.

The sun rose higher and higher, till one by one, along the range, each peak sparkled virgin white and diamond clear. The blue of the sky above them, burned into the darkness of a gentian. The golden light spread and deepened across the snow fields. The feathery lightness of new-fallen snow grew sticky under Mark's feet. He longed for eyes in the back of his head as he floundered on. "The worst of it is," he thought, "since there is no path—I shall leave tracks!" The slope was virgin. The farm was sure to be closed for the winter. There was nothing strange however in this fact, since the Planer family seldom went down into the valley between autumn and late spring. Mark grew warm with the sun's deepening power and his heart filled with a false sense of security and peace. He saw the farm at last in the clear azure air; a little wisp of smoke rose into a column of deep blue. At last Mark heard a sound from the barn; the faint, cool tinkle of a cow-bell. Sapphire icicles hung from the eaves, thick as a man's thigh. Between the barn and the house the sun shone on a little empty snow path. Suddenly a dark figure filled it, carrying a pail in each hand: Lisa came straight down the path towards him, not putting down her pails till she reached the barn door, although she must have seen him. When Lisa reached Mark, she still did not speak, but motioning him to follow her into the barn, she closed the big door behind them. The sweet warm darkness closed over them, blotting out her face.

“One of Them’s up at the farm,” she said breathlessly, “but he can’t get far. I’ve lost his skis for him. He can come down here though—only he’s still asleep. Have you left tracks?”

“I had to walk across the slope,” Mark admitted. “They dropped me out of a plane in the high meadows and I climbed up. I hadn’t got skis, or I’d have tried striking above the farm and prospecting a little first before I dropped down on you. I had to risk it.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Lisa told him. “I’ll send Peter along with the sled to get wood and he’ll cover your tracks. Our Nazi Pig sleeps late fortunately! He’s nothing else to do up here, but interfere with me—and that hasn’t got him much further.” Lisa gave a soft low chuckle, and laid her hand on Mark’s arm. “Fancy your coming up here to help us,” she said. “Well, I had a feeling you’d turn up sooner or later. Na! Na! where shall I put you? I know—Father has a bull—a grand fellow—not our own—he belongs to the mayor, but we look after him—because down there in the valley they’d be sure to take him. There’s no such calf breeder in Tirol as old Franz Josef, but in between times he’s a killer—as the best calf breeders are. Once our Nazi started poking his head in where he wasn’t wanted and came out sooner than he walked in—on his hands and knees too and with his breeches torn! Mein Gott! Did we laugh! Bent double all day we were—we had to tell him it was the colic. There’s the small loft just above Franz Josef’s stall, and the only way to get inside is by the ladder above Franz Josef’s manger. You can manage it if you look slippy! I’ll give him something to take his mind off while you climb up. You can come down at night and sit in the kitchen with us; the Guard, Credner, gets drunk as a king every evening, and I don’t deny I sometimes put a drop or two in his beer, that I bought for Father’s earache two years ago—when I want to be sure of his sleeping extra sound. There’s only the one guard in the week up here, and he goes off Saturday nights and the one that takes his place doesn’t turn up before Monday noon. They don’t like it much up here—seemingly!” Lisa chuckled again, and took up her pails to water the cows. “They’ve only left us eleven cows,” she explained, “God bless them, the other way round! and taken half the fodder the poor brutes need—or think they have; but Father fooled them—more goes into our cows’ bellies than that one ever sees in the manger!”

Mark’s eyes had grown accustomed to the semi-darkness of the stall. He followed Lisa, from the big barn, through a long passage, into a smaller barn, where Franz Josef had a palatial solitary stall. A half door, which Lisa swung open, showed him the massive form of the killer bull, attached by a nose ring to the wall, towering up in front of them. “Na! Na!” Lisa

murmured affectionately and discreetly, to the great and savage Presence, “you step to one side, my fine fellow, if you want anything from me!” What Lisa offered, or what exact action she took to engross the bull’s attention, Mark gave himself no time to find out. He saw the ladder hanging a foot or so above the manger, and was up it and into the hole above it, before Franz Josef had time to take in this insult to his sanctuary.

Lisa opened the door in front of the barn. For a long brilliant moment, the whole gold and azure day shone up at Mark. He saw the farm; mother Planer at the door feeding her chickens; the pigs expectant under the balcony from which their trough was filled; the flash of the half-released stream, and Lisa’s laughing, upturned face. Then the barn door closed, and the darkness and sweetness of the hay into which Mark sank swallowed him up. He slept, as if he were once more back in the peace and serenity of his holiday hours, as if no stern anxious months’ training in strange and lethal weapons lay behind him; no long nights, fearing and planning; no ghastly leaps into unknown spaces, with the whole brittleness of man upon his shoulders. He slept, as if nowhere in the world was there any such nightmare figure as Hitler, piping his madly inspired people to their doom.

It was not only the spirit of the mountains, nor even his long four hours’ unaccustomed climb, that gave Mark such deep and tranquil slumber. It was something in Lisa—something he had never understood or taken advantage of—and yet he knew that it existed—and that it existed for him. Lisa was a warm-hearted, easy, natural peasant girl, but she was something else as well—she was Eve—the Mother of all Living. Not even a killer bull stood much chance with Lisa; she knew a thing or two unknown to killers. Mark was not sure what it was that Lisa knew—but he carried her laughing face with him into his dreams, and slept the deeper for it.

Chapter 6

Mark's first waking thought was Lisa's laughing eyes. "This," he told himself sternly, "will never do. She's nothing but a healthy peasant girl. I couldn't think of her seriously and I should be a beast to think of her in any other way. I must think of nothing but my mission."

It did not occur to Mark that the way Lisa thought of him also mattered. The strictness of his code had never been a problem to him—because hitherto he had never been even slightly attracted by any girl out of his own class. Lisa was just as much without refinement as she was without vulgarity. It was probable that she had never had one single thought in common with Mark. Yet lying there in the chill dawn, under blankets and a *duvet* that must have come from somewhere while he slept, and feeling as snug as a fieldmouse in its nest, Mark continued to think about Lisa. She was, he knew, wholly preoccupied by the cares of the earth itself—the animals or nearest human beings on it—and probably with less frequency the inhabitants of Heaven. She went to church regularly every Sunday, two thousand feet away, into the nearest mountain hamlet, on skis in the winter, and on foot in the summer. She talked with everyone in the church porch before she went in and after she came out. Each of the few families on the mountainside had their own jokes. Some of these they shared with their neighbours—and indeed the jokes were often evoked by their neighbours, and gained an added flavour by arising out of conversation with them. Within the church, Lisa would talk, of much the same natural interests, to God and the saints. The Virgin Mary she accepted as she accepted her mother. She did not always agree with what God and the Virgin Mary wanted from her, but she realized that they meant her well, and could be trusted to stand by her in any difficulty beyond her own power or experience.

Lisa knew exactly what to think of Hitler and the Nazis, because even before the Occupation a handful of Nazis had crossed the border and blown up the Flauerling Church. They had blown it up quite wantonly with dynamite as a mere exercise of derisive power. They were, therefore, enemies. "Bad acts only come from bad men," Father Planer told his family.

“Now we know what to think of this Hitler, who keeps promising us the moon.”

But there was nothing to be done about it. If Hitler promised the moon with one hand he could obliterate the homes and happiness of the whole mountainside with the other. It was best, the Planer family decided, to stand quite still in your tracks—blotting yourself out, as near as possible like a young rabbit against a clump of bracken, relying upon protective colouring and complete invisibility. But of course if you could do any one a good turn who was evading Hitler, you did it. Even if Lisa had not liked Mark she would have provided him with food and shelter, at the risk of her life.

Mark found food within reach of his hand, the best that could be provided cold—bread, butter, cheese, two boiled eggs and a jug of cider. A small window had been cleared of hay, so that he could look straight up the pathway towards the farm.

He had light enough to see the enormous back of Franz Josef beneath him, and to watch his ill-tempered antics.

Franz Josef’s quarrel with the world was as deep as Hitler’s. He pawed and trampled the straw under his feet, as if to destroy it. He tried to gnaw his manger, and heaved his great barrel of a body about, as if every movement he made was an attack upon an invisible enemy.

The cows in the stall had begun to moo in order to attract attention. This must mean that the Planers had already started their five o’clock prayers. Soon Lisa would start down the ice-blue pathway with her pails, and open Franz Josef’s half-door, so that he too could look upon the promise of the March world.

“Herrlich wie am ersten Tag,” Mark murmured softly to himself. But he and Franz Josef were not to be allowed to enjoy this First Day Beauty—both of them had got to be shut up in a community of ill-feeling and restraint. “I must go mad to-morrow,” Mark remarked to himself, looking into the rapture of the awakening world, but he no longer believed it. His spirit had already passed into the rapture of the day.

He ate and drank the cold, clean food with fierce enjoyment. All the things he had done all his life grew dim. Hot water—shaving, a cold plunge, an early run before breakfast, bacon and egg, marmalade and toast—the usual ritual of an English breakfast table; newspaper and politics; boys; his work—how seriously he had taken those archaic classes he called “Work”; how pompously that relationship had been carried on between him and the

politely subservient, well-guarded boys! What had happened to them all now? Mark neither knew nor cared. All his eager senses were sharpened into unknown ecstasies.

There was Lisa in the doorway again, shaking the gaily coloured rag rug that lay in front of the kitchen stove, and even Mark realized that it probably didn't need shaking, an electric current told him that it was being used this morning, at any rate, as a greeting.

Lisa wore a quantity of warm petticoats, a thick skirt and a wool jacket; over these she had tied her second-best apron, matching the blue handkerchief that covered her corn-coloured hair. Lisa had thick chestnut eyebrows above large grey eyes set rather far apart. Her short upper lip seemed to have a perpetual joke with the lower one. Her teeth, when she smiled and she smiled often, were large and white. Her cheeks were a wind-whipped pink and nothing like paint or powder had ever been on her face. Soap and water twice a day were enough. Lisa's expression might have been described as permanently receptive; and, indeed, Lisa was always in love—in love with so many, that she had never yet been able to make up her mind to any particular bridegroom. "Why," something within her deep capacious heart seemed to say to her, "shut out anyone?" The sunshine didn't. Birds sang alike to all the world, even the rain rained alike upon the just and unjust person. Lisa could not have explained why she failed to fall in love even with the Nazi guards. They were men—lonely men—preoccupied by an ardent desire to be loved. Nor was it that they were over-anxious for all ceremony to be dispensed with, so that they sprang at her behind doors, caught hold of her in passages, and generally waylaid and obstructed her. Lisa was not repulsed by their primitiveness. She was exceptionally well able to take any care of herself that she wanted taken, yet without any preconceived arrangement one or other of her family was always within call. It was simply that she felt something about these Nazis was all wrong. They were, she explained to her mother, "*unheimlich!*" One of them kicked a pig, a perfectly good and inoffensive pig that had happened to be on the path at the same time he was. Badly kicked it too, so that you could see the marks of his nails on the pig's thick hide—as if he meant to hurt it. A gentle kick would have been quite in order—if you want to go your way and the pig wants to go the same way at the same time, and the path is narrow, it should be the pig that gives it up—after some gentle physical hint. But Lisa saw the kick. She screamed as involuntarily and loudly as the pig had screamed. No love-making from people that kicked pigs like that, was deeply registered upon her lively senses. Two big hairy hands appeared simultaneously upon Lisa's shoulders while she was shaking the rug in the direction of the barn.

Without the slightest hesitation Lisa flung the mat backwards upon whoever was behind her. “You go and get your breakfast,” she said sternly to the Nazi guard who ruefully extricated himself from the carpet. “It’s on the stove, and leave me to get on with my work; or I’ll let loose Franz Josef on you!” She gave a shriek of laughter, that rather shocked Mark, in spite of which he was quite unable to control his impatience for her to finish with the Nazi—the pigs, the cows, the ducks; and fetch Franz Josef’s pail. When Lisa at last arrived, wind-blown and breathless, she didn’t close the barn door after her. She left it wide open for all the world to see—if they cared to look—what she was up to. She did not even glance towards the hole over which Mark was cautiously peering although she was perfectly aware that he was gazing down upon her. She looked and spoke only to Franz Josef, who was snorting at her with unmistakable hostility.

“Na! Na!” she said soothingly, “what a fine boy you are, Franz Josef! And what a shame it is we can’t let you out into the brave sunshine! But the cows aren’t out yet either—you can see that for yourself, though I don’t say I shan’t let them take a little walk later when the sun is up. You-know-who has to go down the mountain this morning to change guard, and no one’s due to take his place till late to-morrow. Ah—there’s freedom for you, Franz Josef! As soon as he’s safely off, I’ll wave my red petticoat out of the top window!” Lisa gave a laughing cautious flicker of a glance upwards and was gone. Franz Josef’s half-door was still down. He could look out at the world, and snort and paw his deep disfavour at whoever passed anywhere near the barn. Mark, too, could see all that there was to see—Father Planer, for instance, crawling slowly like the very old man he pretended to be—so that he could keep his sons to work on the farm for him, until he reached the back of the chalet where he could no longer be overlooked by any Nazi, when he went to work chopping wood as rapidly and skilfully as any young man of twenty.

That was Andreas starting to milk the cows at the further barn. Peter piled wood on a sledge. Both dawdled a little because they wanted to see Mark before they set off for their day’s work.

At last Credner, the Nazi guard, appeared, not in the best of moods, because Lisa had rather taken the edge off his day, but at least, since he was to report to his superior officer, in the best state of spit and polish.

Lisa, looking down at him safely from a bedroom window, begged him to be careful or he would surely turn all the girls’ heads in the street.

The Planer men had nothing to say to Credner. They always managed to be just beyond earshot of him when he appeared; only Mother Planer never made any efforts to avoid him. She went about her business exactly as if he weren't there. She didn't walk through him, or fall over him—but she only just didn't. Nevertheless it was to Mother Planer, that in default of other auditors, he had to address most of his demands or warnings. Mother Planer seldom answered him, sometimes she stopped what she was doing and listened to him, with her head on one side, much as she might have listened to a cockerel crowing in the distance: “Something,” she seemed to say, “is making a noise! Never mind—it's its usual noise—there can't be much wrong with it!” and then she would return to whatever it was she had been doing before he spoke.

Credner growled at her now, as he passed, shot a malevolent curse at Franz Josef, who returned it with a hideous bellow, and then started off down the path. Could it have been made purposely slippery by a little water lightly flung over the most shadowed spot by one of Lisa's pails? Suddenly he slipped and sat down with a cruel crash exactly where the ice was hardest. Now it was difficult to know which expressed more rage by his noise—Credner or Franz Josef—who naturally felt, since the accident took place a few feet from his nose, that it had happened on purpose to annoy him. Every single Planer had a ring-seat view of the performance. Gusts of ill-suppressed merriment punctuated the silent landscape. Credner got up, muttering savagely, shook his fist at the farm, and shuffled painfully out of sight. A few minutes later, the scarlet petticoat shook joyfully from the window. A smell of concealed and greatly prized coffee came from the kitchen door. With one accord the Planer men threw down their tools and set off for the barn. Cautiously descending the ladder, Mark swung himself clear of Franz Josef's stall, taking a flying leap from the lowest rung, and found himself gripped and patted all over by hard and friendly hands.

It was as if a frost had melted from the landscape. Birds sang, pigs grunted cheerfully and without agitation, ducks quacked with the urgency of greed rather than that of fear. Every living creature drank, ate and breathed in an easier manner, as if a weight had been removed from their chests. The March sun grew so hot that the Planers pulled benches from the kitchen, so that Mark and the whole family could drink their unaccustomed coffee in the open air.

It was two years since Mark had seen them, two years of grinding poverty under the Tourist tax; years of uncertainty and danger and final enslavement. Yet it might have been yesterday, for nothing had changed

about them—their jokes, their habits, and their hearts were exactly the same. Only Mark was different for what had once seemed to him an amusing pause in mountaineering—a mere pleasant sideshow to the real business of life—had somehow grown in value. He knew now these were his friends. They were more to him than the mountains themselves. The Planers—not his pleasures—were part of reality. He looked from one to the other with gratitude and relief, as if they read his unspoken words—they began to tell him one by one all that had happened outwardly since they had last seen him. The Nazis had at first threatened to take both sons away. Something, Father Planer said, had had to be done about it—so Peter got married. They weren't, it seemed, taking young married men away from farms, only the young unmarried ones. "A nice girl," Mother Planer explained, in the mountains, who had already given him two good children, so it was certain that she would be a decent wife for any man. She was still with her own people, and Peter was working by turns on both farms, her father's and here, month by month. It was hard to have him go so far away—at least three miles—to the left of the Wetterstein, but it was a lesser evil. Andreas had developed fits, Lisa stated. "No! No! Of course not real ones!" It was all arranged. The doctor had taught him how—you did it with soap suds—and rolling your eyeballs backwards—you had to bite at everything—even your own tongue—and make a noise like a cow in labour. The doctor gave him a certificate to say he'd had these fits from birth; and who was to say he hadn't? He was therefore also released from being sent into any service. Lisa herself was obliged to serve in the Stadt during the summer, at the Three Red Crabs, but there was no harm in that. She had done it before. Tips were always useful and now necessary. The taxation swallowed all the cows earned. Still, Father Planer said, they could keep going. The earth didn't change to suit the Nazis. What, Peter wanted to know, was Mark doing? Andreas evidently thought this was too direct a way of opening any subject, so he hastily interrupted to say politely that it was good England had started fighting—though it was a pity she hadn't done it before, when Hitler was so small you could roll him over. Now many other things would have to be rolled over as well. England had waited far too long—there was no doubt about it. Still, better late than never! You could get out of the way of an avalanche when it began to move if you were near the edge of it—but if not—not. The trouble with Austria and Czechoslovakia was that they were on the track of the avalanche.

Mark explained that he had come to find out a lot of things it would be good for Britain to know. He didn't say what things or where he expected to find them; and no Planer would have dreamed of asking him. But he

explained that he wanted to get well over the border and off the mountains with the least possible trouble into the Innthal. He might too be coming back with what information he needed if it weren't too dangerous for them to have him again? No one would come to the farm but himself, and no one but himself would know that he was coming. Still there was always a certain amount of danger for those who hid enemies. The Planers listened intently. Lisa's eyes spoke, but she said nothing. Father Planer always spoke first, but this didn't make what Mother and Lisa had to say any less important. At length Father Planer said, "Enemies? But who are my enemies? I have no use for guns against the French and English; but I have a use for corn! Yet the Nazis take my corn to buy themselves guns to fight England and France. No man's goods belong to him now, nor a man's sons, nor even his daughters—as for his soul—to hear these Nazis talk you would think their souls belonged to Hitler. And who is Hitler? Here in Austria we know who Hitler is. It is a pity that we hatched him—but at least we know what we have hatched. He got no white collar job from us!"

"As for fighting," Andreas said, "if it were fighting *against* the Nazis, I'd soon show them I could fight!"

Peter added slowly, with pained eyebrows, "Herr—the Nazis killed our people. Aren't the Jews our people? They are Austrian Jews! Our doctor is a Jew. All of us were born with the help of his hands. They bombed our railways while we were at peace. The Tourist tax broke up our farms—now they want to be loved! Pah! That's the Germans all over. Kick you in the face and ask for a daisy chain!"

Mother Planer said, looking pensively at the barn, "We never had a killer bull up there before. Seems as if Providence had sent him."

Lisa gave a low contented laugh. "It'll be all fixed up, when you come back," she said. "I'll make a rope ladder, so that you can get from the loft to the floor without having to scramble through Franz Josef's stall again. And you watch the weather-cock—it got struck by lightning and the part that moved doesn't any more however the wind blows. But I can get up and change it myself. If it's south you can come in—if it's north the guard is about. And if you come by night—I'll show you where the rope ladder'll be kept—and up you get into the loft, till you see the coast's clear."

Mark drew out his pouch, all the Planers' men's eyes grew fixed in an opposite direction. They had no tobacco but they knew Mark's was for them. They took it, when he offered it, with silent joy. He had half a pound of the best coffee for Mother Planer too, and a silver brooch with an airman's

wings on it for Lisa. She caught it as a squirrel seizes on a nut and ran with it into the house to hide it.

The golden day deepened slowly round them; the sun drank the apricot light off the Thal, and spread broad purple shadows across the snow. On the Wetterstein slope, a released stream powdered the winter grass with giant kingcups. The men went to their work, and Mother Planer to her kitchen. Mark helped Lisa with her tasks in the stall. They took the cows out for their first stroll to the stream at the back. Each cow followed Lisa up the path in turn sedately, until they reached the melted fields and felt the freedom of the light and the spring fresh upon them. Half frightened and half enchanted, they bucked and plunged about, trying the wet grasses with their long tongues. "You are an airman. You fly up in the sky?" Lisa asked Mark. She looked up anxiously as if testing the familiar distant element.

"I passed my pilot's test, but I'm generally only a passenger," Mark explained. "Still, it's useful to be able to fly. You will see a lot of fliers one day, Lisa, even here. For we must win the war by what we can do on the sea or in the sky. We have no great land armies like the Nazis."

"But will you win it?" Lisa asked anxiously. The smile vanished from her face and she looked at him with deep and unaccustomed gravity. "Oh, Herr, the Nazis are wicked and strong—but very strong!" she murmured. She laid her hand on his arm, as if partly to protect him and partly to measure the strength she felt there. Mark found himself looking deep into her eyes—into their pity and their friendliness. He had not meant to touch her, but his hand stretched upwards over her hand.

"We must win," he said, "or else lose everything on earth we have ever cared for!"

As he touched Lisa he no longer felt a shy and separate person, he found himself part of her. She moved suddenly into his arms, against his heart. His lips found her lips. Lisa laughed softly, exploring his head with her hands, and then drew it down against her soft full breast. "You are not strange," she whispered. "You are like other men!"

The short brilliant day closed about them—every breath Mark drew was a separate rapture. He had a strange and bewildered feeling of being something he had never been before, and might never be again, part of a woman's heart. Wherever Lisa went he followed her—to the byre and the barn; and everything they did together appeared to have an acute and sacramental value. Lisa did not stop her practical, unhurried tasks, though she lingered over them. The farm was utterly silent and undisturbed. The

golden day was as still as a picture—drenched with light—cut off from all life before or after.

Mark forgot his mission—forgot the Nazis—forgot more deeply still his home and his respectable island habits. Everything they did broke into laughter.

“To be happy,” Lisa said once, “that is what the Nazis never know! And they try to make all the world forget it! But do not forget this, *mein Herr!* All I have of life I will give you! Do not forget—when you are in danger—when you are alone—when you are unhappy! Remember that there is happiness!”

“But, Lisa,” Mark said gravely, “I am afraid I will spoil your happiness. I am Andreas’s and Peter’s friend. You are all my friends—this new thing that has come between us—what will they feel about it?”

Lisa laughed. “Listen,” she said. “We none of us—in our family—say anything about what we do, to each other. Why should we? We know very well that we are the same people—we have no new feelings! Father and Mother—did they never love? Andreas and Peter—do not they have sweethearts in the Thal or on the mountains? I am not a young girl either. I know already all there is to know. If I give you what I have, it is because I have always liked you. But before, when you came here—you were not wanting anything from me—now you want it. I am happy—when anyone wants something from me, and I like the person, I am as happy as they are! Why should we not enjoy what there is to enjoy?”

Mark sat down beside her on a bench that stood with its back to the barn. From it they could look over the mountainside into the far off valley. “But the future,” he said half to himself and half to Lisa. “What is going to happen about that, Lisa?”

Lisa tossed her head. “That is for God to see to!” she told him. “He made us—didn’t He? Well then—He made us like this—and He will make the future—what it is—when it comes.”

Mark put his hands on her shoulders. He felt their splendid firmness; and as he met the fearless laughter of her eyes, his heart grew freer and freer, until life seemed no longer something bindable and heavy, but something light and uncontrolled.

Often in his adult life Mark had known what wrestling with passion meant, but he had always been the master. Now he knew nothing about it—nor was he aware of any struggle in himself or in Lisa.

“To-night,” she said softly, “very early—but when all are asleep, I will come to you! Now we must fetch the cows in—and the men will soon come home for supper. After supper we will all sing to you. That is what I like best—to sing and then to love!”

“But to-morrow at dawn, I must go,” Mark reminded her.

The laughter died out of Lisa’s eyes, but not the fearlessness. “Yes, yes,” she said, “I know! The Nazis—they have made life so silly! and so ugly! It is a pity; but it is true—what you say—we must fight them. But, Mark, why should you go empty? You will feel stronger if you are a lover! And I—I shall be stronger against the Nazis if I am loved!”

The ground had begun to grow colder under their feet as they went up the path to the meadows to bring in the cows—the burning blue of the sky turned first to violet, then to a dazzling crimson—the air itself seemed to become a colour—and to move out over the snow towards them. One star came out and gleamed very cold, and far away against the lightless air. From the valley below the deep reverberation of a distant bell climbed upwards towards the white and silent fields. The cows, after their first outing, seemed glad to leave the cold frosty meadows for their warm stall. One after the other the solid fawn-coloured shadows followed Lisa down the darkening path until, with a final clatter of bells, they passed sedately into the barn. The light on the path was still pure gold, and side by side Mark and Lisa passed into it.

Chapter 7

A blizzard tore across the white-lipped, wrinkled earth. It seized the snow off the mountains and flung it upwards to meet the falling snow.

The wind came in long shrieking gusts with sudden stealthy pauses. “There are your ski boots warmed and ready for you,” Lisa said without turning her head from the milk-soup on the stove that was warming for Mark and Andreas. Had she forgotten the night? Was it really true that she had held him warm and soft against her heart—carrying him up to the gate of life—lulling one by one his bitter fears so that he felt once more—if for the last time—that he was part of an infinite and friendly universe, above and beyond all the petty cruelties of man?

Mark sat down uncertainly with his back to her, and began to draw on his boots.

Andreas came in, looking at neither of them, carrying their oiled skis carefully across his shoulder. “The storm is rising,” he said. “We must make haste, Herr! One good thing—we have everything else to fight—but not the Nazis. A spring storm on the Wetterstein keeps even a Nazi quiet.”

Lisa turned and gave them their bowls of milk potato soup. As she put the bowl down on the table in front of Mark, she looked down at him. It was a curious look, as if for a moment she drove—with all the force of her being—the secret of their short love—all its kindness—its completeness—into the quick of his heart. “This,” her summoning eyes told him, “belongs to us—now and for ever—nothing else does!”

They drank their soup in silence, and in the same silence Lisa went with them to the door. The snow blew a thick veil between them. Mark knew that Lisa still stood there because the door stood open; but after a few uncertain steps, the farm itself was gone.

The snow blinded them, blowing against their eyes and into their ears, and down their throats. The false *Harsch* slithered, and broke, under their flying skis. Andreas led and Mark followed in what looked like a series of careless swoops and plunges, but these broken, twisted flights against the strength and fury of the elements, were the sum of all the mountain lore either of them had ever learned. Andreas knew his own mountain best; he

was the more effortless because the more constant skier, but Mark was the quicker thinker. His well-used brain, and trained muscles, responded with instant skill to the unpredictable. The persistent clamour of the air confused their hearing, as the flying snow confused their sight. Both men knew they must be off the mountain before the storm grew beyond the puny efforts of even the most skilled skier to drive against it.

Time hung, against space, in the windy balance of the elements.

As they drew closer to the valley the wind seemed to concentrate as through a funnel, with a blind driving will to hurl them off the mountainside into a bottomless pit. They could see nothing beneath them. Trees rushed up at them out of the darkness, with barely time for each to measure his skilled way past them to left or right. Again and again they had to leap into incredible voids, and take jumps that would have seemed madness in broad daylight—which jarred every bone in their bodies. Every now and then the snow shifted or heaved beneath them with dangerous cracks and uneasy movements, as if it were alive and preparing to shake off their undesired weight. The muffled roar of a distant avalanche rose even above the howling of the wind. They were out of its path; but the long thunder of its descent gave them a feeling of infinite helplessness.

The end came so suddenly and easily that Mark could hardly believe the bared flat space he drew breath on was really the valley floor. There was light enough to see the round Turkish cupola of the nearest village church.

Andreas held out his hard gnarled hand. “That is your way, mein Herr,” he told Mark. “I go the other, to my cousin’s village. He has an ox I might think of buying. One cannot move now to right or left without a lie for a reason. Trust no one. That is why I spit out my soul at the Nazis! They take away faith even in a man’s brother! Only we who live on the mountains and know each other like our own thumbs—well, we feel no great difference in ourselves! But here in the *Thal* no man is safe. Even his courage may betray another!”

Mark nodded. He had always felt in Andreas—apart from the reliance he placed equally in both brothers—a greater quality of heart and mind. He was glad it was Andreas now and not Peter who had set him on his way. But it was nearly as hard to part from him as if he had been Lisa.

“Thank you,” Mark said a little unsteadily and then suddenly words pushed past him, as if to reach Andreas without his knowledge or consent.

“Look here, Andreas—if there are enough of us—enough of men like you, I mean—well, then, I think it’s going to be all right in the end!”

Andreas shook a puzzled head. “Men like me,” he said incredulously, “we don’t go very far, mein Herr, but it is true we know where we are going.” He turned and Mark watched him pushing himself forward through the heavy snow.

The world felt strangely hard and empty when Andreas’s figure had passed out of his sight. No one was about in the white and silent village. Mark pushed his slow way to the station and for a time that, too, seemed empty. At last a sleepy official crawled like a torpid fly into the ticket office and sold Mark a ticket to Innsbruck.

As soon as the train arrived Mark slipped inconspicuously into the nearest carriage, stood his skis in a corner, and gave the cheerless formula “Heil Hitler!” to its crowded inhabitants. His greeting was returned but not at all briskly.

Every face, as Mark glanced at them in turn, wore the same expression of unreceptive blankness. These men and women were sunk in a blind misery far deeper than anger. No one was anxious to know what anyone else was like. They took for granted that if Mark were one of themselves he must feel exactly as they did; and if he were not he was already a danger, and the less they knew about him or he about them, the better. Two years of tyranny had knocked all their eager smiling humanity out of them.

The train jogged on through the long valley of the Inn from Landeck to Innsbruck, passing one by one, with familiar jerks and stops, the little valley stations Mark knew and loved of old. Each village now wore the same strange and empty look.

At last they reached Innsbruck. Here there was a difference. Italians mingled with Germans, and took the place of Austrians. The station was important and in the hands of war lords. There was an almost savage briskness about it.

Mark knew he could pass muster as one of the peasants, but he felt disagreeably conscious, all the same, of keen eyes looking through him as he gave up his ticket, before he found himself allowed to pass out of the station.

There was still life in the beautiful old town, though the streets at dusk were emptier than Mark had ever seen them. But the life there was struck Mark as false and unpleasant. The real inhabitants had no rights, and the swaggering military, holding undisputed sway over them, had no roots.

The wind still blew harsh and bitter from the mountains, but the snow had stopped falling. It lay thick and soft over the unswept pavements so that no footsteps made a sound.

Mark turned down the old street towards the river, and looked for the inn where he was to meet Pirschl.

He passed and repassed the Two Bitter Cherries several times before a man lurched out of the doorway and followed Mark down to the river's edge. When they had both reached the swiftly flowing black water, he said in a good-humoured grumbling tone, "Ah—it is you, Anton! Late as usual. I had nearly given you up. But come in to the Bitter Cherries, and have something to cheer you up before our drive. You might say this is only the beginning of our journey!"

No one was in earshot of them; but it was as if Pirschl were afraid even of the listening air. "Be a little troublesome," he said in an undertone, "when we are in the café. Attract enough notice for them to see you are a little out of the way! But not enough, you understand, to make any sort of scene. No one makes scenes here—mad or sane—nowadays—except the Nazis themselves. You understand! I have already told the innkeeper and the waiter that I expect my brother who is not all there—but quite controllable. Yes! Yes! as controllable as everyone in this blessed land has learned to be. Why, even I—an artist—am controllable. I must paint my pictures up to the scratch of those featureless nineteenth-century humbugs, since they are all the rage in the highest quarters. Or else I am quickly reminded how perishable an artist is!"

Pirschl too had changed. He spoke with his old ironic drawl, but there was something nervous and urgent behind his laughing tones. When they sat together in the dim and humble little inn, Mark could see that the change had become a definite part of him. Pirschl was thinner and looked more like a scarecrow than ever. His heavy mop of red hair was streaked with grey; his eyes absorbed his face under their thick brows; they stared out, as if all the life of his body was centred in them.

Mark sank heavily on the chair opposite him. He had taught himself to let his face sag, and his supple body sink into an inert lump.

When the meal Pirschl had ordered for him came, although by now he was so famishing that he could have cleared the plate of unappetizing stew in two mouthfuls, Mark pushed it away and asked in a loud petulant voice for *Nierenbraten*. "This stuff! this stuff!" he shouted, "isn't good enough for men. Bring me *Nierenbraten* or I won't eat anything!" "Come, come,"

Pirschl told him, “you’re asking for the moon! No one has *Nierenbraten* nowadays—except generals! It’s a *goulasch* day and you’d better eat it up—before the others come! For they won’t want to wait about once they’ve had a good look at you. We’ve a journey ahead of us you must remember!”

“I don’t want to go!” Mark shouted. “I don’t want to go away! I want to go home!”

There was real panic in his voice now. He felt a storm of loneliness and anger welling up inside him, as if he were indeed a man hunted and forlorn—forced by strangers to give up his will—that will which alone ensures a man his self-respect and is the proof of his sanity.

Appreciation shone in Pirschl’s eyes but his lips formed the words, “That’s enough.” Everyone of the café’s small clientèle of tired workmen on their way home, was now staring at Mark. They had even stopped eating to take in the unaccustomed drama. The old and shabby waiter approached Pirschl’s table significantly. Pirschl shook his head, and leaning over patted Mark’s shoulder gently. “Come, eat it up! There’s a good fellow!” he said soothingly, “and you shall have some beer with it! Here, waiter, give my brother some beer—poor chap—he won’t get any of our good Innsbrucker where he’s going!”

Mark hesitated, then began eating wolfishly; while he shovelled down his food with one hand, he tried to cover his face with the other. “He doesn’t like being looked at!” Pirschl explained to the room at large. “That’s right, waiter—a mug of beer for each of us!”

“I want more! I want more!” Mark snapped, pushing his plate away from him.

“And now he wants more of what he doesn’t like!” Pirschl murmured with a good-natured laugh. “But never mind—give him more, waiter! I’ll stump up for once. But it wouldn’t do to feed you in a café every day, my brother. No! That it wouldn’t. Ah! Here’s our comrades.”

The storm door swung open, and what for a moment appeared to be two young men came up to their table, but at a second glance Mark saw that the second of the two was Ida, dressed in long ski trousers and a black pullover. “Ah!” she exclaimed, “so this is your brother, Herr Pirschl—and here is my friend and colleague, Herr Carl Lauterbach.” Her eyes laughed at Mark still, but was there a hint of respect in them as well as laughter? The jaws of the wolf had closed over him; but he had chosen to walk into them; and she knew that he had chosen.

Mark stared up stupidly and defiantly at each in turn. Dr. Lauterbach gave him a quick professional glance, and took the seat opposite him; Ida sat between Mark and the door. They had him securely now, these two doctors, and the artist who pretended to be his brother.

What if Father Martin had after all been deceived in them? Or had been, himself, a deceiver? What if the Nazis had planned this very trap to catch Mark with his specialized knowledge of British planes and weapons—so that they could question and torture him at will?

Mark felt the sweat break out cold on his forehead, the very roots of his spine had a frozen feeling. His eyes turned to the door. He must get out, something within him cried urgently. He must get out! He made a short, uneasy movement, but before he had had time to rise from his chair Ida's hand shot out and pushed him back firmly but gently into his seat. "You'll do very well where you are, my boy," she told him in her light incisive voice. "There's no hurry at all. We'll be off presently, but we're all going to get better acquainted first!"

Mark felt his panic slowly subsiding. He still felt suspicious of them, all three, but the second wind of his common sense and courage came back to him. Whatever the truth was he must act as if he believed in them. Nothing had yet happened to prove them false; and if they *were* false still the best thing he could do was to appear to believe them true. Everyone, including himself, had so far acted according to plan. Once more he cowered back into his corner, his elbow resting on the table, his face covered by his hand.

He would not look at Ida—that hard, sarcastic, brilliant face still perturbed and antagonized him.

The conversation that followed seemed to take place in a nightmare.

On the surface it was just an ordinary conversation between four not very intimate companions. Actually it was a duel between two doctors trying to prove that a sane man was mad; and the sane man himself who was helping them. He *must* help them. It wasn't his business to be sane. But only one of the doctors was aware of this, and both appeared not to be. Sometimes their eyes met each other significantly and looked away again, as if to hide the dangerous sense of their private and expert knowledge.

Pirschl took no direct part in the conversation. Here and there he dropped a friendly observation or supplied a decisive connecting link. Nobody spoke of sanity or insanity. They asked Mark simple questions, about his tastes, his habits, his work. What he liked to read best and why he

thought he liked it. They listened carefully to his answers, answers that became at first purposely and after a while unintentionally, verbose and incoherent. Mark could hear his voice growing edgy and nervy, fatigue and danger tossed over and over together in his mind. Was he really off the mountain or not? Was this the real Nazi world or one of his anxious dreams of what it might be like? Was there anyone called Lisa? Suddenly in the middle of a conversation that had nothing at all to do with anything that Mark had ever known—he heard himself asking for Lisa in a loud voice. It was a most unpleasant, screaming voice. “I want Lisa!” the voice proclaimed savagely. “I want Lisa!” One of the peasants by the door laughed. Fortunately Mark was still thinking in German so that it didn’t matter what he said. Still it frightened him. Voices shouldn’t proclaim strange desires—not known to the minds they spoke from—even in the right language. Mark became acutely aware of his need for self-control, it slid over him again, like a familiar garment.

Ida’s face cut itself out distinctly from the fog of smoke and fatigue which seemed to fill the room.

“Are you satisfied, Herr Colleague?” she demanded.

“Oh, perfectly,” Dr. Lauterbach said, getting up. “I’ll sign whenever you like, but better get him home first I suppose, hadn’t we?”

Ida nodded. She did not look at Mark, as he stumbled wearily to his feet. She just walked to the door and stood waiting for the bill to be paid.

Outside a sleigh waited harnessed to two rough and powerful carthorses. It had begun to snow again.

“I’ll drive,” Ida said over her shoulder to the two men. Mark found himself gently and firmly pushed into the sleigh. He was left quite free except that the man who had been holding the horses and Dr. Lauterbach were on either side of him. Pirschl did not come with them. He stood on the side walk waving and shouting affectionate farewells. The sleigh bells tinkled merrily through the muffled air and in a moment the sleigh shot off into the dark valley, away from the twinkling lights of the town.

It was not cold. A warm fur rug had been tucked all round Mark’s knees. The wind had fallen with the return of the snow, and the snowflakes that blew against his eyes had none of the cutting quality they had possessed in the storm. The jolting darkness seemed full of unendurable risks and strains. Mark felt almost paralytically powerless. There was nothing he could see or do. He could not even move. He was being driven in an unknown direction

by strange people against his will. He was even strange to himself. He—and no one else—had given that incredible cry for Lisa.

That he had shouted out loud for a peasant girl in the middle of a café was perhaps the most disconcerting thing that had ever happened to Mark. He was not able to explain it to himself. He might, after all, be mad, he told himself suddenly. But he had none of the satisfaction of a madman. Madmen were not conscious of themselves as mad. What he had said was appalling to him just because he *was* so conscious of himself. Did Ida know that his control had snapped—for that one moment—or did she think as Pirschl certainly had thought—that Mark was a considerably better actor than he had ever imagined? There had been nothing in Ida's face to show Mark what she felt—neither recognition, criticism nor curiosity. She had taken him as if he and his behaviour were a matter of course—just like any other madman's. The interminable shaken darkness was unlit by a single star, but the horses seemed to know their way by instinct. They dashed on and on into the deepening night without pause or hesitation. At last they slowed down and began a long steady pull upwards. The darkness deepened all round them as if a cloak had been drawn suddenly close against their very eyes. "Pine trees," Mark thought to himself, "on each side of us; ahead and behind us—nothing but pines."

The light bells rang on with the cruelty of a satire. Suddenly the horses swerved and stopped. There were no lights—no sounds—yet they had arrived.

Chapter 8

Mark found himself standing in a vast, bright room. His dislocated mind reeled at the sudden overpowering change. The room was full of people dancing and talking. It stretched away on all sides of him under a heavy beamed ceiling into dark shadows. In the centre an open fireplace, as big as a small room, threw out gusts of naked warmth. Columns of clear flame devoured whole roots of trees and cast a flickering light over the heads of innumerable deer, the tapering black spikes of chamois horns and the spread antlers of ancient stags hung against all the walls. Everywhere about the room there were counterparts of animals and birds, picturesquely arranged in glass cases—foxes and owls, squirrels and weasels—as if the life of the woods had pressed itself through the grey stones of the Schloss, to cling about its very heart. The walls were wood-panelled above a shining parquet floor.

The younger people were dancing to a gramophone, while older ones were playing bridge. Solitary people sat in corners reading. No one took much notice of their arrival. One or two near the door looked up and smiled at Ida, but most of them seemed unaware of anything but themselves. Had they all crashed together into a knight's banqueting hall out of one century into another, Mark asked himself helplessly. Or were they all part of some ancient nightmare and would they and their unsubstantial persons and habits all vanish when the drunken knight came to his senses again to plan the next day's hunt?

"We won't disturb them," Ida said in a low voice. "This is the best hour in their day—after supper before they go to bed when they are—or pretend to be—a little happy. This is the way, Dr. Lauterbach." The sustained cheerful public look died out. They were in a dimly lit, long passage stretching away into darkness.

Mark felt himself stumbling back into reality again. They passed a dining-room nearly as large as the banqueting hall; then a kitchen, swept clean and garnished, then endless shut doors of offices; lastly they came to a sound-proof doorway and when they had passed through it, the atmosphere changed again. They were in a place that belonged to an individual, perhaps to Ida herself. Mark was too exhausted to ask himself if the room they

entered was beautiful or not. He only saw that it was a library lined with books. He sank into a seat close to another great open fireplace, and let its warmth sink into him.

For a long time he heard the sound of Ida's voice and Lauterbach's; perhaps he slept for their actual words escaped him. Someone brought in a tray of sandwiches and hot Glühwein. Ida came over to the fireplace and begged Mark to eat and drink. "It will soon be over," she told him. "Dr. Lauterbach is going to make a physical examination—he must do that tonight before you sleep, because he has to go back early to-morrow to Innsbruck."

Mark stared at her—a physical examination? What was that for? Then he remembered—he was mad—he was in a hospital. They *told* madmen what was going to happen to them. They couldn't choose.

Ida raised her eyebrows a little as if she could have wished the situation a little different, but knew that nevertheless it must be put up with. For a time she said nothing more, but she stood there as if to give Mark time to eat and drink and become accustomed to the room and the strange necessities of the hour, before she left him.

It was unfortunate but from the first moment Mark had disliked Dr. Lauterbach—the grey middle-aged man, broad-shouldered, bull-necked with eyes that were like jellied grapes, bulging a little out of their sockets, made a wholly disagreeable impression on him. Dr. Lauterbach was not an ugly man, but ugliness seemed to have crept through his face, and taken advantage of his features. He stood with his back to the fireplace under a portrait that commanded the whole room. When Mark's eyes turned from Lauterbach and raised themselves to the life-sized figure above the mantelpiece, he found himself looking into the fierce eyes of the handsomest man he had ever seen. It was a most speaking and emphatic portrait. The man was very tall, thin and elegant; he was dressed in a moss-green hunting costume with a fur collar which set off the almost incredible beauty of his features. His eyes were dark, luminous and fierce; they seemed to command the room and everything in it. Even his painted semblance was full of life. It was the same life as that of the wild things in the forest creeping through the long preserved, stuffed animals, into the heart of the Schloss. The man in the portrait made Lauterbach look like a lump of shapeless clay.

Lauterbach, licking his thin, small lips, and staring down a little superciliously at his patient, was unaware of the contrast. "I suppose it is all right," he said a little uneasily to Ida, "to see him like this—here, alone?"

Ida shrugged her shoulders. "Herr Pirschl," she said addressing Mark, as much as she addressed the doctor, "is, I am sure, very tired already—it would certainly be better to leave his physical examination till to-morrow, but since that is impossible for you, and since you think it must be done by you, before the necessary papers are signed, we have no alternative. I will therefore leave you to get on with the job."

"But—alone?" Lauterbach protested.

"I always see my patients alone," Ida told him, with an undercurrent of contempt in her voice, "but of course if you wish for an attendant——?"

Lauterbach shook his head. "Naturally," he said, "naturally you take the usual precautions?"

"Oh, yes," said Ida with a crooked twist to her mouth that might have passed for a smile. "Naturally, we do everything here that is usual—as well perhaps here and there—as modern science should—something a little unusual!" She turned her wintry eyes full on Mark. "You will have to undress," she told him "and do what Dr. Lauterbach tells you; then you can go to bed, and get the rest you need." She turned and left the room.

"Now that the lady has gone," Lauterbach said half to Mark and half to himself, "we can get to business. Stand up, my man." Mark rose slowly to his feet. He wondered if he were as tall as the man in the portrait. Mark was six feet tall, the man in the portrait, though his proportions were so perfect that he did not look excessively tall, might have topped him by an inch or two. Both of them looked down, quite a long way down, on Dr. Lauterbach.

The doctor approached Mark rubbing his plump short hands. Perhaps he thought it did not matter poking a lunatic, he may even have wanted to reassure Mark as to his genial intentions, but Mark happened to be a man with a curious dislike to being poked. Physical contacts were his aversion—even the involuntary one of being pressed against in a crowd was a dangerous trial to his temper. This hard and violent punch from a stranger filled him with resentment. He pushed Dr. Lauterbach's hand briskly away from his chest. "When I have got my clothes off you can start examining me," he told him. "Till then kindly keep your hands away from me."

Dr. Lauterbach's green, grape-like eyes became more prominent than ever. "Why, you idiot, how dare you speak to me like that!" he said sharply. "You are under orders. What infernal impertinence! I shall do what I choose with my hands."

"Not to me, you won't," Mark replied grimly, "at least not often!"

Dr. Lauterbach leaned forward and gave his patient's cheek a ringing slap on the jaw. "You can't behave like that under my charge!" he shouted. Promptly he found himself sitting on the floor with a nerve-shattering pain at the base of his spine.

Mark suddenly felt a great deal better. The mist of his fatigue lifted.

Lauterbach scrambled to his feet and flung himself, sure of his own sobriety and with a trained ability, to make violence tell, upon his patient. What he had not counted on, was that the apparently inert, exhausted patient was a trained athlete. He did not even get to grips with Mark, for Mark held him off with methodical skill. He was instinctively aware that the man attacking him both feared and despised him; and this gave Mark an advantage, for he neither feared nor despised his adversary. Mark was merely very angry; and he became angrier. For he found that Lauterbach fought with no rules whatever—using the whole of his strength and all the intelligence he had to knock his opponent out in as quick and complete a way as possible. Lauterbach kicked, scratched, and would have bitten any part of Mark he could have fixed his teeth in. In fact, as Mark with a flicker of amusement felt, Lauterbach fought less like a sane man than a lunatic. Mark evaded the flail-like blows, he countered Lauterbach's vicious kicks and as each bull-rush of his adversary spent its force, Mark got in a smart tap of his own. Slowly but surely Mark pushed Lauterbach away from the fireplace towards the wall of books which lined the room. Lauterbach fought more wildly. He overturned a table, he hurled a standard lamp across his adversary's path and nearly fell over it himself. He found his breath going. The door opened without either of them being aware of it. Ida came in and shut it quietly behind her. She should of course have called for help or herself intervened; but for a moment she did neither. She simply walked behind the two swaying interlocked figures, for they had, at Mark's instance, at last come to grips, to the fireplace; lit a cigarette, and poured herself out a glass of Glühwein, which she sipped slowly, while she looked on at the fight.

Mark became suddenly aware of her. He had fought at first from sheer temper; now he added a touch of vanity to his anger. Before, he could have stopped the fight at any time, but now he fought to a finish. Let her see—if she thought him a weakling, if she really thought he had *meant* to cry out for Lisa in the café—what kind of a man he really was! Mark gave her a very pretty exhibition of first-class wrestling, and laid Dr. Lauterbach out stiff on the floor, but almost before he heard the thud of the doctor's head against the bookcase, he felt his hands caught by the wrist and pulled viciously

backwards. A short shrill whistle sounded in his ear. He had no time to free himself, before two white-clad attendants flung themselves upon him. Mark's theories, his skill, his self-control all automatically vanished. He became a mere fighting, threshing, wildly exhilarated madman. For a while what he felt was ecstasy; a red light wavered before his eyes—all the anger he had ever felt was released in him. In spite of blows, twists and cracks, he was using every muscle he had, and giving wherever he could place a blow, as good as he got. He had full use of one of his arms, although the other still remained at the mercy of an iron grip; and then suddenly a blow from behind—a neatly planned and expert blow on the side of his head—turned everything black before him. The last thing he heard was a low, musical and quite delighted laugh.

When he came to himself Mark was in a brilliantly lit white room, without furniture. The floor was firm and resilient rather than soft, so were the walls. He was in a padded cell; but he was not alone in it. Sitting on the floor, her legs crossed under her, her back against the wall, was Ida. She was still smoking, and looking at him with an amused, if not kindly, smile. He saw with intense distaste that her long slim fingers were indelibly stained with nicotine. "Well," she said, gently blowing a difficult series of smoke rings into the air between them, "you have established your reputation. Would you like a cigarette?" Mark stretched out his hand to take one, and was amazed to see that it trembled. "What else can you expect?" she demanded. "I had to send for two more men—to get you in here. Lauterbach will not be able to keep his appointment in Innsbruck to-morrow. Why did you make an enemy of him? He is an outside doctor—a well-known Austrian Nazi—a criminal, of course, as most of our Austrian Nazis are. We have very few respectable ones like the Germans—though I must warn you my father is one of the few respectable ones. A deluded monarchist with his mind still in the ark with Noah. But this Lauterbach—it was a little bit foolish of you! We want no outside complications. Still you have convinced him, it seems, that you are a dangerous maniac. Perhaps that is as well. I have seen more convincing Manic Depressives but not a better all-round homicidal incident. I believe that you went on fighting even after you were unconscious. It relieves me at least of one anxiety—none of the attendants will ever attempt to bully you!"

"I didn't like Lauterbach's face," Mark conceded rather shamefacedly, "and after you'd gone he poked me. I've always disliked being poked."

Ida laughed again. "You see how easy it is to go mad now!" she told him. "Or did you plan the whole thing simply in order to impress me?"

Mark blushed as he had not done since he was an over-sensitive little boy at prep. school. "I can't say that it was a plan," he said truthfully. "I acted impulsively to start with, and then you came in—and set those thugs on me—and, well—I felt the whole thing was unfair."

Ida laughed again. "When an Englishman feels a thing is unfair," she said, "and only then—he gets angry—and then I suppose—he begins to fight? You must admit that your country watched the Nazis rise to power through a good many unfair incidents before you acted. But I forgive you your part in it since you are here to help us now! What we must remember, Herr Pirschl, however, is that you are on a mission. You must do nothing whatever to spoil or hinder that mission nor must I. There must be no more impulses. It is quite in order that I am here now, since it is my custom never to keep a patient in a padded cell for more than an hour or two, and always to visit him before releasing him, when I try to instil in him a little of the common sense I am supposed to possess!

"Herr Lauterbach is deep in an assisted sleep. Had I not—as you so gracefully express it, 'set those thugs on you', have you thought what would have happened? You would have beaten Dr. Lauterbach in a fair fight, and I should have been held an accessory during the act. Lunatics do not fight fair, they fight as you fought when those men set on you—and I held your wrist. If you had not fought like this, Dr. Lauterbach would lose face. But no one loses face who has been momentarily overpowered before help came, by a man in a frenzy. You must put it out of your mind that you are any longer a model Englishman out to impress every woman with your strength and the virtues with which you subdue your inferior brother man! You are a sodden, trampish, savage, unscrupulous, homicidal maniac whom I shall very slowly lick into a sort of semi-shape."

"Oh, it was you who dragged back one of my wrists, was it?" asked Mark incredulously. "I must say you have a pretty hefty grip!"

"Thank you, I have," Ida agreed. "On more than one occasion I have owed my life to my muscles. I keep them in pretty good order. But at present we need brains rather than muscles. I want you to remember that although I am a highly privileged person, and this is a highly privileged mental hospital, still it is run under Nazi authority.

"If I were to shield you from too much discipline I should be suspected, and if you give too much trouble you will be liquidated.

"Now, for what is left of the night—and there is very little left of it—I must have you placed in what is termed the fractious ward. This is a

disagreeable place inhabited by disagreeable people but I can do no better for you at the moment. I shall give you a sleeping draught so that you will soon be unaware of your surroundings. No one will be likely to hurt you if you leave them alone.

“It is a pity. I should have wished your first night to give you a good impression of our home, but perhaps it is better to see the worst first and to gain your good impressions later.”

A feeling of unutterable horror swept over Mark. “But—but,” he stammered, “can’t I even sleep alone?”

Ida’s eyebrows raised themselves ominously. “It is what we all do,” she told him. “We sleep alone—and die alone—not only in this hospital. The walls of our mind are the only privacy any of us really gets. You must learn to make yourself at home there. Believe me, that is sanity. No man is truly sane who is not content to be himself and does not make himself free in his own consciousness. In Europe there is nowhere else where he can be free!”

Mark was silent. At times he felt the waves of his antagonism recede. She and she alone was aware, and gave him the sense, of his own sanity. He did not wholly understand what she had just said, but he knew that he would remember it.

“I suppose you have brought useful information with you,” Ida said after a pause, “for our underground workers? Yes—well, this information must not be handed on to me. No one does anyone else’s work in our group except in a dire emergency—nor must we know anything about anyone else’s activities. I protect and shelter you. Pirschl collects news for you—but the person who must know and carry on all that your country can send us through you is Father Martin. He visits sick patients here regularly. His next visit is due the end of the week. He will be able to talk to you freely in the confessional. This room is also sound-proof, so I have been able to talk to you here openly. It will be better from now on that I choose the opportunities I think safe. When we talk at other times it should only be as patient and doctor.

“To-morrow you will see my father, who is the titular head of our institution. But you will remember he is a convinced Nazi. This cannot be helped—it is the mould of his mind. We are a deeply attached father and daughter. But we think in different worlds. In his world I cannot breathe; in mine—he would not. But I do not trouble him with my ideas. I do not say that he thinks me a firmly convinced Nazi—that would not be possible—but he knows nothing of my activities—nor, indeed, of my theories. ‘She is

young, poor little thing,' he says to himself—though I am no longer young. 'And he is old,' I say to myself. Although at times, I must admit, I feel myself considerably older than he is!" Ida sighed. She rose, looking a little uncertainly at Mark. It was as if there were still more she would have liked to say to him—perhaps to warn him about, but felt that he was not ripe for it—or that the moment was not opportune. Perhaps she thought the man before her was too dazed and weary to take in anything more.

She had found time to change her clothes, and wore a neat short black skirt and Russian blouse. Mark was not too dazed to notice one new thing about her: although she had no beauty in her harsh pale face, her body might have been made by a fourth-century Greek sculptor. Her feet and ankles, the shapely slim legs and well-set head, were exquisitely modelled. Her woman's clothes made her look younger, only her eyes—cold and indifferent—were old. They were older, Mark thought, than any eyes he had ever seen. They never changed even when she laughed.

Ida had a key fastened to her wrist. Giving Mark a little nod, she turned the key in the soft padded wall and pushed open an invisible door. A few minutes later the door swung backwards and the attendants beckoned Mark to come out and go with them. They did not touch him, but they walked on each side of him, down a long passage, and into a room that they carefully locked behind them.

The room was lit by faint blue lights, high up on the walls. Mark was conscious of a curious, rather an unpleasant smell. There were ten other beds, besides the one the men told him was his. "Undress," one of them said to Mark briefly.

One of the figures talked interminably to himself in a low monotone, the others lay rolled up like caterpillars fast asleep, but even in their sleep they were restless and every now and then one shouted out loud.

When Mark stretched himself on a narrow soldier's cot and counted the ten men between him and the door, he thought he would never be able to sleep, but almost as soon as his head touched the pillow sleep caught him, and flung him deep into the short mercy of oblivion.

Chapter 9

Mark became aware of light beating on his closed eyes before he remembered where he was. The weight of the drug *Ida* had given him the night before hung on his limbs and his senses. A high, querulous voice rang on and on in his head, or outside it—he could not be sure which. “I tell you I can’t bear it! I won’t stand it! All my life I’ve been cheated—always I’ve been deprived of my rights—put upon, neglected. Why should I have to wear my brother’s old clothes?”

The complaining voice passed suddenly from self-pity to a roar of anger, “and now he’s got the best bed—the one by the window in the corner. Wasn’t I here the longest? I tell you I *will* have it! Get out! Get out!”

Mark dragged open his astonished eyes to see a middle-aged, solid-looking man, his eyes rolling, his face splotted purple and ashen with rage, dancing on the tips of his toes, a few feet away from him, shaking an infuriated fist in his face.

“No, you don’t, Steinbosch!” an attendant said sharply, intercepting him neatly. “Come on out of this! You slept in your own bed all night without any trouble, didn’t you? Then don’t start making a fuss with this new one after the night’s over. Besides, I warn you, you’ll get more than you bargain for if you do—he knows how to fight—though he’d better not try it on here too often. Besides here’s breakfast coming!”

A swift and ludicrous change took place in the fierce countenance of Herr Steinbosch, a look of craft and greed replaced his rage. Without a word, he turned and hurled himself towards a large wooden table that stood in the open doorway. It was the swiftness of this change that told Mark where he was. He was in the fractious ward of a mental hospital—surrounded by madmen. He closed his eyes again, to let the antidote of his mission heal the panic in his soul. Last night, in the padded cell, *Ida* had given him what he needed—the defensive armour of his lifelong discipline came back to him. If these men were mad—that was his safety. He was part of a plan and had clicked into it.

An attendant appeared, pushing a wheeled table piled high with portions of coffee, rolls and butter. He set them on the table, in exactly equal portions

each at some distance from the next.

The clean mountain air filled the room, lifting from it its faint peculiar odour. There was no cultivated garden to look out upon but a precipitate green hill with small patches of snow, down which streams ran pursued by golden kingcups, and beyond which stood a range of amethystine mountains.

“Get up and dress,” a second attendant said to Mark briskly but not unkindly. “Here are your clothes! That’s your locker—and you’d better keep it locked. Some of our boys here are like magpies. You can get your breakfast for yourself, can’t you? I’ve got the old ones to see to! Don’t disturb the two at the further end of the table if you can help it. They’re always troublesome first thing in the morning!”

One of these two was Herr Steinbosch, from whom Mark had just been so abruptly parted. The one on the opposite side of the table was a tall, gangling fellow with morose eyes set close together, and a perpetual frown that seemed to creep down his face and settle on his determinedly unhappy mouth.

All the patients wore a uniform of heavy blue sailcloth, loose but not uncomfortable, and Mark was glad to see that the suit laid out for him was impeccably clean.

In the corner furthest from Mark were two highly disagreeable-looking old men, whose habits were to part with whatever they should retain and retain whatever should be parted from. They were at their best when Mark looked at them, propped up in bed in scarlet jackets, eating their breakfast supervised by an attendant.

There were two attendants constantly in the room; both looked physically fit and alert. Johann, who relied upon finesse and good humour, and Fritz, who relied upon finesse and a sort of automatic harshness which he had acquired from a six months’ visit to Berlin.

The ten patients they had to look after were the most troublesome the hospital contained.

On either side of the two truculent patients, Herr Steinbosch and Herr Müller, sat two particularly gloomy ones. “No doubt,” Mark told himself, “manic depressives like myself.”

They ate with rapacity but without pleasure, as if eating were a mechanical process, taking place in spite of themselves. Herr Winkel, the elder of the two, ate fast without looking at what he ate. Herr Putznagel, a

sallow youth tormented with pimples, ate slowly as if he expected each mouthful to choke him, and never took his eyes off his plate. Next Herr Putznagel, and with an empty seat beyond him, sat a busy and happy-looking young man, his eyes gleaming with amused malice. He glanced round at Mark with a keen, intimate delight, as if he were not only enchanted to see him, but had indeed known him all his life. "Sit here, beside me, brother!" he said in a wheedling, welcoming voice. "I can see we shall have a lot to talk about together! It's great fun here when you know the ropes!"

Mark sat down in the seat offered him. On his further side was a slight, timid fellow, who kept looking round him apprehensively, pecking at his food as if he expected to see it snatched away from him by anybody at any moment.

At the head of the table, between the two truculent patients, sat a distinguished-looking man, with sad, intelligent eyes. Mark would have supposed him perfectly sane except that he was sitting there, and in the same uniform as the others. His table manners were perfect; he ate with discrimination and without rapacity. He bowed ceremoniously towards Mark, as Mark took his place at the table, "*Mahlzeit*," he murmured. "Fresh rolls will be brought in presently."

It was plain that he presided over the meals, and that he was respected by all the others. Even the two who sat on each side of him, snatching at whatever they could fasten on, did not touch what belonged to him.

"Ah! You're looking at our King-Patient!" the malicious voice next Mark went on companionably. "We're supposed to worship him. He's our lady superintendent's pet! Outside he was a general. Everyone clicked their heels and saluted at sight of him! But we needn't be like that in here, need we? Gott sei dank! We have no heels to click with. And there's only one person who has to be saluted now, all over this loose old Austria of ours—the Nazis' Germany—and that's our old friend—between ourselves you know—the tramp—Hitler! What we were outside was just a parcel of earthworms—weren't we? and that's what we are inside; but inside anyhow, this fine general of theirs is just an earthworm with us. He can't get away from that, can he?"

Mark gave his neighbour the heavy lifeless stare on which, after long practice, he justly prided himself.

"Ah! You are one of the silent ones!" said his neighbour with a chuckle. "Well, you'll be surprised how the silent ones let out *here*—once in a while!

I just save up for that moment, listen in—and afterwards—well then I know everybody's secrets, and can make good use of them."

"You shut up!" Steinbosch roared suddenly across the table, "you damned sneaking, stinking little reptile!"

"There—there!" said the attendant, patting Steinbosch's shoulder as he passed him with the fresh rolls, "don't you let yourself get upset now or you'll spoil your own breakfast! As for you, Heinel, you keep that wicked tongue of yours off your mates, or you'll get into the usual trouble. And next time you do neither Johann nor I will pull you out of it!"

As soon as breakfast was over, the trays were removed as swiftly as they had been brought in, and the table slopped over by some of Mark's companions was instantly scrubbed clean.

"Make your beds!" said Johann briskly.

The younger depressive began to cry noiselessly like an unhappy child. Of all the terrible tasks that stretched before him—even here where tasks were so much less terrible than in the outside world—this task of making his own bed appeared to him the most appalling. The second depressive nerved himself to begin his task but failed in the middle. He did not however cry, he swiftly lay down again in the unmade bed, and stared fixedly at the ceiling.

The truculent patients made their beds extremely well, though they fell out with each other, because Steinbosch said that Müller had unfairly finished his too soon. Müller was roused to a terrible passion by this accusation. His voice rose higher and higher, his gestures became more and more threatening until suddenly he fell flat on his back in a prolonged and highly noisy fit. None of the other patients took the least notice of the thrashing figure on the floor, they even walked over him to get to anything they wanted to reach, much as an alligator in the zoo treads upon his companion in the mud, as if he were the log of wood he so closely resembles.

Even the general went on making his bed like a work of art although Herr Müller's feet drummed close to his own. Only the attendants moved to help their patient. It suddenly occurred to Mark for the first time, confronted by this curious object lesson, that it is only an insane being who does not go to the help of anyone else in trouble. The illness from which the world suffered before 1939 was this type of insanity.

When the general had tidied his already meticulously neat corner, he took a packet of cigarettes out of his locker, and walking up to Johann's

fellow attendant Fritz, who was still on his knees by the patient, asked permission to smoke. What he now gave the general was a light. The general offered Mark one of his cigarettes, and lit it from his own.

“Now we can go out,” observed the general. “After breakfast exercise on such a morning is beneficial.”

The enclosure into which they stepped from the open doorway was long but not wide. The walls round it were high and along the top of them was a jagged row of glass.

The thick walls of the Schloss rose, high above them, surrounded by deep pine woods. Beyond the walls and the pine trees they could catch a glimpse of distant peaks. “This looks an old castle,” Mark ventured. “To whom does it belong?”

“For many centuries,” the General told him, “it was the property of cousins of our Royal Hapsburgs in an indirect line. The last to whom it belonged was the Archduke Michel Salvator. You remember the name, no doubt—though you are young perhaps to have ever seen him. A very fine type—beloved in Tirol. A great hunter. You may have observed last night, when you entered the hall of the Schloss, many trophies of the chase? The Schloss was left in a curious manner by the last Archduke for the purpose for which it is now used. He had a great affection, it seemed, for his foster brother, Herr Dr. Eichhorn, who is our chief. The Frau Doktor you may perhaps have seen. She is our acting superintendent; but the Herr Doktor visits us daily as well. He lives at the farm below the Schloss and has been also all his life a good hunter.

“In the mountains over there chamois are still to be found. *Auerhühner* are not rare in the early spring. All winter long there are hares—martens—all sorts of small fry. You have good shoulders, mein Herr, though forgive me for noting you do not carry them well. Have you ever been trained as a soldier?”

“No, I am not a soldier,” Mark said slowly after a long pause, “a little training in school corps—that I have had—but my family—we were wanderers, so I was seldom for long in any school. You may have heard of my brother, the artist, Pirschl? He alone of our family has distinguished himself. I have done nothing.”

“That is a pity,” said the general kindly. “One should always have been trained—one should always, I find, have done something. Still you are

young—you may recover—and perhaps you have done no great wrong—in that case you are still fortunate!”

“No—I am not fortunate!” Mark said, in the lazy, lifeless voice he had taught himself.

For a moment the general said nothing. His tragic eyes fixed Mark’s with a long penetrating look, then he said gently but as if to close the conversation, “we are then, I find, brothers in misfortune.”

He bowed, and turning away from Mark, walked, very straight and tall, and for the moment purposeful, towards the further end of the enclosure. He seemed, as he walked, to set a space about himself, into which no one ventured to intrude.

The sun beat down in golden warmth over everything and everyone. All the others, except the old men and Herr Müller, were out now. The attendants were washing out the ward.

Pigeons, shining white, and very elegant, wheeled and pirouetted on and over the roofs, in an unconscious rhythm.

Mark found himself thinking, as he watched them, how neat and happy was the life of instinct compared to man’s confused, haphazard tussle with reason. Here were these lively and lovely birds, carrying out with rapture their indelible rules. While the untidy, tangled, broken men, beneath them, without one plain hint from nature must guide their every action by a separate effort of their own.

His malicious friend of the breakfast table sidled up to him; and fixing Mark with his over-intimate, smiling eyes, he suddenly made him an atrocious suggestion.

In the clear purity of the mountain air, his ugly thoughts had a ludicrous rather than a dreadful sound, yet Mark felt that his future comfort might depend on making himself plain from the start.

He stood quite still, and stared with the sudden weight of an old anger into the bared and craving eyes of the pervert.

“You go to hell!” Mark told him savagely, “and if you come bothering me again, I’ll beat you into pulp!” He drew a deep breath, and turned to meet the eyes of a friendly-looking man, who had just come into the garden. “My name,” said the newcomer, “is Felix Mannheim, at your service, Herr Pirschl. I come to invite you to join my class. We have one every morning from ten o’clock until one. It is difficult to procure what we need in a place

of this size and it may become more so. We have many different occupations—it is for you to choose. If you prefer gardening—I can introduce you to our gardener. Or if you prefer engine work that too is open to you. We generate our own electricity, and also serve and repair what cars we are allowed to use. Then there is the farm—perhaps you are more accustomed to the care of animals?”

Mark hesitated. There was something about the pleasant, fearless, friendly face that immediately took his fancy; instantly he felt at home with Felix Mannheim.

“I should like to work in one of your classes, if I may,” he said after a pause; he added, “But I don’t know how to work.”

“Well, we’ll find out,” Herr Mannheim said with a charming smile. “We find out how to make what we are told is needed.”

“I should like to serve my Führer,” said Mark stiffly.

“There is only one thing better,” said the voice of the general behind him, “and that is to serve our country!”

“It is the same thing,” insisted Mark with some heat.

“But naturally,” said Mannheim hastily, “naturally it is the same thing! Then please all come with me, meine Herren!”

The little group of men drifted with him back into the ward. Johann unlocked the door that led into the Schloss and locked it after the last of them had gone out.

The passage Mannheim led them through opened into a small courtyard in which stood a big workshop. Another attendant accompanied Herr Steinbosch and the two depressives further on into the Schloss. Only Herr Heinel, the pervert, and the miserable Herr Mandel on whom he sharpened his wits, accompanied Mark. To his surprise the general remained behind in the ward, with Herr Müller, slowly recovering from his fit; and the two old men.

The workshop was well stocked with tools, though Herr Mannheim gave them out with some selective care.

There was a plane, and a big lathe, but they were evidently in the hands of specially chosen operators. Herr Heinel was an expert tapestry weaver, and seemed to forget his unpleasant theories of life directly he found himself opposite his easel, but he never overlooked the opportunity of tormenting Herr Mandel, who had subsided into basket weaving.

The shop was full, and yet no one seemed to be interfering with anyone else. Each had his own special task and implements, and all of them seemed absorbed in it. None of them took the slightest interest in what anyone else was doing. Only Mannheim, passing along from one to the other, seemed to have any part of his alert mind on lease to his fellows. He lingered longest by the least expert workers, and without spoken explanation, began to do himself slowly and correctly what was a difficulty to the other. It interested Mark, himself a teacher, to see that Mannheim always did a little slower than even the slowest pupil, whatever he wanted them to copy. "What do you care to do?" he asked Mark when he had gone the whole round of the shop. "Have you ever cared for books?" Mark turned his senseless stare upon his new friend's face, but perhaps he could not quite help something behind it, that was like an answer. "Your hands," Herr Mannheim went on, "are not a worker's. I mean not a manual worker's. I have found many who like to read books—now that they have the opportunity here—also like to make them. In the next room we make books. See, the door is open—would you care to come in?" Mark followed him slowly. Here he found more highly skilled patients, working at every stage of bookbinding.

Twice during the morning they were interrupted. Once by the sudden, rather ceremonious, appearance of Herr Hofrat Eichhorn, who entered accompanied by the chief attendant. Hofrat Eichhorn was very unlike his daughter, tall, stout and pompous-looking, he had fine features, a square grey beard, and very small, deep-set eyes which seemed unwilling to come up into the open and be looked at. His mouth was both weak and heavy and he did well to hide it by his beard.

He moved slowly and impatiently about, from one patient to another, grunting out a question and not appearing to listen very carefully to the answer.

When he reached Mark he said sharply, "Ah! You made a fuss, young fellow, I hear, when you came in last night! Don't do it again! We don't like fusses here! We have a very short way with them—*nicht*, Otto?"

The chief attendant laughed obsequiously. "Certainly, Herr Hofrat. *Selbstverständlich*, Herr Hofrat!" he agreed. "A very short way."

"There is a shorter way still," Herr Hofrat proclaimed to the whole shop, "and it is one that we are now entitled to use more freely!"

"You have heard of a bullet, my dear sir, have you not? Well—there is no quicker cure for insubordination than a bullet!"

Felix Mannheim stood at attention, while Hofrat Eichhorn made his speech, but as soon as he had finished, he moved imperceptibly nearer Mark. "For a first morning he has done very good work," he observed gently.

Herr Hofrat ignored this remark, and meeting with no more recognition from the busy workers than the shadow he cast across the sunny floor, he soon retreated. But though none of the patients appeared to have noticed his presence, there was, Mark observed, a certain acceleration in their work once he had gone.

Once more, at noon, the workers paused for a brief moment. From the tower of the Schloss the Angelus rang out—a deep and sudden bell, with a long reverberation reaching far down the mountainside.

It was curious, Mark thought, to know that all over this cringing, enslaved country, to which he had long ago given his steady heart, in thousands of villages, from valley and mountainside, and from the midst of ancient cities, a prayer to a dead woman—dead two thousand years ago, could make the heart pause and remember that there had been—there still were—such things as love and pity.

Chapter 10

There was no outward sign—there was no disciplined attempt to reach any particular standard in Schloss Salvator. If a patient wanted to remain in bed, when he was told to get up, no one insisted on it. His breakfast was put on the table, but he need not eat it. The ward was washed out, the door stood open to the outer world, no one hurried him into it. Even Ida, the visiting doctor, showed no regularity in her visits and exacted no sort of attention from her patients. Her appearances were never timed, they seemed fortuitous, yet if an attendant raised his voice or showed impatience towards a patient, he often found Ida's cold eyes raking him with a terrible gleam far more disconcerting than a blow. If a patient lost his small share of control or sank away from decency, or yielded to the more serious of his compulsions, it would be at that moment that he encountered Ida. There were no general rules applicable to all the patients at all times. Each patient's rules were his own limitations and these were always kept open to meet the slightest progress. Patients in the more limited wards knew that they could and would be moved into a less limited one, the moment they could control their own actions sufficiently for the severer limitations to be lessened. Ida spoke to them about their difficulties, as a workman speaks to a fellow workman about the imperfection of some tool they both needed to mend in order for it to execute a common task. "When you have got over this illness." "When you can eat your meals like that." "When it is not necessary for you to be so angry," she would carefully explain—"then you can do so and so—or you can go freely here and there." The sickness of the soul, Ida treated with the same respect and care as the sickness of the body; but though this was a hospital where improvement was expected, it was also a re-training in moral values. This was the one path towards recovery. Each patient had offered him, some for the first time, the chance to acquire habits of decency; and the instinct of contributing towards a community which largely provided for its own needs. From the moment a patient arrived, his skill or the possibility of developing skill in one or other of the activities of the Schloss was looked for in him and brought out into the light of the patient's own consciousness. From the moment he could recognize that he *had* this power, a new hope was born in him. Sometimes the hope was there

before the patient discovered it—a glow-worm in the dark unaware of the light it was carrying.

It was strange to Mark, who was both harder and less elastic in his code, and more sentimental in his expectations of a human being's innate capacity to carry out his duties, to see that Ida neither showed nor welcomed affection as part of her treatment.

It was not devotion that she roused, nor personal attention that she challenged in any of her patients. Yet when she came into a ward something dynamic happened. Every patient in it became slowly aware, if it were only for a few moments, of something other than themselves. It was like the opening of a window in an airless room.

Mark puzzled for some time as to the cause of this awakening; he even (though his hostility to Ida had not decreased) felt it in himself. He came at last to the conclusion that it was a sort of hidden relief—because Ida never for an instant accepted the taint of a patient's inability to be normal. For Ida, insanity as a fate (unless the organ of the brain itself was structurally degenerate) did not exist. To be mad was merely a patient's unfortunate choice; not a doom; and for a moment—a brief, wistful, ecstatic moment—the wind of their freedom to behave like other people swept over each patient's consciousness.

Steinbosch had a mania to destroy women. In a bad mood, and he was liable to such moods several times a day, he would try to attack Ida. She would circumvent or divert him from his violence, and then almost immediately she would succeed in making him feel that she had found something in him to agree with. He wanted to destroy something? Very well, then, a great many things *did* need to be destroyed—let them find out together why he wanted to destroy *her*. What had made him feel *she* was the thing that had to be destroyed? Something certainly was troubling him and in a strange rush of shame, confusion, self-pity and bitter rage, out would come, sometimes in a torrent, the long history of Steinbosch's resentment. Listening to this frequently told and lengthy tale, Ida showed unending patience.

She would sit beside him wreathed in smoke, or walk up and down by the open door, her hands in her pockets, her eyes attentively considering the stream of his self-justification—for it was really himself, she knew, that he wanted to kill. A homicidal maniac is only a man who wishes to wipe out his debt to life, by destroying life itself, instead of by paying his debt. Since it would be painful for him to remove his own life, he has to find someone else to take his place, and who better than a woman, for presumably it was

his mother who had brought him into the world and during the period of his dependence on her had failed to show him how to pay his debt. It must be, his maddened senses cried, *someone else* who made his life so insufferable, it could not be that he was causing this dreadful havoc in his soul himself. His whole being was concentrated upon the blotting out of the masked enemy who sat within his brain, obstructing his every movement towards escape.

It seemed to Mark as if he could sometimes see Ida put the key into the madman's hand—but at the last moment he would not turn the key, but threw it fiercely away. Yet he had held it; he knew she had given it to him and his eyes followed her, as a child's eyes follow his mother when she leaves him, full of accusation and of hope.

The depressives, among whom Mark watchfully presented himself before her, Ida treated with antiseptic humour. They might sulk, weep, sink into abysmal silence, be so passive that they would do nothing for themselves, and barely consent to breathe, but Ida knew—and showed that she knew—that they were just as much alive as they really wanted to be. Their trouble was that they suffered from an inordinate anticipation of what life was prepared to give them. They wanted a universe on the cheap—the expectations of a spoiled child had made them believe that they could always have the smooth with the rough. But such expectations are not met by Life. Very well then, they would pay life out. They would meet no call upon them whatever—least of all the call of their own self-respect. They wouldn't shave, feed themselves, wash or speak. Theirs was the sit-down strike against living. As Ida sat down with them, her eyes gleamed with the humour of the game they were playing. Helpless were they? Why they were stronger than life itself! They knew they were stronger—so did Ida. No one could make them do the simplest human duty—they were having a wonderful time—crying their eyes out, so that they wouldn't have to put them to any better use. Ida would sit down beside them, talk for them, tell them what they were up to and share the desert they made of the universe with them. She would do anything with them except pity them.

It seemed to Mark, as if the depressives did not altogether dislike this treatment. They reacted to Ida in a way they reacted to no one else. Once, at one of Ida's sharpest home-thrusts, Herr Putznagel actually laughed. Herr Winkel followed her about, in his sly secretive way like a dog, a fond dog, that might however bite the heel of the person he was fondest of if she didn't occasionally notice just how near he had crept. Ida noticed, but she liked Herr Winkel. She saw in him the decent little human being he might quite

well still become, if he really knew, or could be made to guess, he was one. Meanwhile he had so little courage that it would really have pleased her, and perhaps have relieved him of a good deal of bullying had he summoned up sufficient pluck occasionally to bite.

It was only Herr Heinel, the pervert, who hated her. For the indecent and the vicious—those like Herr Heinel, who tormented themselves and others by their dirty vices, Ida had the kindly tolerance of a nurse who sees a child eating the mud pie it has made. Ida provided something better than mud for Herr Heinel. She washed his face, took away the dirt and if necessary even put him where he couldn't daub himself—and others. But what she often failed to do—in spite of trying—was to give him and the other perverts less virulently concentrated on their vices than he was—something more useful than mud—some idea—some work which, if they could master it, would soon seem to them more entertaining and more worth their while.

She tried, but often in vain, to save and resurrect the embittered pride that had let them sink into a desire for mud. This desire was, she knew, but the agonized malice of a discouraged mind. Herr Heinel had found in his wretched vice something he could at last do himself that would create notice and annoy—if not control—others. He could conquer through being disgusting—very well, if there were no other way to triumph, he would take that one, and find strength through cruelty. A sadist is only a person, Mark discovered, who perhaps by a turn of the brain has decided that to be a genius is too hard for him.

It struck Mark, watching Ida's method with Herr Heinel, that perhaps the whole German nation had taken this direction, because its genius—its music, poetry and art—had felt itself baffled by what it felt to be—perhaps mistakenly—the greater attainments of others. Why did Beethoven and Brahms have to go to Vienna to produce their best music? Did this sense of inferiority in their own country daunt even their musical genius?

Why did Herr Heinel, out of the whole ward, so hate and resent Ida? He knew that she saw through him. He could neither wound nor degrade her; he could not even convince her that he was himself wounded or degraded. She simply saw him as he was—a nice little man who had decided to be nasty, because no one took enough notice of him to satisfy his vanity, when he was being nice.

She was different, Mark noticed, in the Idiots' garden, into which one day, as it was larger and he was, Johann said, now quiet enough, he found himself allowed to wander.

The Idiots' garden had no high walls round it. There was, indeed, an open gate that led direct into the pinewoods. Ida was with the idiots in the garden, and for them, Mark saw, she felt pity, and showed pity.

"You see," she said to him, "these poor people really have something to complain of, though they do not complain! The actual organ of the brain is diseased in them or incapable by malformation of any further development. These are nature's failures—they have no dignity to be reached—no captive to set free. For these victims of life you cannot do too much! In their ward I have the best and gentlest of all the attendants. I chose for them a matron who had lost her children through an epidemic. She gives them what they need, an unchangeable patience and kindness. As soon as they have learned how to be friendly, and this you would be surprised to find how quickly they learn from such an attendant, I allow them to wander about at will—in the pine forests or on the mountainside. To have sunshine and shadow, rain and wind and snow play with their broken senses is good for them. I find it better not to mix them with richer human beings for in a sense that weighs on them. With each other—or where they can watch—or perhaps only feel—the movements of nature, they are more at home. Sometimes they improve so much, we can find work for them in the garden or the fields; but we never push or strain them into making efforts, for what cannot grow must never be forced."

"And the Nazis?" Mark asked her. "They allow you to use these methods without force?"

Ida looked round her without speaking—then she said, "Come to my office—I will give the order—in half an hour's time. Go back now to your own ward until they bring you." Mark raised his eyebrows. There was no one within earshot of them, not even the idiots themselves. Yet Ida had spoke with such decision, that he obeyed her.

It was the first time, for over a week, that he had seen her alone. She spoke to him every day—sometimes often in the day in the open ward—as she spoke to all the other patients—but she had left him there.

To-day, when he had been taken by Johann, after the morning's occupation, into the larger garden, he had felt a curious sense of relief, as if he himself were better of a sickness that weighed upon his spirit.

He did not want to go back into the more limited ward again so soon.

From the Idiots' garden he could see the whole outline of the great Schloss, the Hunger tower, the high-hunched roof; and a curious eyeless

wall that stretched down like a column—on the right side alone. An attendant walked back with him to his locked door, but he was hardly inside the ward before the message from Ida came.

Johann took him to a small office room that led almost directly off the ward.

There was nothing in Ida's office but filing cupboards, a desk at which Ida sat, and a chair opposite it. "This is a sound-proof room," she told him, when the door had closed behind Johann, "and I keep it so empty that there is no chance for any hidden microphone. Now we can say what we like. Before it would have been unusual to single you out. Father Martin has been delayed—but he will come soon. You asked about the Nazis and my methods. Well, there are two systems here and it is wise for you to understand both of them. One is the system of the Nazis—it is represented by my father—by any visiting doctor—by Fisch the chief attendant and one or two others. When you come up against it you will know it. It is always the same. The truth can afford to be different—but a lie—well if you lie you are condemned to consistency—lies must match—they rest one upon the other. These two systems of ours are like a mountain stream in winter—my system like the water runs beneath an upper covering of static ice. The Nazis would no doubt destroy my system if they recognized it. But I appear an eager adherent of the Third Reich and since I produce food and farm produce and care for my hundred patients without further medical aid than that of Felix Mannheim and my own father, they leave my method uninvestigated. My father amuses himself by giving administrative orders occasionally but never touches any of the patients. From time to time the commandant at Innsbruck sends an inspector here. Well, we look after him. He is treated like a king and he gives us a good report. We go on as we were. I am a good manager. They get from me plus what I give my patients, eggs, milk, butter, vegetables and even pork. We ask no labour for these productions. Perhaps one day they may decide to liquidate us. But I think we are too useful for that. As regards their stomachs even the Nazis are intelligent. A goose that laid golden eggs they might kill, but not one that provided eatable eggs for the table. Probably we have spies among us. Fisch is perhaps one, another may be your Fritz to whom you gave a cabbage ear the night you arrived. I do not, however, much concern myself about spies. Anyone living under Nazi rule must know that you cannot have a household—let alone an institution—without a spy. What, however, can they report? I make no great secret of my system. 'Surely,' I tell the inspector, 'the Nazi system is pre-eminently one for the sane? A person who does not understand and respond to so perfect a system is of necessity insane, and when insane

requires a quite different system.’ It is so logical what I tell them that even an idiot, and all the inspectors sent to examine our Home have, so far, been idiots, can understand it! For the sane force—very well then—for the insane—persuasion. It is true that the world works the other way round but this the Nazis refuse to accept. That is why they are overturning the world—helped of course by all the Nazi-minded in every country, until it will be exactly—as I put it to the inspector—for the sane force and for the insane—well, very soon the insane will all be killed except those who do the killing!”

Mark frowned. “You put things as if they were very simple,” he said. “I do not find them so, and I have studied the education of human beings all my life.”

“In what way?” Ida demanded with a wicked grin. “There was a book once—written I believe by a Frenchman—called *The English—Are They Human?* An Englishman is in a cloister from ten to twenty—do you call that human? From twenty to sixty he retains, in a certain portion of his brain, a one-sex world. But I did not bring you here to talk about sex—though I have no doubt it would do you good to talk about it. I brought you here to warn you—that you are far too intelligent. Felix Mannheim tells me that you do your work as a bookbinder, ‘far too well’. No one could be deceived into thinking you a real depressive in the workshop. The ward attendants are so far taken in by you—the patients do not observe you, because I purposely put you with the least sane patients—but Felix told me after your second day, ‘I do not ask you, Frau Doktor, why the new patient is here, but I assure you that it is not because he is insane!’”

Mark looked alarmed. “I am sorry,” he said. “I tried to bungle a lot. I thought I couldn’t very well be slower in handling my tools.”

“No doubt you under-estimate the quicksilver qualities of your distinguished brain,” Ida told him drily. “However it does not matter. Felix will keep his conclusions to himself. Do you happen to know anything about horses?”

“I suppose I do, a little,” Mark admitted. “I have always ridden.”

“That is a comfort,” Ida observed. “Your English upper-class habits come in well here, for I need a man who has ridden all his life. I will transfer you to a very secret part of my establishment that deals with horses. However they are not exactly horses—they are winged angels. Under the present régime unfortunately winged angels are out of place. They are looked upon even as outcasts. Perhaps you have heard in Vienna of the Spanish Riding School?” Mark nodded.

“I have often wondered,” he said, “what happened to those horses!”

“A good deal happened to them,” Ida told him grimly, “or rather it was ordered to happen. Fortunately we Viennese have a certain smattering of brain power and anticipated those orders. It was ordered that sixteen of these horses—the pride of our riding school—the great geniuses—the leading dancers—should be destroyed.

“The Third Reich thought that horses of such an unutilitarian character were an insult to the Intelligence of the New Man. The New Man, you see, is not to think and a horse that thinks might remind him of a former occupation of its own.

“We smuggled eight of them to America; four into Hungary, and another four we could not get out of the country—it was too late; so we exchanged them for four less perfect of our scholars—and over-night they vanished! Only their understudies remained. Each horse was, however, still a *Lippizaner*—the only difference was that the horses we left behind us so deeply respected the new régime that they could not dance! The four that could not be got out of the country are in a small valley in the hills behind the Schloss. I took those horses by night and hid them safely in a barn, which we have turned into a riding school. There was a certain amount of confusion, while we were receiving the caresses of our beloved Herrenvolk in Austria, and no one knew anything of our little arrangement. Even if the horses are seen about here nobody knows that they can dance. I do not say no peasant knows that certain horses are to be seen at uncertain hours in the neighbourhood, that were not seen before. But our peasants accept anything that they do not understand quite easily—nor do they ever repeat anything that they observe, to a Nazi. The sun might fall out of the sky, and they would not report it; if possible they would hide it in a barn.”

“Yes, I know,” said Mark; for some reason he felt a little confused and ashamed, and looked down at the ground. He was remembering Lisa.

Ida went on smoking as usual, but for a moment or two she also remained silent, then she said, “Well, it still exists, this little riding school, and those who attend to the horses are all anti-Nazi sure and sound. It is in fact our underground movement. Should we be discovered—well, I once rode in the Spanish Riding School. I even received a gold medal for my jumping. I should be, I think, forgiven. Scolded—perhaps fined, but certainly forgiven, and I do not think any of us—except perhaps the horses—would be accused of being anti-Nazi!”

“Of course I will join your group,” Mark agreed eagerly, “but how, from my strictly guarded ward, can I manage it?”

“Johann is one of us,” Ida told him. “The general is another. You will both be allowed out. Johann will accompany you—we call it working on the land. The general is a suicidal maniac. You can be very dangerous, as we know, but outdoor work, under supervision, is suitable for you both. It is as the Americans so aptly say a ‘Natural’. Now you have stayed in my office long enough. Please look restless and a little ferocious! I will ring the bell and Fritz will come, or should come in about thirty seconds—for you.” Ida stood up and Mark mastered an impulse not to remain seated. He found that looking up at her, a ferocious expression came to him very easily.

Chapter 11

The small iron gate in the wall closed like a trap in Johann's careful hands; but it closed behind Mark—not in front of him. The spirit of the living earth passed into Mark's blood. The pale windy March morning tasted of freedom. The wind roared, danced and sang above them, in the pine branches. It came and went in gusts of rollicking gaiety.

The snow, except for an occasional patch in a windless hollow, had melted. There was nothing to impede this uprush of the spring; nothing was imprisoned; there were no barriers; nothing was finished. Only here and there a rotten branch stuck its naked rigidity into the living air; not a leaf nor a drop of sap hid its fresh significance.

Johann strode ahead of his two charges without concern, whistling as if he were giving hints to the nearest blackbird.

The clouds hurrying towards the mountains gave them the air of play-fellows rather than landmarks.

All Mark's strained senses released themselves in the fluid stream of life. As he relaxed his long painful efforts to be inert and dull a hidden tension passed out of him. His eyes saw with a new intensity; he found himself listening to an undercurrent of faint sounds; even his sense of smell seemed heightened as if he had just landed after a long sea voyage. For a moment he felt stripped clean of his personality, ready to take life as it came.

Mark's eyes met the general's. The general gave a stiff and friendly little nod, as if he understood and shared Mark's feeling of release.

The pines broke off short; and they found themselves in the high meadows. Far away the walls of the Schloss glistened like shining pebbles. Above them, there was a cleft in the mountains, so narrow that it might easily have been overlooked; the walls opened out into a narrow valley. A small mountain stream broke through it; and on the floor of short meadow grass stood groups of silver birches. The further end of the valley was cut off from the mountain walls by a deep green lake. On one side of the lake, half hidden by an outcrop of pines, stood a vast wooden barn. "That," said the general, "is where we keep our horses. There is a way out behind the lake

over the mountains into another valley but you cannot see it. The Nazis have been up here, but as you see, the valley is not wide enough for an air-field—and as for the barn—they look on it as one more extravagance on the part of the Schloss. They searched it, of course, and found nothing there but hay. They might come up and search it again. We are always on the look-out. I think they would still find nothing but hay.

“No peasant ever comes here because of the lake. Once there were three young bridegrooms who came up for a lark, with their brides and other young people of their village. They were drunk, no doubt, and for a bet, they offered to walk across the lake. Their brides and friends watched them. They went into the lake hand in hand. They walked on till one of them lost his footing, and clutched the man next him. They struggled and clutched at each other as if they were in play; but they were not playing, they were struggling for life; and all three of them were drowned before the eyes of their helpless brides. That is why the valley is called the valley of the Three Bridegrooms. It is of course supposed to be haunted by them.” The general stopped abruptly and once more the fixed look of his own haunted past came like a mask across his face.

The door was open when they reached the long low barn. The half darkness within blinded Mark at first; but he could see that the emptiness spreading round him was in the shape of a stadium, with shadowy doors on either side.

The general said: “Now I must leave you. Sit here and watch. It will not be so dark long. We pull back a trapdoor in the roof and get light enough.”

From somewhere Mark began to hear a faint sound of distant music played on a gramophone. A shaft of light sprang above his head and reached one of the doors. The door swung open and an old Viennese dance tune poured through the empty barn. Very slowly, with a rhythmic grace, the horses paced out one by one into the stadium.

“Their names,” Johann’s voice said proudly behind Mark “are Diamond, that’s the black with a star on his forehead; then the half Arab and half Lippizaner—the pure white one—is Pearl. After her comes Emerald, the chestnut, and the pretty grey—he’s Arab too, you can see it in the bend of his neck and the neatness of his hindquarters—he’s Sapphire—he’s the Frau Doktor’s special! The pure Lippizaners have a longer barrel and scraggier buttocks. See Sapphire sidle in, the sly old fellow, as if he didn’t know he carries the best rider of the lot.”

The horses, tossing their heads and side-stepping a little, uneasy in their excitement, steadied slowly into line. It was pride rather than fear that inspired their restless carriage. Yet all of them kept well under control of their riders' hands and knees, though sometimes in the excitement of their task, they pretended for the sheer fun of the thing to evade it.

Twice the riders circled round the stadium before, with unwavering steadiness, the four horses drew up one by one, to where the Emperor's box might long ago have been, and saluted, each in turn.

Mark could see now who each rider was. First the general on Diamond; then Felix Mannheim on the Chestnut; the groom who lived with the horses and looked after them rode Pearl; and finally Ida on Sapphire, the Arab grey.

On horseback, Ida was another person. Dressed and riding as a man rode she yet looked more like a woman than Mark had ever seen her look. Her slight figure was erect without stiffness, and adapted itself fluently to every movement of her great horse.

The horses moved by, now quietly and serenely in time with the music, so that they seemed to float down the length of the school, and through the two pillars in the centre, weaving their way through the intricate figures, with the exact precision of expert ballet dancers.

All four had learned how to depend on the timing of the music, and never to go through the pillars too quickly, or out of turn. They passed from the first simpler dance into the opening figures of the *quadrille*. For this dance the excellence of one horse and rider is not enough. Each one of the four must learn how to correlate his movements to those of his fellow, and swing to right or left with the precision of migrating birds. The dignity and elegance of the formal music melted into their easy movements. Watchful and jealous of each other, they hid their passions under the pride of their own skilfulness—as perhaps long ago the lovely ladies they were unconsciously copying had hidden theirs.

The music changed and became more staccato and imperative. The horses changed with it. Now each one stood alone on his own merits, for each horse must now perform his long-ago self-chosen dance. For it is part of the training of the Lippizaner that each horse has by nature a certain skill for a special dance. He must be tried at each one in turn, until his skill is found; then he concentrates upon his speciality and the other dances—except the figure dances where all are involved—are given up.

“Just like humans they are,” Johann proudly confided to Mark, “follow their own taste, and they’ll go with it as far as you like, but try to make ’em do what they don’t like and you’d think they was so many loonies. They cut up so rough—in a manner of speaking,” he added hurriedly, remembering that he was speaking to one who came under this heading; and who had already shown how rough he could cut up.

Mark however was watching Diamond wheel out from the others, the general as stiff and motionless upon his back as a walking-stick, so that it was unnecessary for him to answer.

Diamond’s speciality was the *Levade* and this he gave with a splendid formality and finish, taking every note into his conscious timing.

Diamond was the strongest of all the horses, and the general’s spirit had long ago slid into him, and matched his own, both in strength and in reliability. Each depended, with flawless confidence, upon the other. Both horse and man were a trifle stiff in their formality, but what they had trained themselves to do they did faultlessly. The *Levade* perfectly accomplished, they floated down the school, out of the limelight.

Next, Felix Mannheim brought the nervous chestnut, Emerald, into the centre, with great resource and skill. Emerald had long ago chosen his rider as well as his dances—the *Mezair* and the *Courbette* were his. No one but the gentlest of masters could work with his intemperate pride. A hint of coercion, the faintest pressure of an alien will, and Emerald flurried himself into complete confusion. He must be reassured and, without realizing it, persuaded. His whole being listened to Felix’s low voice, and Felix, well knowing what a pitfall pride is to a man or a horse, and that it comes oftenest from nerves too stretched with love of duty, to bear the weight of any reproach—least of all his owner’s—gave Emerald always the quick response of that full confidence which he knew the great horse lacked in himself. It was only the fear of failure that drove Emerald into overspeed, and confused him into mis-timing.

Felix had to insert something sedative into the chestnut’s fiery blood before the great horse could relax his arrogant impatience. When Emerald heard the kindness of his master’s voice, he was freed so that he could listen to the music, because by then he knew that the heart that loved him, would hold him back from making a fool of himself. With his special grace, and an unhurried rapture, Emerald executed one after the other of his masterpieces.

Hermann of Zillertal was a little over age for the rigours of the Spanish Riding School, but he had been a champion in his youth, and such a man

never forgets his early skill. The management of a horse had long ago become as natural to Hermann as breathing. He rode Pearl effortlessly into her dance. She was herself so mild and serene a character that at first Mark hardly realized the brilliant cleverness of both horse and rider. Theirs was that simplicity which is perfect art, and which conceals all effort. The flawless rhythm that they practised flowed round them and through them. Pearl's speciality was the *Croupade*, that compact and intricate posture dance which can seldom be achieved without stiffness; but Pearl made her movements with a grace as fluid as water. She then achieved the still more subtle *Ballotade*, with equal felicity. Gracefully, and without impatience, the big grey Sapphire took her place. He had before him the hardest of all the figures, requiring the lightest of all riders—the *Capriole*. He shuddered a little as he found himself alone with his rider in the middle of the empty stadium. The other horses had all been withdrawn, to leave him the full space of the stadium for his great ordeal. His neck firmly arched, his tail spread, his nostrils crimson and dilated, his eyes blazing with excitement, Sapphire began the approach to the *Capriole*. Ida sat on the centre of his back, straight as a lifted sword from head to spine. Twice she took Sapphire round the stadium to relax the tautness of his nerves, and show him how much space he had, before they swept towards the emptiness, which should have been the royal box. It almost seemed to Mark as if, in the dim space, there stood a figure watching.

Sapphire arched his hind legs and slowly—terribly—raised his forefeet to the height of a dog begging. When he had reached the fullest height possible he hung motionless as a frozen leaf upon the air. Ida sat lightly, and yet firmly, encouraging him with the steady pressure of her knees, and not letting her weight shift forward by a shade too much, and, above all, not letting Sapphire slide too far back.

Mark saw how wise it had been to let him out, in the long swinging dance round the stadium, before his nerve could free itself into a burst of conscientious energy and he felt capable of giving her this final token of his confidence. Ida never pressed or held back Sapphire. She let the great horse blossom into his act of grace, at any time and place which best suited his judgment.

It was not for nothing that she had won her gold medal as the greatest amateur rider of the Spanish School.

The salute over, Ida whispered “Fertig!” and horse and rider floated away together in an ecstasy of relief and dignified triumph, down the long

school to join the other riders. Once more they all four met together for the final dancing march.

To that irrevocable, nostalgic tune—"The Blue Danube"—their four beautiful forms moved in unison out of sight.

"Vienna's yesterday is over," Mark thought to himself, "but what a yesterday!"

"It does them good!" Johann remarked philosophically. "It does us *all* good—even the fellow on the roof, who watches the valley-neck for us. Fancy the Germans wanting to kill our horses! They never have been able to know what fun it is to do a thing beautifully—just because it's right! No! They must make money by it or turn it into a law—or else down somebody else by it.

"A fine thing, done finely, just for the fun of the thing—by a fine beast—that's what a man never forgets, isn't it?"

"No—you can't forget it!" agreed Mark. His heart sang although he remembered to lower his head and drag his words out of himself, as if he had already sunk back into his mask of depression. But Johann, in his enthusiasm, had forgotten he was talking to a patient, and did not notice whether Mark was depressed or not.

"Now, there's the general," he went on. "To see him ride that horse—who'd think he had anything the matter with him? And yet that man the moment your back's turned would do himself in with a penknife, chew up a coffee-cup or bang his head against a rafter, as if he were swinging a rat. Can't leave him to himself for a moment you can't! When he gets out after breakfast it's always to try to hang himself, and some one of us has to be behind a tree watching to stop him in time. Yet Saturday, every week, you can bring him here to his riding—and not once look at him; though I grant you it is different on the way back." Johann suddenly remembered whom he was talking to, and gave Mark a startled glance. "Don't *you* try on any of your tricks either," he muttered hastily "or you'll never be let to ride one of them special horses!"

"You'd better go and look after the general," Ida's voice told him, taking Johann's place beside Mark. She sat down beside him on an upturned bucket, taking out one of her eternal cigarettes, and glancing at him with an amused smile. "To-morrow Father Martin comes to the Schloss," she told Mark. "He will see you in church at the confessional. You'll be escorted to the chapel at about eleven to-morrow. Get all your sins ready! I'm sorry I

still have to keep you in the fractious ward, but it is wiser now you're there—and they seem to be taken in by you—not to change you to one where they might be more observant—anyhow not before our esteemed friend the visiting doctor calls again. You can always spend Saturdays here with Felix and the horses. You like them—our horses?"

Mark said, "Of course. They are miracles. How on earth do you get them like that?"

"We don't get them like that," Ida said, "we get them raw, and then we set to work first to understand, and then to train them, as, if we had any sense, we should train the human child. The result is what used to be called civilization. That is why the Nazis want our horses killed. They are symbols of what they are stamping out all over Europe. The Nazis wish to train without understanding! Such things as those horses have achieved come only by persuasion, never by force. They must be worked with by lovers. No Lippizaner ever danced for or with an enemy as a rider. We serve our horses, and they serve us. It is only out of mutual confidence that service such as theirs is born!

"After the horses have rested, you shall try Pearl. She takes it out of herself least and is the easiest of companions. Felix will go with you. You have nearly the same figure as the general and he will lend you his riding things, which he keeps here. By the by you can say what you like to Felix—and be yourself with him. He will ask you no questions. There is a kind of man in this country, whom the Nazis never suspect or understand. They think him so light as to be negligible—so perhaps some of the best men in the world will survive—by accident!"

"Before you go," Mark asked her, "is it true the General is really mad—or does he merely play some part—against the Nazis?"

Ida shook her head. "No—poor fellow," she said. "It's true enough—he thinks he must be dead. Only about Germans he has always been sane: he is an Austrian. But he asked too much of himself from a child; expected too much of himself; bore too much perhaps as a soldier and a patriot. This is an imperfect world, my English friend. The career of the Lord God is too strenuous for most of us.

"The general, horrified perhaps one day by finding out that he was also human, decided that he had committed the unpardonable sin. Perhaps he had—he can't laugh at himself! For this he condemns himself to death—but not on Saturdays. On Saturdays he lets himself be free to live—and it interests me, who believe a little in human freedom, to notice that he instantly

becomes sane. For the time that he allows himself to be free, I can even reach him with another idea—this idea I have given him is that he too can still fight against the Nazis.

“Believe me, I am not a religious woman but I sometimes laugh when I see—even in the horse I ride—that all that I have to do in order to help him accomplish his aim, is to make him think with eagerness of something other than himself!”

Mark pulled himself together to tell her what he thought she had earned, although he disliked paying compliments and was more reluctant than usual in paying one to Ida. “You ride well,” he told her dispassionately. Ida gave him a glint of her cold eyes.

“It has been mentioned to me,” she admitted. “I had a good master. He himself could do all the figures, even the most difficult of all, when the horse must dance alone without the control of a rider, and his rider runs with him side by side, freeing yet guiding him with a loose rein over his neck. My riding master had the best horses in the world of course, but he was also the best rider!” Ida checked herself suddenly. “Ah! Herr Felix,” she called. “I turn our patient over to you. Hermann will give you both lunch, and Johann returns with the general and myself. I fly!” She stood up between the two men, glancing from one to the other with a mocking expression. “How will you get on with each other?” she demanded.

“I wonder! But that is a thing no woman ever knows—how two men get on together when she is not there! *Leb’ wohl! Meine Herren!*”

Chapter 12

It was not until Mark had been free of the ward for a day that he realized how much he hated and feared its inmates. He could not shut even his inner self away from the unspeakable smell—the smell of fear—as if madness emanated from each patient, and infected the very air he was obliged to breathe. He loathed the two filthy old men in their corner clinging to their indecencies as if they were the last straws of life; and dirt the only medium left for their forlorn and frustrated wills to work on. He could not shut out the loud screaming complaints of the active maniacs; their restlessness invaded him; their constant despairing rage jarred his every nerve. The sunk and often sobbing apathy of his fellow depressives seemed but a step away from his own consciousness. Something dangerous and murderous was roused in him, as he watched the half glee, half cold terror of young Winkel followed about and tormented by the repellent Heinel. Mark tried to force himself to remember, while he struggled to fall asleep, that tomorrow he was to see Father Martin, and that then he would at last know for certain, whether he was a sane man trying to keep himself from becoming insane; or an insane man, in vain attempting to re-enter the world of sanity.

Ida was no help to him he told himself savagely. She ought to have been but she wasn't! He hated her for her cool detachment and for that something in her which completely quenched in him any desire to show her how much and how dangerously he suffered. If she was inhuman he wanted to be still more inhuman. If she had no pity for his torments he was determined to hide from her that he had any; or that he often felt nearly overpowered by his revulsions and disgusts. But he need not hide them from Father Martin, who was, he knew, his friend, and thinking of Father Martin, Mark at last fell asleep.

When Mark woke, a bar of sunshine crossed the sill of the open doorway, and the pinetrees sent in their keen sweet odour like a message. Mark dressed, more hurriedly than he usually allowed himself to dress, and made his bed in a nervous haste so unlike his usually prolonged and slovenly drama, that Johann took the trouble to cross the room and watch him. Breakfast was more interminable and disgusting than usual—even the outdoor world into which he hastily plunged, refused to release him from his

gnawing suspense. The general paced to and fro like a cornered wolf unable to see a way of breaking out from the cage of his life and unwilling to think of anything or anyone else within it.

Mark sat down hopelessly at the end of a bench, and gazed stupidly at the walls of the Schloss. The ancient golden stones had survived destruction for centuries but they could not communicate to Mark anything of their long and placid endurance.

“There is still sun on the wall!” Ida’s voice mockingly reminded him. Mark had been watching the door into the ward, for her coming, but she had come out of the pinewoods behind him, through a hidden door.

“Father Martin is in the chapel already,” she told him in a low voice. “I have told Johann I am taking you to him. It is better to go through the garden where no one else will see us. You do not know yet how dangerous the jealousies of your fellow inmates are! To go outside a door—that is for them escape—so they do not like to see others go out of it. But what they take with them—when they do go out—is their prison—and until they will walk out of *that*—for them there is no escape!”

The chapel stood by itself at some little distance from the Schloss, a small friendly building kept open day and night. It was at the disposal of any patient well enough to be given the freedom of the outer grounds in which it stood. Ida, who was an unbelieving Catholic, merely insisted that the chapel should possess nothing worth destroying. The seven lamps burned before the bare and simple altar, but they were hung out of reach.

“If my patients want a gymnasium, I provide a gymnasium,” Ida explained to Mark on their way through the pinetrees. “If they want a place in which to exercise what they believe to be their souls certainly I will not disappoint them—let them pray! They can do themselves no harm by prayer—which they are not already doing themselves in other ways—and as for good—who am I to judge of what another person finds good? unless it destroys the peace of others and then I do know that I must stop it. The religion of most insane persons is usually designed to annoy others, but here they can only annoy God—and He can take His own precautions. I provide our patients merely with an altar, a confessional box and a visiting priest, and I take care to pick my priest. Here we are—and the chapel, except for Father Martin already at his post—is empty. I do not think anyone will disturb you—should anyone do so, Father Martin has a bell within reach of his hand, and an attendant is within call to answer it. When you have

finished he will ring the bell, to have you escorted back to the ward. You enjoyed yesterday?"

Mark looked at her tight-lipped and sombre. "Yes," he admitted guardedly. He was not going to tell her how much he had enjoyed yesterday; he added, shaken by a sudden impulse, "This Felix Mannheim—I let him know who I am—and what I am doing. I am not supposed to do this, you know—but you told me he was trustworthy?"

Ida nodded. "Felix is—as far as I know—safe," she agreed; "he is certainly anti-Nazi—I should think he might help you. I would ask him myself for help if I needed it. But I will tell you this—not to advise you—but simply that it is a little rule of my own. I never tell anyone anything that matters—either for myself—or about anyone else—unless there is an immediate need for help. Also I never help anyone unless I am convinced there is this need. This is a bad moment in the world's history—let each be responsible for himself!"

Mark met her light, cold eyes without answering her, except by a look as impersonal and challenging as her own. He had asked her for neither sympathy nor admiration—yet he knew that he had expected both. He would have noticed her head out of a thousand, he thought, not with pleasure but with a certain instinct that here was a head that counted; eyes that saw more than other eyes though they never became involved in what they saw; a tongue that could equally well express or conceal the swift ranging thoughts of the astute brain that governed it. She had a hard, sarcastic and yet brilliant face, with no sadness in it; and no pity. Indeed, about her whole erect and supple figure there seemed a certain blithe acceptance of life, as of a boxer who steps out into the ring cheerfully to meet an adversary whom he feels certain of being able to tackle. "You know where—and how to kneel before a confessional box?" Ida asked Mark with a teasing smile, "in spite of being an English Protestant? Good; then I will leave you. May you enjoy this particular cleansing of your soul! You have at least a friendly audience. Father Martin always thought you would return to us. I never did!"

"You have no need to tell me that you despised me," Mark said with heightened colour. "You made it perfectly plain!"

Ida laughed. "Did I despise you?" she asked, raising her ginger eyebrows questioningly. "I doubt it. I merely thought you immune—in some strange English way—from any necessity to feel for others unless they happened to belong to your own country and lived, even there, within the magic circle of your own caste. I see now that you can—after all—push

back the circle a little. I still do not know how far, or to what purpose, but the pushing back, that I believe in, and therefore I am prepared to assist you!”

“Thank you,” Mark said coldly. “I know that you are, and I know that it is only because you imagine that this pushing back will serve you and your country, that you *are* prepared to assist me!”

“What more do you want of me?” Ida demanded with a satiric gleam.

“Nothing,” said Mark with hasty emphasis and walked past her into the chapel.

It took him a moment or two to clear his mind from the intense annoyance Ida had momentarily roused in him.

The empty, wooden shell of the little building smelt of pine logs, and was very silent. Father Martin’s voice came out of the silence, reassuringly.

“My son,” he said, “I am very glad that you came back to help us. I knew that you would, if possible, but sometimes even our most certain intentions cannot be carried out. Perhaps this is less important than we fancy, since God’s intentions are always carried out—but we like to see them in the hands of those who will do their best as instruments.”

“It took over a year before I could learn what I needed to find out,” Mark explained. “Besides, the first year of war we still seemed choked by Munich—we were not even ready to prepare for being ready; but I think, together with France, we are now ready.”

Father Martin was silent for a long moment, then he said, “Perhaps it is as well—for so strong and sometimes so blind a people as the British to run every risk, otherwise they will not use their great powers. Pirschl has told me what you wanted to know, and between us we have divided what we thought we could find out for you. Pirschl will bring you the details of any new German inventions he can discover and also, what might be to your government of even greater importance—what he can find out of the Nazi chiefs’ strategy and plans. It may seem strange that these military secrets should be even guessable by such an outsider as Pirschl, but he is in a very privileged position and the chiefs of the party also think him negligible since he is an artist. They do not know—none of them being trained except in matters of killing—that no one can be a great artist who has not in him the capacity to be of use in almost any direction. Pirschl is a man of inconceivable rapidity and justness of observation. He can copy any design and remember any measurement he has once seen. He it is who will both

discover and make clear to you what is most vital. I, too, have done all I can in the short time you have been here. I have discovered the positions of the main airfields and how many planes each holds. I know the submarine bases, and where the armament factories now are, and where more will be built. I have for you the necessary figures and a map with their approximate positions. This I should advise you to study and then destroy. The figures are perhaps too complicated to carry in your mind, but you will probably deal with them by some code of your own. It is better that I should not know what contacts you have—or how you reach them. Perhaps it would be well for you to use what we have procured soon, and then return here for more. Ida will see that you go and return as safely as possible. By that time Pirschl may have obtained what he seeks to discover, and we shall have made fresh plans. Before I give you the map you must go to the door and look each way carefully. It would not do if I were to be seen handing you a paper—or you putting it away.”

Mark got up and went to the chapel door. The whole building was now full of sunshine and the thick clearing in which it stood was shining like a jewel. Nothing moved or stirred in it—except the light.

When Mark had returned and knelt once more before the confessional box Father Martin handed him a little packet of very thin, easily concealed paper. “Destroy what you can. Keep what you must,” he repeated. “Crosses mark the airfields, swastikas the bases, and where each factory now stands I have made a small O. You have the shape of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia in your mind, perhaps? I have indicated mountains and rivers on the map and have marked the mileage, but I have not filled in any names—still, even so, it is a paper better destroyed if you can trust your memory!”

“I have a trained memory,” Mark assured him.

“Then there is only this I would add from my own judgment,” Father Martin said softly. “Do not think that Hitler is not prepared as well for a long war as for a short one! His whole country is permanently organized on a war footing. You do not know what that means. You who tie your gasmasks to your cricket bats, and still depend on horses and greyhounds to lift your untutored hearts! Remember and tell your people—the Germans are trained not only technically but spiritually for murder! Anti-semitism is not a folly—it is an atrocious process—the Nazis manufacture cruelty—against defenceless Jews—so that a whole people may be ready to accept murder as a pastime without physical damage to themselves. The Jew is the trial rabbit on which to whet the appetite of the German nation towards destruction.

Everything in Germany to-day is a training towards hate. Ufa Cinemas are notorious for presenting ugliness and shocks. I want you to tell those in authority in your country that Germany has been spiritually trained and drilled as well as physically and as no other people in the world—man, woman and child—has ever been trained. Think how every country clutched so far has been a weak and harmless country. Up to date Germany has a casualty list—in this spring of 1940—as light as the ski accidents in a normal winter. Christians are the only people who could have trained themselves in love—as the Nazis have trained themselves in hate, but, alas, how few—how poor has been their Christian contribution! How strong, how incessant and skilled, has been the training of the Nazis! How readily all those with hearts akin to Hitler in every country fall in with his methods, his aims, even, my son, in *your* country!”

“Not now,” Mark said hastily. “We are awake at last!”

“Awake perhaps,” Father Martin said gently, “but still untrained. A child is roused by a nightmare, but he has not learned how to control himself so that he has no such nightmares.”

There was a long silence between them.

“I am not, as I told you, a real Christian,” Mark said at last a little uncomfortably, “but I am not the less convinced that we are fighting to the death, against a horrible thing!”

“A Christian is either a Christian—or he is not real—he is not real as a *man!*” Father Martin said with sternness. “Nor in my opinion can a man be real unless he *is* a Christian. Christ’s teachings are the moral values of humanity; that is, I think, why He so constantly called Himself ‘the Son of man’. Believe me, my son, it is because consciously or unconsciously you accept those Christian values that you know the Nazis to be an enemy you must fight to the death. But be very sure you do believe it when the test comes!”

A shadow crossed the chapel floor. Mark, looking over his shoulder, saw the general. He looked neither to the right nor to the left but marched as if to face a firing squad, towards the altar. When he stood close before it, he flung himself face downwards on the floor, his arms stretched out on each side of him, in the form of a cross. Fritz, who stood in the open doorway, contented himself with a glance at the general’s outstretched form, as if he had expected it, looked perfunctorily at Mark’s bowed shoulders, and stepped back into the pinetrees. Once more a silence, even more intense, settled down upon the little chapel.

“We must leave his self-tormented soul to God!” Father Martin said at last, in a low voice. “It is what he himself—poor fellow—cannot do. It is his madness to believe that he can judge better than God, what to demand of himself. If there were any need for him to die, death would not be denied him. But we know there is no such need.”

“But the general is at least only cruel to himself,” Mark objected. “He does nobody else any harm.”

“To waste his life in self-torture—you think that is no harm to others?” Father Martin asked. “You kill a human being if you kill yourself—it is only one remove to kill another. The Germans too are a deeply conscientious people; it is the unpardonable sin of this man Hitler that he has roused their over-tender consciences in a wrong direction. It is what makes the German people so formidable that—they worship thoroughly. They worship so sincerely that they feel like gods! It is well, too, for us all to remember that although what the Germans worship *is* wholly evil, they have learned *how* to worship it. What we worship is Goodness Itself, but, alas, we have not yet learned how to worship goodness in spirit and in truth!”

Mark found nothing more to say. He was curiously moved, but more by Father Martin’s passionate sincerity than by his words. Father Martin came out of his box and walked with Mark to the chapel door. Fritz stood a few feet away from them, but he was looking towards the door a little anxiously, for to have two of the fractious patients so far away from any control but his own and Father Martin’s was a precarious business.

Father Martin laid his hand reassuringly on Mark’s shoulder with a light friendly touch—as if it were the blessing he had not been asked to give. “Good-bye, my son,” he said. “Remember where I live, and if you need me do not hesitate to seek me!”

It was not until Mark had got back to the ward again that he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to say a word to Father Martin about the unbearable conditions under which he lived.

Chapter 13

The thin paper in Mark's pocket burned its way into his mind. How was he to study it, or even to take it out and look at it? He was never a moment alone. No one in the fractious ward was ever free from supervision; even if he went out of doors he would be overlooked from the open doorway, and, usually—always if the general or any two violent patients were outdoors as well, an attendant would follow them. Any patient was free to use paper and pencil, unless they used them to eat or for any other deleterious purpose, but any patient poring over a paper would be noticed in a manner that Mark knew he must at all costs avoid. He must also avoid letting either Fritz or Johann see that he carried such a paper on him. He sat brooding over his difficulties which soon became worries, in a manner that was becoming more and more familiar to him. He was beginning not to be able—except for purposes of resentment and self-pity—to shut himself off from all the other patients. He thought that what possessed him was his mission, but without realizing it the objects of his concentration became more and more the obstacles and annoyances which stood between him and the free exercise of his own will. Resentment flooded him, because he felt that he should not have been exposed to his noisy companions—to the long uninterrupted hours of disagreeable idleness. He could read a book—but he did not want to read a book. Any activity open to him was in a sense a fresh outrage, since he had no choice except to refuse it. This the Depressives almost invariably joined him in doing, so that in a sense he helped to carry out his drama by his own proclivities. But this merely annoyed him still more. "I am here on a mission," he kept telling himself, "which I am not allowed to perform!" Ida, coming in and out of the ward, several times a day, added to his bitterness by attempting to talk to him in the same manner as she talked to any other patient. Naturally it would have been highly inadvisable to treat him differently, but she might at least by some small imperceptible sign—some double-edged word—have momentarily released him from his sense of indignity. She did not release him from his predicament. She seemed even to take a pleasure in seeing him in it. Now she must act differently, and he himself when she next came into the ward must make a direct appeal to her. Mark objected strongly to this humiliation, and when at last she came in and passed within earshot of him,

he did what he had to, very badly. "I must see you!" he said, not under his breath as he should obviously have done, but quite loudly. Ida appeared not to have heard him; and when he got up impatiently to force her to listen to him, Johann promptly intercepted him and pushed him back into his chair, imagining that Mark was going to attack her. Mark's control snapped suddenly, and he threw himself upon the unfortunate Johann who was however more prepared for the attack and far more capable of dealing with it than Doctor Lauterbach. Almost instantly Mark found himself pinioned from behind by Fritz and once more frog-marched by two attendants into a padded cell. This time he was not unconscious and not hurt, he was merely furiously angry. When Ida let herself in two hours later, Mark was still angrier; but by now he was or thought he was completely in control of himself. There was nowhere to sit except the floor and this physical indignity forced Mark to stand up. Ida, however, sat down promptly and proceeded as usual to light a cigarette. She did not sprawl but sat cross-legged, with a straight back and took no notice of Mark's towering above her. "You really ought to get over hitting out whenever anyone touches you," she said, glancing up at Mark with a twinkle. "You seem to combine the sensitiveness of a sea anemone with the reactions of the Bull of Bashan. What is it you feel at those moments—something sacrosanct?"

"I have papers that I must study," Mark said, ignoring her provoking question, "and I had intended to draw your attention to the fact that it was imperative for me to have a few minutes' consultation with you. It is impossible for me to study these papers under constant supervision."

"My attention is more easily roused than you think," Ida told him, "and so is that of your fellow inmates. Herr Steinbosch, for instance, feels extremely slighted if I attend first to any other patient, and as when he is slighted he becomes exceedingly obstreperous, I usually manage to play my opening gambits in his direction. I was coming back to you directly I had finished with him. Now we have had to wait two hours instead of a few minutes. Conspirators should, I think, never confuse urgency with hurry."

"I cannot concentrate in the hell to which you have consigned me," Mark said a little breathlessly, for he felt as if he had been running hard, and for a long time. "You might believe that I should not ask you willingly for a concession that was not vitally necessary for my mission."

"Come, come," said Ida, pointing to the floor beside her, "take a cigarette. This floor is soft. Make yourself comfortable and forget that by nature we are enemies since by our common purpose we must act as friends. I have been stupid perhaps, but I was very anxious to make no exceptions

whatever as to your treatment. Had you not had that outbreak during your first evening, I should almost immediately have given you a private room; but I daren't after that burst of energy do for you what never would be done with any other dangerous maniac. You had qualified, you see by your own action for a different category than I had intended. It was my idea to put you into a much pleasanter ward where most of the inmates think they are Jesus Christ."

Mark succeeded in gazing over Ida's head, without meeting the mocking eyes turned towards him. "I suppose you are a sadist by nature," he observed with icy scorn, "and your position here has no doubt developed your talents."

"It would be foolish of me," Ida said after the faintest pause, "even if I were a sadist, to wish to torture a highly respected colleague. A good workman never quarrels with his tools—and I aspire to be a good workman."

"I don't care whether you respect me or not, or what sort of workman you think you are," Mark said savagely, "I can stand what I have to—and I have never asked for your sympathy. What I *do* ask for is simply a chance to do the job I'm on."

"You shall have it," Ida returned promptly. Her eyes rested on him for a moment without their jeering quality, as if she were summing him up not unfavourably. "To-night you can stay where you are. No one will come near you. I shall close the eye-hole—so you can study your papers in peace. Tomorrow we will make plans. I have also talked with Father Martin."

Mark felt that he was being ridiculous standing before her—as if he were some kind of a culprit and she his judge. As Ida had stopped asking him—or appearing to expect him—to sit down, he flung himself to the floor—on the opposite side of the cell. Now at any rate they could confront each other on an equality.

Mark wanted to be rude to Ida; and he had never been rude to any woman in his life, even when he had wanted to be rude to them. It was however of no use being rude to Ida unless he could make her suffer. What she had said so far was difficult to controvert. She had spoken reasonably; and she seemed impervious to his bad opinion of her. He would have far more deeply resented any expression of pity, but that she should appear to believe there was no need for it, when she had obliged him to submit to the horrors and indignities of the fractious ward, was a deep offence.

It was his disgust that she had under-estimated. Mark felt disgust far more readily than he would have acknowledged; but disgust such as the past fortnight contained mingled with the constant fear of some unknown indignity thrust upon him without warning, was beyond anything he had dreamed of having to bear. The offence was so deep that he was unable to formulate it even to himself. It seemed to go down into the very roots of his being.

Ida broke the silence that had grown up between them, by saying, "My dear colleague, what is it that you are suffering from?"

Mark stared at her with concentrated fury.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "it is inconceivable that under the circumstances in which I have been living I should not suffer?"

"But you are sane," Ida murmured speculating. "Need you have suffered so much? You are not there for ever! You are there to create an impression necessary to an important piece of work. You have created it! You have made, on the whole, a preliminary success. I should suppose that you might have been congratulated rather than pitied. Even to-night plays into your hand—it was about time that you should have some further outbreak, and to-morrow a limited time of freedom stares you in the face. I find it extremely strange as well as unfortunate that you have had to suffer so much for yourself. One would have supposed that if you suffered at all, it might have been from pity for others; but there is something in your behaviour which makes me think that you do not know what pity is!"

"Those creatures!" Mark said sharply. "You expect me to feel pity for them? Why should I care what they feel? Their every act in the day—every word I have heard them utter—every inconceivably filthy, disturbing, insensate thing about them, makes me loathe them. If I had any pity it would be for Fritz and Johann who have to stand the weight of such obscene behaviour and to keep the place tolerably clean. But after all they are paid for it and not obliged to seek such a profession! They have long hours off and the blessed respite of going in and out of that blasted locked door at will! You shut me up with those loathsome semi-human beasts and expect me to pity them! You must be mad yourself."

"Well, that's quite likely, of course," Ida acknowledged. "It happens frequently in places like this—especially perhaps if one does not understand one's patients. But you see I try to understand them—and that I find deeply interesting. I also try not to judge them by standards they have never known, or long ago forgotten. To tell you the truth, I never thought you would have

so mortal a horror of those poor fellows. You are no coward—so it cannot be that you fear them physically. And there is nothing else to fear about them—if you are wholly sane. They are dirty, no doubt, but by no means all of them. Our friend the general, for instance, is immaculately clean, as for Herr Steinbosch, he washes himself continuously, and only attacks those whom he considers (and very often rightly) are not sufficiently clean! But why are the others dirty? That is what is interesting, since each in turn has his own reason, and one that seems to him a perfectly good and laudable reason. Probably it is a good reason except that it overlooks one important point—the taste and noses of others! You will see, if you study each case carefully—and you have grossly misused your time if you have not studied them—that each in his own mania has something fundamentally reasonable—the only point where his reason breaks down—and inevitably *must*, is when it becomes (and of course each lunatic secretly wants it to become) unpleasant to others! This is Adler's Law of Social Interest. Act against it and the same thing happens as when a human being defies the law of gravity. The law breaks you. But forgive me if I tell you that you have made this experience more unpleasant to yourself than you needed to find it. These gentlemen are each in Hell and in a Hell that they have made for themselves and out of which they find it extremely difficult, though seldom impossible, to escape. It is a tragedy to see in anyone so much that is useless, but it is a tragedy that these poor fellows have chosen for themselves and preferred to the normal difficulties that they might much more easily have overcome than the new ones they have invented for themselves. I presume therefore that they are being better taken care of, and much more pleasantly and kindly treated here, where they are being at least partially understood, than they would be elsewhere. I have pity for them—a very great pity, but I ask you—is not this tragedy—on a smaller scale—common to every human being? How much of ourselves and our almost limitless powers do we really use? Your disgust, for instance: from how much living it must have cut you off, for almost nothing can be clean enough for you to touch!”

“I happen to have been brought up to be decent and to like decency—not to be filthy and to enjoy filth!”

“You were the more fortunate,” Ida said smiling across at him. Her face became enchanting when she smiled, what Mark liked to think of as her ugliness changed and melted into a rare and inexpressible charm.

The little white cell, full of a hard and dazzling light, flashed this beauty into him, so that he turned his eyes away from it, unwilling to acknowledge that it would be difficult to forget Ida's smile.

“What do you expect me to do?” he found himself demanding with what he thought was undiminished hostility, “in order to avoid disgust?”

“Study a little more what each of these inmates is feeling and *why* he acts as he does,” Ida replied instantly. “Study them as a botanist studies flowers, or, if you prefer it, as a zoologist studies reptiles. A zoologist has not too much disgust for those reptiles—though if he were to be careless in his study of crocodiles, for instance, he might lose a leg. Study our patients, my dear Herr Colleague, as if you were yourself a crocodile! You would soon lose your disgust—you might even become still less like a crocodile yourself should you study our patients like this I fancy!”

“I am not a psychiatrist and have no desire to become one,” Mark said impatiently.

“No,” Ida agreed, observing him thoughtfully. “I understand you are a teacher. That is to say human nature is your art as well as your science and where better can you study both, than when, for the first time, you have them spread before you—wholly unmasked and unprotected by those lovely but often deceptive controls upon which you pride yourself?”

Mark felt an inclination he had always despised in other men, to rush out of the door and bang it. He could not do it, but that he should even wish to do it, surprised and annoyed him. Banging doors and rushing away from women had always struck him as undignified and defeatist actions. It was what took place when a woman was too aggravating not to hit; and too reasonable to be successfully answered. Mark looked at Ida instead with that particular brand of self-preserving insolence to be learned at all English Public Schools, but to be learned best at Eton.

It was a look under which most people grew confused or recognizably wilted. Ida did neither, she met Mark’s eyes without insolence, but instead with an amused curiosity.

“A cat,” she observed with a friendly grin, “may look at a king—nothing that the king does can prevent it—but is it worth the cat’s while to do it since it is no answer? That is left to the king! I read in your eyes ‘I despise you, my good woman’, but that I knew already. And I must assert that as long as I have not done anything for which to despise myself I can quite easily bear it.”

Mark’s armour still held. “I beg your pardon,” he said in his most dispassionate and distinguished manner, “but I am afraid that your extreme skill in understanding other human beings sometimes carries you too far—or

not far enough. I am not quite sure which—in either case what we think of each other is rather beside the point. I have been told to ask your help. Father Martin suggests that I leave here as soon as I have mastered the contents of the notes he has given me. May I take it that I shall be left in possession of these notes with sufficient privacy to escape observation? and then may we settle a time convenient for my departure—and since it seems necessary, make some arrangements for my return?”

“Yes,” Ida replied equably, “you may indeed. These spring evenings are long. I will myself set you on your way to-morrow. As for the papers read and memorize them now. No one will disturb you until breakfast time. I shall suggest that Felix looks in on you before Johann is told to let you out. You can give the notes to him either to destroy or return to you later on, as you think fit. When you return it will be as well for you to go straight to Hermann at the Stadium and he will notify me. He will know nothing about you beyond that you are working with us against the Nazis. He will not even know that you are sane, but he would rather die than betray any anti-Nazi—sane or insane.”

It is not easy for even a graceful woman unless she combines extreme agility with her grace, to rise from a cross-legged position on the floor, in a picturesque manner. Ida achieved it purely by muscular power, but Mark happened to appreciate muscular power even in a woman. It was curious, but he found that it cost him a slight effort to look at her without admiration. He too rose, and was glad that he was a full six inches taller than she was. She held out her hand to him. “I am sorry to have caused you so much discomfort,” she said, “some of it—most of it perhaps—was unavoidable—but not all of it was.”

Mark bowed, ignoring her outstretched hand. He had achieved rudeness. She left him instantly and without another word.

Chapter 14

Mark lay face downwards in the pitiless brilliance of his empty cell. The hard light beat on his nerves like blows. Why had he been unable to keep himself aloof from the repulsive jangled minds into whose company he had been thrust? Why had his lifelong practice of self-control failed him again so suddenly? What was the use of the complete repression, which had made his senses cringe before him like beaten slaves all his waking life, if before Ida—and against a sane attendant who was only attempting to do his duty—he had to break out once more like a furious child?

Mark tried to find refuge from his stinging sense of shame by spreading out the maps and notes Father Martin had given him on the floor and forcing his trained and capacious memory to soak up the facts like a sponge, but his memory jibbed; and his brain became a curious blank into which a confused mass of conflicting images jammed themselves. Very slowly they sorted themselves out until at last only those of Lisa stood firmly above the rest. Lisa, leaning over Mark with her eyes full of a profound and bottomless mercy. Not once since Mark had found himself crying out her name in “The Three Bitter Cherries” had he let himself remember Lisa. He had skirted her image as a man refuses to look down at an abyss beneath his feet. It was not safe to know that the kindly earth lay so far beneath him. But the earth was kindly, if you were not too far above it. Even the memory of Lisa released something in Mark; he felt reassured against an inner panic, as he had felt when in the chapel he had suddenly heard Father Martin’s voice speaking to him from the confessional box. What was it that the peasant girl and Father Martin possessed in common which was stronger than the madness that was even now impinging its dreadful night on Mark’s sensitive mind? Was it that they had helped him lose his self-consciousness and had let him out into a limitless universe? Perhaps he had felt release just because the universe they let him out into *was* limitless so that even the thought of them made him feel safe. Was it because there was no shelter from their easy loving so that it was no use even trying to hide? The light in his cell felt less piercing. Once more Mark turned to the maps and figures and now, as if a barrier had been suddenly swept away, he found that he could concentrate again. Hour after hour passed by and they might have been so many minutes—nothing eluded

or held him back from his task. He must have slept at last for when he woke the light was off. Somebody had entered the cell in the course of the long night and given him the mercy of the dark.

At eight o'clock Felix unlocked the door and took him up to his own quarters. Neither of them spoke until they found themselves secure in the little civilized world that Felix had made for himself, where everything sane and natural was once more open to them. It seemed a miracle to Mark to see the spotless bathroom with its shining glass, and the razor-case beneath it; a clean white bed, a writing table by an open window looking out over the tops of pines; books and a tray with real china on it—and actually a knife beside his plate.

“Don't look at the papers yet,” Felix begged. “They're all German anyway, and no one knows even what *kind* of lies they are likely to tell. Wash—and eat your breakfast. Take a long rest. I must go and do my work and no one will bother you. Probably we shall see you on your way, later on in the day. The Frau Doktor is making the necessary plans. Everything we do has of course to go through her father, but she understands him. I daresay you got a bad impression of him at my place the other day, that's only because he's afraid. I mean he's not sure of himself enough to understand how little—if anything—there is to be afraid of, but when he feels normally secure he's quite a good fellow. Only the very sane can afford to behave decently with the insane, if you know what I mean; and no one who's half a Nazi can be wholly sane.”

Mark held his coffee cup suspended in the air; “Do you mean if you're insane you must *be* a Nazi?” he demanded.

“Well—yes, I suppose I do,” Felix said laughingly as he turned to leave the room. “It's very much the same thing, isn't it? Nazis are out to destroy individual responsibility, which is sanity—madness is individual irresponsibility—so the Nazis must believe in madness! Believe in spreading it at any rate among those they conquer; and I don't quite think you'd want to spread madness unless you *were* mad, would you?”

“No,” Mark said reflectively. “I suppose not.” He felt for a moment, alone in the clean and happy little room, full of sunshine and silence, as if he had got hold of the missing piece in a picture puzzle, and then his eyes fell on the newspaper; Felix had suggested his not reading till after breakfast; and he read of the destruction of Rotterdam.

The Germans did not seek to justify their act, nor did they realize that their act itself had judged them. This was the culture they felt it their duty to

spread over all the civilized world. In one night's senseless fury they had killed twenty-five thousand harmless, undefended souls—after the Dutch had already sued for peace. This was more than an act of war against an enemy; it was a profound and deadly power set loose against mankind.

What was there in the rest of the world to stand against it, Mark asked himself in horror. The earth had suddenly become a very small and easily overrun planet. One by one the European territories had fallen, now the enemy stood before the naked citadel. Only France remained between her lifelong antagonist and the rest of the world—France and the small island off the coast of Europe which was Mark's home. How prepared was the brain of Europe to take the impact of a mailed fist so pitilessly trained to smash? Can you keep an army of human beings valiant, buried in a box like the Maginot line? Above all, such a people as the French whose ardour and sagacity have always lain in attack and flourished best in the light?

What were his own people doing behind the rampart of the French army in their small land? Mark stopped reading the paper. The sunshine and the silence became as ominous as the light in the padded cell. He felt as if he were being hideously, inescapably beaten by an unseen power. He crouched in his chair, covering his face with his hands, trying to hide from himself the end of Rotterdam, which might be the end of London.

The door opened and closed softly, and Ida stood looking at Mark dispassionately as if she were trying to find a new way of tackling a difficult subject.

"I had forgotten," Marie said bitterly, dropping his hands from his face, "that in this place there was no privacy."

"I see you have read the paper," Ida said quietly. "Why should you try to hide your pain? Nothing we could feel would be enough! There is no need—and no time—for privacy any more in the world we live in, Herr Pirschl! We fight for or against this one thing: and it is much easier if we fight together and seek to hide nothing."

"I must apologize to you for last night," Mark said, rising to his feet. "Twice I seem to have made a fool of myself, without sufficient reason. Being forcibly handled is, I must confess, an offence that I find I cannot easily submit to."

Ida shook her head, as if it were a matter of no importance either way, whether Mark submitted to it or not.

“You have destroyed what you had to destroy thoroughly?” she asked instead.

“I burned the papers and scattered their ashes in the wind. There is plenty of it,” Mark said with a gesture of his hand towards the window. “I am ready now for anything you suggest. What are your plans?”

A flicker of a smile passed over Ida’s face. “We have planned of course a little,” she admitted. “We needed the horses and the carriage you came in—we have them—also papers—also a little arrangement for a visit to a Nervenheilanstalt for you to have lead injections. Only you will not have them—and there will be no visit. The chief at this Home is a friend of ours and no friend of the Nazis. Such things arrange themselves nowadays though not always easily. Much has to be done through the hands of those who do not know what they are doing it. But now we plunge—and in general in this awkward business of ours, I must tell you, we plunge more than we plan! Fortunately the Germans are at this moment in a state of dazzled contemplation of their own successes. Also they have got used to stamping on us here in Austria. We are so flat by now that it is barely a form of exercise, so though they still take precautions, of course, it is without any real conviction that such precautions are necessary. I think that we have a chance to evade them. I came to tell you that our carriage is at the door. Everything that we need for a two days’ climb—and it will take us two days and nights of hard climbing to put you safely on your way to Trafoi—is packed and hidden under the floor of the carriage.

“We start dressed suitably for an entrance into the new hospital. We must drive away from our goal first, only turning back later, having shed Felix and the carriage in the outskirts of Innsbruck.

“I shall return home by rail from Landeck when you are once safely on your way above the pass. I am sorry that I have no better guide to offer you than myself, but we cannot use the passes as they are always watched, and I happen to have been brought up on these mountains, so that there are few paths that I do not know. In moments of emergency an offensive guide who knows his route, is better than a sympathetic one with less sense of direction! There is no need for you to return to the ward—everything is in order and arranged for, but I find you still have too much emotion in your shoulder-blades. Have you forgotten that Depressive’s shamble? You are a Depressive until you reach the mountains. You can then become an officer and a gentleman again—or what would be better still a Tiroler at home in his own country!”

Mark tried to relax the rigidity of his backbone. He could not easily forgive Ida for having seen him in a moment of despair. He was all the more determined, as perhaps she had hoped he would be, that it should be his last. He would have been more astonished than pleased if he had known that Ida had liked him the better for his emotion.

“Then he’s human, after all!” she had said to herself. “It is worth while running a risk to serve him!”

They met no one on the stairway; and the courtyard, except for the pigeons and the waiting carriage driven by Felix, was empty.

The snow had melted off the roads; the mountainside sang with the voices of a hundred streams and little waterfalls.

The strong ungainly field horses snorted, pawing at the soft ground with pleasure at their unexpected release from heavy labour.

There was no sign of anxiety, or effort of concealment in Mark’s two companions, yet each of them was fully aware that they were driving straight into the jaws of a ferocious monster ready to crush them without pity, if they presented the slightest obstacle to its insensate will. But they had been aware of this fact too long for it to over-cloud their daring courage. Nor did they feel the shock of Rotterdam as Mark felt it. They knew it was one more nail driven into the coffin of their old life; but they knew also that their old life was dead. It was their business to create a new one—if it could be created.

The pinewoods rang with the sudden joy of mating birds; the floor of the valley beneath them was brilliant with May flowers. The unflecked, burning blue of the noon sky hung above their heads like the bell of a giant gentian. Every breath they drew of the keen, tempered air was like a new creation.

In spite of himself—in spite of the shock that had overwhelmed him, Mark became conscious of the piercing beauty of the day. His eyes as they met Ida’s dancing eyes, could not resist smiling at the audacity of their common exploit. What they were doing matched the racing splendour of the day.

“No! No!” Ida told him, laughing outright at his reluctant smile. “I beg of you, Herr Pirschl, be your natural self! Look preternaturally grave and raise your eyebrows a trifle as if at an unpleasant smell! Leave the smiles to us—for we belong by nature to a land that is incurably gay. ‘*Leichtsinnig*’ our teutonic brothers call us. A people so frail, so mild that we can be almost instantly brushed into the insignificance where we belong. So they have

brushed us. But they have not cured us of our gaiety. We laugh still—at ourselves—at each other—and at Them. At the bottom of our hearts we have a faith—that is perhaps a sort of courage—we still believe that we shall be the ones—who will laugh last!”

Chapter 15

The vigilant, expressionless faces under their tin hats came up so suddenly round the rollicking dogcart that for a moment Mark believed they were the phantoms of his own brain.

The life of the little village they were passing through stopped instantly. The horses pulled up, sweating and steaming, a child dropped a bucket and rushed into a cottage, the very hens stopped scratching in the barnyards. The posse of brown shirts popping up round the open carriage were as inappropriate and inexplicable as rabbits shooting out of a conjurer's hat. The bloom and gaiety of the spring valley contradicted everything about the soldiers' fierce rigidity. Against the scowling faces blew the sunny wind, on which the seeds of life were flying in every puff. The glowing beauty of the fields in flower mocked at their weapons as it mocked at their lifeless expressions; and their insane intent.

"Your papers, please," the Leader woodenly demanded.

Felix clambered down from the box and stood at his horses' heads; Mark slumped further down in his seat and stared vacantly at the horses' twitching ears; but he was keenly aware of Ida, erect and incisive, by his side.

"I am a doctor from Schloss Lebensfeld," she stated very clearly and succinctly. "This, beside me, is a patient—a Depressive; he does not speak so it is no use asking him questions. Here is my father's certificate for him; he is being moved to Dr. Otto Schulz's Nervenheilanstalt for special treatment."

"We will make him speak," the Leader exclaimed, and leaning forward he struck Mark a violent blow across the cheek. "What is your name, Idiot?" he shouted. Every drop of blood in Mark's body leapt to answer the shout, but he forced himself instead to go as limp as a dead rabbit—slumping forward and burying his burning face on his knees.

He heard Ida's strong, dispassionate voice above his head. "You see," she said, "this kind, with *Angst neurose* you cannot make more senseless—or less senseless—by a blow seeing that they are senseless already. But we

hope to do something with him later on; and until we have cured him he will be of no use to anybody.”

“Such stuff is only fit for carrion!” observed the officer. “That fellow at the horses’ heads—is he also an idiot? So able-bodied a man should not be sent on futile errands like this! The horses too should be at work in the fields. I dislike this whole proceeding. It looks unnecessary—if not worse. I shall telephone for further instructions about you. Descend please and go into the *Stube* with your idiot and the driver. I will see that the horses are attended to! I could if I wished have you all locked up at the nearest police station, but I show you this indulgence in case your story is true.”

“It is not out of your power perhaps,” Ida said with icy distinctness, “to do what you choose, but it is beyond your responsibility, Herr Kapitän, since all of us at the Schloss have been inspected by Herr General Epps himself—we work under his orders.”

The officer made no comment, but the fact that he refrained from making one was a sign that he felt slightly chastened.

“Come, Karl,” Ida said, with a smile to Mark, “we will do what this gentleman suggests until he satisfies himself about us.”

Two guards were posted at the door of the Weinstube, the horses were led into the courtyard by a terrified landlord.

There was the usual crucifix in a corner of the Weinstube with a stag’s head above it, and a painted salmon with glass eyes hung close by on the wall; but it was empty of human beings. Ida sat in a panelled alcove on a wooden bench under the salmon. Felix stood looking out of the window with his back to the room; and Mark gazed at the glass bottles above the bar and wondered if they were ever opened. A fearful lifelessness hung about the little room. No human being stirred in the inn, down the village street a dog barked nervously at intervals, and far away in the distance a cock crowed; but the life of the village had stopped at the appearance of the soldiers. Whatever was going to happen to them—if anything was—would happen without witnesses.

The guards at the door stood motionless as if they had been cut out of cardboard and pasted there. It was impossible to think of them as any more human than the painted salmon on the wall.

The side of Mark’s face burned, and he had an unreasonable sense of guilt as if he could never forgive himself for not having returned the blow.

It was an instinct that he had had to smother for the sake of his companions' lives, as well as his own, but a smothered instinct, however good a man's reasons are for smothering it, can make him feel intolerably in the wrong.

Ida took out a notebook and began to do some accounts. Mark could see from where he sat, how neat and precise her figures were, but he could also see that she had added one of her columns up wrong and he longed to put it right with a nervous insistence. An hour passed by and still nothing happened. Mark began to be aware of his two companions in a new way. He not only felt for them; but he felt with them. He knew—the idea had not occurred to him before—that Felix loved Ida. Felix did not look at her often; even when he did his eyes withheld his devotion, but he was intensely aware of her and the gravity which had settled over his easy, good-natured face, was, Mark guessed, mainly on her account. Whatever they were in for, what the men both minded most, was their complete powerlessness to protect her. It was in fact as if the only weapon any of them had at the moment was Ida's self-control and presence of mind. She was the one out of the three who must be considered responsible. They could do nothing about it. They had to let her be responsible. Since anything any of them said would be overheard, none of them spoke, but their eyes met from time to time, Mark's and Felix's oftenest. An hour later there was a stir outside the door, and the guards were replaced; and still nothing happened. No one entered the inn; no one came out of it. The air from the open window blew chill, and at length Felix shut it, and came back from his point of vantage overlooking the empty street to sit down opposite Ida. Long evening shadows crossed the floor. The distant mountains turned a hard indigo blue and seemed to close up round the valley. Ida smoked steadily, and the little room gradually filled with a vague grey fog, out of which her white face stood with unnatural distinctness. It was odd, Mark thought, that anyone so varied in personality as Ida, should have so colourless a face.

A door banged, a voice shouted an order; there was a sudden scurry of sound as if the life of the inn had been wound up again like a mechanical toy. The horses trotted out of the yard, the door into the kitchen was flung open and the captain appeared. "Continue your journey!" he shouted at Ida, who sat barely three feet away from him.

The guards withdrew from the door; and they all three moved stiffly into their waiting dogcart.

The quenched and silenced village vanished a moment later, like a dream, a dip in the road hid it from them, as if for ever. Mark did not even

know its name; but he realized that it might well have been the last place he would ever know.

“You were a good idiot!” Ida said at last, “and I assure you it was very necessary to be a good idiot! Such incidents do not all have happy endings. No one knows now at the sight of one of our German friends, let alone a posse of brown shirts, whether they are to be inconvenienced—or murdered. They might have shot you and Felix out of hand—or spirited you off to some unknown camp—as for me I am protected—but I assure you there are times when to be protected by the Nazis tastes less well than death!”

“Do you know what stopped him—or why, since he was stopped, we had to wait three hours instead of a few minutes?” Mark asked impetuously, “or does one just never know anything?”

“Until it happens—if it happens—nothing!” Ida said. “Even to see what happens may be a crime punishable by death. In fact there is only one virtue permissible in the German Reich to-day—and that is to be of immediate use to it—if you are *not* of immediate use you are already a criminal. You see it is a new code. You should learn it. Nothing so simple has yet been invented.” Ida spoke to him with a new intimacy. It seemed to Mark as if those hours of waiting had bound them all three nearer together. The silent bitterness of their helplessness, the deep derision they felt in common for its cause, made them feel as if they had known each other always. Mark realized that neither Ida nor Felix feared the Germans, what they felt for them went much deeper than fear—they knew that they must take every precaution to preserve themselves in order to carry on their work, but in doing so they took no serious account of what might happen to them in spite of their precautions. They had long ago given up the expectation of personal survival. All that mattered to them was that the country that they were working for—this spirit that wasn’t Nazi—might survive.

“Twice since I have been here,” Mark said at last half to himself and half to Ida, “I have fought when I had no real need to fight—and this third time—I felt I *should* have fought—and couldn’t! It’s a curious feeling because I haven’t of course dreamed of fighting at all as a physical necessity since I was a boy. The need for it is in the very air one breathes here!”

“Don’t let little questions of ethics worry you,” Ida advised. “As for fighting—it is like lion hunting. They say when a lion charges a hunter shoots whether he is a coward or not—or even whether he is a hunter or not; as long as he has a gun he shoots! There is no ‘ought’ outside an emergency—it carries its own ethics with it. Our one chance in this particular incident

was to be—all three of us—composed and numb. I had made everything as sure as I could, but anything can always go wrong under the Nazis. The golden rule is—that there is no golden rule. Felix—perhaps the next pinewood!”

A few minutes later Felix stopped the horses, close to the side of a wood under the shadow of the trees. The blind white road was empty behind and before them. The sweet scented dusk was rapidly closing in, far away in some uttermost unreachable space a primrose-coloured star gleamed in icy severity. They took out their rucksacks to part from Felix, who was to drive on by himself to Innsbruck. They stood for a brief moment together under the trees, but found nothing to say to each other, although they knew that they might never meet again. Felix let his eyes rest on Ida with a hard beseeching look, to which her clear eyes made no answer. Then he sprang up on the box again and drove off into the dusk.

“A good fellow,” Ida said, as they started off on foot, under the pines, “but he has too much heart. That is a great defect nowadays. One should be cold-hearted like I am, or bad-tempered as you are. At any rate I find it a luxury to be with someone for whom I do not care at all.”

“Thank you!” Mark said, curiously annoyed by this frank avowal. “I am pleased to hear that I come up to even one of your peculiar standards!” “What made her say that to me?” he asked himself, as they strode on in uncompanionable silence. “Just as I was beginning to like her?”

During their ordeal at the inn Ida had impressed Mark very favourably. She kept still, though she smoked as usual far too much, and she had neither said nor done anything, nor even appeared to *feel* anything, that added to Mark’s sense of discomfort.

It had been extraordinarily unpleasant to be young and strong, and yet quite unable to protect a woman; and still more unpleasant to know that whatever amelioration could take place in a highly dangerous situation, must be produced by the woman herself.

Ida had made it as possible for both the men to bear, as she could, by taking their danger as a trifle. Why did she turn round and make it unpleasant for Mark now, when there was nothing to be unpleasant about? She had made it so unpleasant that he did not speak to her again until they had reached the outskirts of the city.

The life of the evening, such as it was, had begun. Italian officers, as well as German, roamed the streets. Once Mark heard a girl laugh as if she

were happy, and this seemed a remarkable and extraordinary thing. He had forgotten, since the morning, that so much normality as a human laugh still existed.

On the further side of the city, near the noisy and rapid little River Isar, they came to an inn called "The Golden Lamb".

Ida pushed open a side door, and skirting a Weinstube on the right of her reached the kitchen without entering a public room. She knocked three times, and then after a pause, a fourth. Someone pulled back a bolt. The eyes of the whole family were turned on them unsmilingly as they entered. For a long moment no one said anything. A middle-aged woman was cooking, and a man who must have been her husband was drawing beer out of a barrel; a girl and two young men were filling trays. Ida laid her hand with an affectionate pressure on the girl's shoulder. "Grüss Gott, Rosa!" she said cordially. "Grüss Gott, Frau Schaffer und Familie!"

"You were not expecting me, I know, but any time in the twenty-four hours is good enough for a friend, isn't it? All that we want, this poor gentleman, who is one of my patients, and myself, is a good supper and afterwards a room to change in. To-night we go up into the mountains. It is better perhaps not to say that you have visitors who have gone up into the mountains. No one I think saw us enter."

Herr Schaffer turned off the tap of his barrel with such precision that no drop fell.

"Gnädigste, Frau Doktor," he said in a low voice, "a great deal has happened since we last saw you!"

"It has indeed," agreed Ida slipping off her rucksack, and smilingly taking the nearest empty chair, "but friends remain friends I think, whatever happens." She drew out her cigarette case and passed it to the young men. "I know you smoke only a pipe," she said to their host. "Well, will you give us supper?"

Herr Schaffer stood smoothing down his blue apron with hard and horny hands, his eyes sought those of his wife and his two sons doubtfully before he answered. "It is like this now, *meine Gnädigste*," he said finally. "Here in this inn we are all obedient servants of the German Reich. Before we had our ideas, and maybe they were the same as yours. Maybe not! Everyone knows a goose when he sees one—but an idea! You cannot count the feathers of that one when he flies! Now we no longer know what your ideas are. They may no longer be the same as ours. How do I know if you

are a peaceful citizen of the Greater Germany as we are or not? Queer things happen now. So far we have been a fortunate family—since you cured our Rosa of her wits wandering—everything has been as it should be, under our roof and naturally we wish it to remain so!”

“But we have never forgotten,” Frau Schaffer remarked, deftly tossing a pancake, “what the Frau Doktor did for our Rosa! It is true though what the old man says—we have two sons—we don’t want to lose them. Queer things happen now.”

“Well, I have told you what I need and *all* that I need,” Ida said reflectively, “and as for ideas mine are exactly what they were before all these pleasant changes took place. I value the Nazis just as much as I valued them then. You remember when they bombed our railway station and blew up our bridges—in those peaceful days before the war?”

A slow smile spread over the faces of the young men.

Ida turned her eyes on Rosa. “You know me better than your family does,” she said gently, “do you think I should betray anyone to the Nazis?”

Rosa had never taken her eyes from Ida’s face since she entered. She looked at her as an affectionate dog looks at his master. She put the last mug of beer carefully on her tray, and turned to face her father. “The Frau Doktor would never betray anyone,” she said firmly. “I knew that always even when I was ill. Now that I am well again have I ceased to know it? We can safely do whatever she asks.”

Herr Schaffer looked at his sons. “Take this beer into the guests,” he told them. “These two will eat here in the kitchen. Forgive me, Frau Doktor, but from the ‘Three Bitter Cherries’ they have taken the sons of old Bebel—and now his little Mietze—only sixteen and pretty—she is not there any more. Her father and mother—they do not even like to ask about her! It is better to say ‘I am obedient. I am a good German.’” “It is better still to know—whatever one is forced to say—that one is a good Austrian,” Ida said with a friendly smile. “This is a fine soup, Frau Schaffer, and we have appetites! Have you any scraps we can take with us to the mountains? We are a little off our course and must go back as far as the Oetzthal before we start climbing—this will take us time!”

“Not too much time!” said one of the sons with a grin. “I myself know a milk lorry that will take the milk cans to the foot of the Thal to-night—why does not the Gnädigste and her friend make use of it? It goes from here taking returned empties, and bringing back milk at dawn. It is very seldom

stopped, and even if one is stopped—sitting in the middle of the cans, one hides as in a forest.”

Ida gave a vigorous nod. “That is a splendid plan,” she said, “no doubt, by the time we arrive at the Thal we shall be shaken into cheeses—but all the better. I will be one of the heavy kind that lie on the chest of the Nazi and give them nightmares!”

“I shall go out now,” Hans told his father, slipping on a little canvas jacket, “and tell Wilhelm to stop at the turn of the road above the Isar, at ten o’clock—that gives you an hour from now, Frau Doktor.”

“Go my son,” agreed his mother, returning to the stove. “I can give you bread, butter and hard eggs to take with you as well as cheese,” she told Ida, “and to-night—there is actually *Schweinefleisch*. You are surprised no doubt—but he was our own—and I hid him in the cellar—taking him for walks at dawn. Also he died like a Christian—smothered by Hans and Seppel—without one scream. You know the fuss they make when their throats are cut? This pig—knowing and seeing nothing—died as if he had just been baptized.”

Mark and Ida ate a splendid meal, waited on by the eager if awkward Rosa, and then each in turn slipped into an upstairs room to change into mountain kit, leaving their clothes behind them.

Mark was astonished at the ease and celerity with which the whole family entered into their plans. Each one seemed to know by instinct exactly how best to help their dangerous guests. They departed silently, as unseen as they had come, accompanied by Hans, who took them to the exact spot, where a minute later the lorry drove up, and halted for them.

It was midnight before they were safely out of the suburbs, and on the road through the Isar valley. The moon, very bright and honey-coloured, rode high above the pines. The wind had dropped, and a light frost drew out rather than quenched the scent of the breathing earth. The low, uneven lights of the lorry picked out here and there a cat’s eyes in a ditch, or a hare in rapid flight doubling across the fields, but unable to forsake the fascination of their gleaming speed.

The milk cans clattered above the engine’s whine with a protective noisiness.

Ida and Mark sat side by side, in the very centre of the empty cans, joggled by a shared discomfort into companionableness. Mark threw his shoulders back with relief; here at least he need not shamle any more. He

could hold his head erect and draw the sweet keen air into his blood. Half of the May night had gone before they drew up at the foot of the Thal. A sleepy guard came to the back of the lorry and took a cursory glance at the rows of cans. "You can unload," he told the driver briefly. They jerked on for a yard or two, and under the deep shadow of a station shed Ida and Mark slipped out between the cans—and crept away into the pines. Above their heads the pines sang softly their universal uncertain music—coming and going on draughts of balmy air. Once the blood-curdling shriek of an owl shook their hearts into their throats; and then dropped into a complete and utter silence, more terrifying than sound. They climbed steadily for an hour or more till they reached an open *Alpe*, and the massive shadow of a hay stall, showed them where they could take shelter. "With luck there will still be enough winter hay to lie soft in," Ida told him. She slipped her hand along the eaves above the locked door, giving a sigh of satisfaction as she came on the key. "I know their habits," she explained to Mark. "In my country we lock a door and then leave the key handy. It is said that we do the same with our hearts! Now we can sleep till dawn or even later. No one will disturb us!"

It was completely dark in the sweet smelling hut. Mark could hear Ida take off her boots and settle into the hay like a bird into its nest. The door stood enough ajar for Mark to watch the deep-yellow moon sink, till the pinetrees caught and hid, all but a faint light. It seemed as if it were the silence of the night that had swallowed the moon, for Mark heard nothing more at all, except his own heart beat.

Chapter 16

When Mark woke easily and lightly, as a man only wakes in a mountain air; it was as if he had fallen out of the troubled earth into an infinite serenity of blue sky. The air, the earth, the mountainside, the very straw he lay on were bathed in azure light. Close to the half-open door, Ida lay like a boy exhausted by a long day's play, her arm under her head, her face half buried. She slept so quietly, she hardly seemed to breathe. Looking down at Ida he felt a strange pang of pity and tenderness; he wanted to find something to cover her with against the chill of the dawn, but he had nothing, and if he pulled the hay over her, the sound of its rustling might wake her. Mark moved noiselessly out of the hut. Nothing living was in sight. The hut stood on a small patch of level ground, on the upper slope of the Oetzthal. Far below, the pass wound like a twisted ribbon deep into the mountain range. The upper Inn valley shrank in the dawn light; the Engadine mountains seemed to press nearer and nearer, the massive slopes of the Silvretto Alps towered up, a wall of indigo, against the pale blue of the sky. Across the valley the Zugspitze still crowned with snow shouldered its impressive height far above the lesser peaks. The stillness of the blue dawn was so intense that his own footsteps startled him. Far away he caught the faint murmur and splash of a waterfall. Just beyond the hut, in a patch of melted snow, a group of soldanellas lifted their violet bells, and trembled in the dawn as if their ragged-edged cups were moved by an inward terror.

When Mark reached the stream, he plunged head and shoulders into the icy water. The shock of the melted snow, the glory and the solitude of the mountain shook him into an uncontrollable joy. What life was like this life of the high mountains, so lonely and pure, cut off from all mankind? The blueness slowly faded from the air. One by one the natural colours of the earth took its place. The outcrop of rock through which the stream chuckled and tumbled, was close covered by a fine lacework of lichen, orange, yellow and grey. Among their cold shadows Mark found the first May flowers. These were the nurslings of frost and drought, avalanche and hurricane. Saxifrages twinkled like the stars before night steadies them into brilliance; silenus and buttercup-yellow primulas pushed slowly into the light. They were still surrounded by death but their dauntless beauty taking no account of it, quivered and danced to meet the day. Mark came upon a group as

magical as their weird name; each wicked head of a Sclern witch had a brilliant collarette of brown beneath it, and moved with a dancing motion. Andreas had told him that the Sclern witches ride at night. Any small stick or stalk serves as a broomstick, and careful watchers can see them setting off by moonlight down the mountainside, though no human eye has ever been able to catch them at dawn, returning with their evil deeds accomplished, to mask themselves once more in the innocent guise of mountain Thrift, so innocent looking, as to deceive even that arch-detective—the sun. A shadow moved across a rock and looking upward Mark found Ida looking down at him, with mocking eyes.

“Worshipping witches?” she demanded. “A nice performance for a self-respecting schoolmaster to begin his day’s work on. When you’ve quite finished saying your prayers to those evasive ladies come and eat your breakfast under the seven enchanted firs! That’s where I brought us to last night. I know them well. Below us is the Wolf’s ravine, and if you don’t reach the firs in time the big bad wolves get you; and if you *do* reach them you are liable next morning to find that you have taken root, where you can never get out again, and simply become the eighth enchanted fir. Well, there are worse fates in the world to-day than to be turned into a firtree, so I thought we’d better risk it. The Golden Lamb has provided us with coffee in my thermos, and some of the sausages of that highly Christian pig!”

It was a gay and sumptuous meal and Mark was surprised to find that he could share the solitude with Ida without losing its incommunicable rapture.

She understood the mountain flowers, she even knew their most likely haunts, and respected their heroic persistence. She knew in how shady a spot a yellow violet will consent to grow; and where to find the rare and heavenly mountain forget-me-not.

But Mark did not tell her of the blue dawn, for fear that she might read into it something of the queer pang of tenderness he had felt, when he looked down at her. They talked in happy snatches all day long and all their differences seemed to vanish in the high world of beauty and remoteness.

They found as they climbed hour by hour, surmounting difficulties and avoiding dangers, how safely they could depend on each other’s skill and presence of mind. Neither had the defects that make mountain climbing an irksome or perilous business. Ida’s presence, never very physical, became more non-conducting than ever. She was not only a sexless companion but hardly more human or noticeable than a mountain wind. By the time the stars had begun to fade and the sun became dazzling, they reached an open

ridge where there was no overhang. They took it in turn to lead and were not roped except when they crossed the glacier and found the rocks slippery and difficult to negotiate. The shadows began to lengthen, changing from blue to deep purple and at last to black. As they crossed the rough sea of grey and broken ice, the peaks before them became bathed in a deep rosy glow.

“That is the *Finsterhorn*,” Ida told him. “I spent a week once almost at the summit. There is a hut. We were climbing the *Silvretta*, dawn by golden dawn. Looking back on it, it seems incredible there was such a world. Everything was safe then—except ourselves—and now everything is dangerous—except ourselves. We have lost the power to be dangerous!”

“Do you mean human beings have lost the power, or Austrians in particular?” Mark asked her. “It seems to me it is only the human beings, who have now become dangerous—all our other problems we have either solved or are on the way to solving.”

“I suppose I meant Austrians,” Ida said after a pause. “Individually in those far-off days, some of us thought we had power—or it was thought of us.”

“I always meant to ask you,” Mark demanded, “that portrait in the library where you first took me, was it the last of the Archdukes?”

Ida was silent, while she took a long careful inspection of the pathless glacier in front of them.

“Yes, he was one of them,” she said at last. “The snow is bad here—very brittle and uncertain—also I am not wholly sure whether there are not a fresh crevasse or two since I was last here. The bridges are formidable rather than dependable, when found. You will let me lead perhaps for a time since I used to know this glacier so well—the portrait you mention was the last of our special Archdukes—Michel Salvator.” She said no more, and Mark, too, was silent. They spent two hours crossing the glacier, most of it was sheer slogging endurance, but there were perilous instants, and they got across it only just in time, before daylight began to fail them. “Now there is nothing but a path,” Ida told him, “only as there is a precipice or two, on one side of it, we had better wait for the moon—there she comes! We are only an hour from the Senner hut, so we need not hurry.”

For a moment they stood stock still looking at the May moon. An enormous orange ball slid slowly into sight round the nearest peak. She was preceded and followed by a wash of silvery light as mysterious and splendid as her own image.

She moved steadily upwards, like a great ship through a waveless sea, disappearing at times behind a peak, to flood them again with her strange light, the moment after. Mark and Ida stood almost under the peak; on a small rock platform, beneath it, a path wound down to an eyelid of land on which the Senner hut was perched, and where they could still see the dark forms of cattle grazing.

On one side of them was the peak itself and on the other, after a tumbled rock or two, they could look sheer down into bottomless space. Close against the sheer edge and silver clear in the broad moonlight perched a family of Edelweiss. They were near enough to see the hundreds of tiny flowers in star form, closely pressed together. Each velvety flower had a triple star, and wore it like a crown.

“They are in a very dangerous spot,” Ida whispered. “That is how they grow—these royal flowers! Don’t want them—don’t touch them! They call them Lad’s death in my valley. That is because the boys think their girls want them—and perhaps they do—for a girl can want very silly things sometimes.”

“I used to think them overrated,” Mark said, looking down at the flowers motionless in their silver glow, “but I was wrong. They are strangely beautiful. Shall I fetch you one?”

“Are you mad?” Ida asked fiercely. “Have you forgotten we are on a mission, you and I? And would you risk ending it for a piece of foolery a child could make out of a blanket?”

“I think you are a little unjust,” Mark said queerly, “and it doesn’t look half as unsafe to me—a mouthful of rock-climbing—as that glacier we have just crossed certainly was—at least half a dozen times.”

“Well, that was different,” Ida said grudgingly. “We *had* to cross the glacier—there was no other way of getting to the hut; but no one has to lean half-way over a precipice on a slippery rock to pick a flower.”

“All right, I won’t,” Mark said a little stiffly. “I only wanted to show you a token—a very small one—of my gratitude. I haven’t felt that I could express it hitherto but I do realize the risks you have run to help what I am trying to do; and I am grateful.”

“Let’s sit down for a while and forget your gratitude and my temper,” Ida told him. “We shan’t see a night like this twice in a lifetime. Have you ever been in love, Mark? This is a moment to talk of it if you have. I should

say that you had learned very little about women. Every Englishman I've ever met has been half a monk! That makes one rather suspicious of the other half—if one happens to be a psychiatrist!"

"I'm not a monk at all," Mark said crossly. He found himself sitting on a rock where he could see the moonlight shining on her hair. She sat a foot or two beneath him, and her face was in shadow. He watched her white, narrow hand, touching without hurting the moss that grew on the rock between them. He could see the long rosy tentacles of the moss almost as plainly as if it were day. This clear unreality of moonlight freed something in Mark, the personal barriers that were second nature to him by day became trivial in the sober vastness of the approaching night. The stars came out slowly one by one, very faint and lightless at first in the darkening blue, and then becoming colder and clearer until they shone like frost flowers.

"There have only been two women in my life—and I'm thirty-four," Mark told her at last. "I suppose you think that's rather like a monk too. Well one of these feelings—passions—affairs—whatever you like to call them—wasn't monkish! I met a girl called Effie when I was twenty-one. She wasn't happy at home—if girls ever are. She was rather a nervous, high-strung sort of a girl but very intelligent—ultimately she did uncommonly well at the University—though she didn't stick to anything. Anyhow she had the idea that she didn't want to get married for ages—if ever—and yet wanted to know a thing or two about life. In a way I think we were a good deal in love with each other, off and on. We quarrelled awfully but in the holidays we sailed a boat together and even took trips to France, and for two years we sort of planned most things together. We broke off after a rather worse row than usual. I don't know now what it was about. We met once or twice after the row, but by then she'd taken up with another man whom she eventually married. I don't think I minded very much by then, but I often remember Effie. She wanted everything quicker than I did—and rather more of it—if you know what I mean—while it was on and less after it was over. I'm exactly the opposite in love. I'm a slow starter. I want little rather than much—and I don't want to dispose of what I've got too easily. Still, I've always had an idea that if I'd been rather older I could have appreciated Effie better; for one thing, she was plumb honest, and I find that's rather a rare thing—if you'll excuse my saying so—for a woman to be. I don't mean to say that she didn't tell lies, I daresay she did, but I know she never told herself any."

"You explain Effie very nicely," Ida said, taking out her cigarettes which, for once, Mark had noted with satisfaction, she had seemed to have forgotten, "so I suppose you were more in love with the other one—who

was probably *less* honest—that you see is what—if what you say is true—is likely to have been the reason for it. I assure you that very few men like a woman most for her honesty!”

Mark hesitated. It had been easy enough to talk about Effie—he’d got over Effie—but in a sense he had not got over Mary. “I don’t know,” he began a little uncertainly, “if Mary was honest or not—it is a little difficult when you haven’t lived with a woman—to understand exactly where honesty breaks down. Superficially she was intensely sincere, but probably you will say if she had been honest about our love—I should have lived with her. But there were, for both of us, pretty big obstacles. She had married a cousin of mine—a chap older a good deal than either of us—who’d had shell shock in the last war. He wasn’t very kind to her. I used to stay with them often. She never complained of him but I couldn’t help seeing. She had three children and loved her garden. Looking at those Edelweiss made me think of her. She was very graceful and liked playing Bach. She’d been well taught. We used to read the same books too. We fell in love—or knew that we were in love—very suddenly in the middle of a symphony concert. It was awfully sudden, painful, and just damned serious. We both knew it was quite impossible, only we kept trying to think it wasn’t. It seemed so very innocent somehow—just to have fragments of that intense and blinding intimacy every now and then. Sometimes Mary thought it could be managed and sometimes I did but never both of us together. We always knew that it could only end by being a cheat or a break. She wasn’t in the least an adventurous type. Her home was everything to her—and she wasn’t even vain. Her husband too—while he wasn’t kind or at all attractive—was in love with her. She couldn’t get over that—though he hated the children—and wasn’t really fit for marriage anyhow. Still I suppose he hadn’t realized that he wasn’t, any more than she had. The children, you see, were Mary’s life. That’s why our—our being together, if you can call it that, when it was only an intimacy of the heart—had to come to an end. We couldn’t, when it came to the point, either cheat or break. That was all there was to it, and yet it lasted many years—in fact I wasn’t sure till suddenly the other day that it was over. We tried not to meet, and yet in a way it was a pity—we were such friends. Effie and I never were—with us it had to be lovers or nothing. But if Mary were here now—both you and I would enjoy it! She never said stupid things or did unkind ones.”

“I do both,” Ida told him in a flat, hard voice. “Sometimes I say very stupid things because I don’t want to be kind—and sometimes because I do!”

Mark made no comment on this statement. He was, for a brief moment, comparing her in his mind with Mary. They had one thing, he thought and perhaps only one, in common—they made the passing moment more valuable with them than without them. After a prolonged silence Mark said, conscious of his daring, “You’re not much younger than I am—so I suppose you’ve been in love too?”

“Oh, yes!” Ida said, and for a long time Mark thought she was not going to say any more. At last she said, “It’s so stupid to say men are different from women. Of course they *are* and of course they *aren’t*! We’re all human, but I suppose here and there we’re human differently! I can tell, for instance, that that Mary business with you went deep—it isn’t very intelligible to an Austrian like myself that you didn’t let it go further, but I accept the fact that love in the air can take up a good deal of room! But after all I don’t believe it changed you! You are what you set out to be, aren’t you? The kind of man you were in your own mind *before* Mary is still the same man as you are *after* Mary? She didn’t, if you know what I mean, hoist you out of your own mind into hers, so that you can never, in any real sense, get back into your own again?”

“Yes, I daresay that is so,” Mark admitted. “I like to think I’m more what she wanted me to be—but I daresay I’m much the same really; besides I suppose if you haven’t actually lived with a woman you hardly know what it is that she *does* want you to be!”

“You wouldn’t know after—necessarily,” Ida told him rather sharply. She went on, after a brief pause; “anyhow, what I’m trying to explain is that before I fell in love I really was or thought I was a different being. Superficially anyhow I *looked* different even to myself. I was, for instance, innocent, unbelievably and drastically innocent, brought up among horses and men—without subterfuge—and on my merits, as it were, and no doubt they’d used a certain chivalry—as they must have supposed it—in my upbringing. I was mercilessly credulous, teachable—and what you really don’t think I now am—even sentimentally *kind*! I was like a head-long puppy—trusting all the world and bouncing into—and at—everything I fancied! Then I met a man who, as it were, started from scratch, for I was only sixteen, and he educated me for ten years; and now you see at least I don’t bounce any more. I’m very far from innocent. I don’t believe anything anyone tells me—unless I have to! and no one can teach me a thing! Not because I don’t want to learn but because I distrust any man who tries to tell me. Mark, I was in love, so much in love that I daren’t even now read Shakespeare’s Sonnets for fear they’ll make me scream!”

“But it is over isn’t it?” Mark said very gently. For a moment he wanted to touch the hand that played with the hard cool moss so close to his own. He was very sorry for her. Ida turned her head and he thought again how nearly beauty had moulded her features, or was she really beautiful, when her lips curved gently, and her strong chin looked less decisive and her eyes less cold?

Ida laughed. “Oh yes,” she said, “it is over like a nightmare when you wake up in a light room and find you aren’t strangled after all, nor walking about with no clothes on and a train to catch at Basle railway station! But have you ever noticed, it’s what you wake *with*—the spirit of your dream—that haunts you all day? A lobster may cause a dream—but it’s *you* not a lobster that makes the dream it causes! But I’ll just prove to you how cured I am. Repeat to me—in your nice quiet English voice—one of Shakespeare’s sonnets—and I’ll *not* scream.”

“All right!” Mark agreed, “but give me a minute or two to think out one of my favourites. I only know a few, and I want to choose a suitable one. Suitable, perhaps, to us both.”

“They’re all suitable to anyone who has ever been in love—at different times,” Ida murmured. “But certainly, choose!”

Mark moved a little so that he could see the Edelweiss and think of Mary. He began almost beneath his breath:

*Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know’st thy estimate;
The charter of thy worth is thy releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
And for those riches where is my deserving?
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
And so my patent back again is swerving.
Thyself thou gavest, thine own worth then not knowing,
Or me, to whom thou gav’st, else mistaking;
So thy great gift upon misprision making,
Comes home again, on better judgment making.
Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter
In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.*

“It sounds so deadly humble,” Ida said almost in a whisper, “and yet the whole of disillusion lies in it. Shakespeare only *wanted* to believe he was not

worth his lover. That would have been so much *less* a thing to get over! What no one can get over is to find out that it is one's lover—not one's self—who is worthless! If one is less worthy oneself, it's not surprising and one can make one's self better! But no one can make his lover better, not if he tries all his life long—with his heart's blood! Besides the whole point of one's lover—is that he couldn't *be* better—he should be perfect!"

Mark privately thought that such a standard was too hard on any earthly lover, but there was something in her voice that kept him from any form of criticism. If she had been arrogant in her demands at least she had broken her own heart, as well as her lover's, by her arrogance. "To me it didn't mean quite that," Mark said gently. "I thought of it always as a splendid close. He had had, after all, something stupendous that he wanted. Now he must get on without it, but at least he knows he's had the best there was to be had."

"Oh no! No! he hasn't!" Ida cried out in anguish. "He only had the *dream*—'on waking no such matter!'"

There was such pain in her voice that Mark dared say no more, but this time he did touch her hand—very gently—and very quickly taking his hand away—just that she might know if she cared to know that she had all his sympathy.

"Oh," she said after a pause that seemed to them both strangely long and significant, "they have lit a candle in the hut below! Let us go down to them for in Senner huts, they go early to bed."

Chapter 17

Mark had been in Senner huts before, so that he was not unprepared to step into a tunnel made of cheese. It was not the overpowering smell that was strange to him—but a sense of leaping terror that greeted their entrance. The dim light of one candle by the window flickered over the three stricken occupants of the little hut. A boy and a girl sat bolt upright on a bench staring at them with eyes that looked as if they had been prised open by fright; and an old man lying on a bunk in the corner whimpered like a frightened dog. There were several empty bunks round the walls, a stove, a table, and where there were not bunks shelves for pans containing milk that was hardening into cheeses.

The hands of the two young people gripped the bench they sat on as if they felt themselves being forcibly dragged away from it. Ida's quick "Grüss Gott!" made them relax slowly, but the old man still whimpered, and the look of violent exhausting terror lingered in their eyes.

Ida sat down on the nearest bench and began to explain to them, that she and Mark were tired after an eight hours' climb and benighted. They would be thankful for a night's rest. She told them that they were doctors studying herbs and flowers, "*Wir sind Oesterreicher*", she finished quietly. The girl jumped up as if released by a spring; washed two chipped mugs in a bucket; filled them to the brim with fresh cow's milk, and set a stout slab of their latest cheese before her guests. It was all they had in the hut, she explained, to offer them. The boy's terror also died down; they even began to talk about themselves a little, they were brother and sister, and came from the village of Reichenau in the valley. They too had an uncle who collected herbs and often they helped him. It was a way of passing the time like any other and he had told them what to look for, and where it would be likely to grow. They had quite a collection already though they had only been up two weeks. They kept their herbs in a shed behind the hut with the finished cheeses.

The sound of their voices seemed to reassure the old man in the corner for he stopped whimpering. But they all three suddenly became dumb and motionless again, when Ida explained that if they saw any Germans, she hoped they would not mention Mark and herself, nor say that they had spent the night there. "These ones," Ida said quietly, "interfere too much with

simple people like ourselves. We get into trouble without reason, so that it is better to keep them ignorant of who we are, or what we do.”

The heartfelt “*Gewiss!*” that both boy and girl uttered simultaneously showed what they too felt about their conquerors. Ida and Mark finished their simple meal, talking companionably about cows, goats, their pasture, and the herbs. Not till they had re-washed their mugs and were making their brief preparations for the night, did Ida ask casually, “And this old man—he looks feeble to be up so high on the mountain—and on your hands as well as the beasts! Has he had an illness?”

Seppel and Anna looked doubtfully, first at the old man, and then at each other. At last Seppel said cautiously, “We found him in the snow—our first week up. It was a slight spring fall—but he was finished. He could do no more. However it was his mountain so we took him in; and we shall care for him till we go down with the cows in the autumn. Perhaps by then he will be well! He costs us nothing! He takes only milk. But we too—we feel like you about the Germans. Ever since they came there has been nothing but trouble. We are told by our new schoolmaster, and the priest, that it is a very good thing to have the Germans with us—they are our brothers—our stronger brothers—and we shall become prosperous and strong because of their rule. But we cannot really believe this! You see that man over there—he isn’t old—he comes from Dachau—he is only twenty-four! We knew him because he and his brother Wilhelm had the farm of the *Drei Schlimme Räuber* and Wilhelm still owns it—there he works of course—as we all must for the Nazis. When Hans escaped from Dachau—because they didn’t let him out—he hid in a drain while they were doing outside work and he got away into the woods—so he thought they would send first to see if he had gone home to the farm; and he came up to this hut instead—on the chance that it might be open—and fortunately it was, just open, for we had come up early—and it is his mountain.”

“I see,” said Ida gently. She moved quickly across the room, to the remains of what had once been a human being.

It seemed to Mark that it was no longer Ida who bent over the tortured man. She glowed with an exquisite tenderness, her skilled intelligent hands eased and calmed him by their touch. “Bring the candle here, child,” she said to Anna. “Let us see if together we cannot make him more comfortable.”

In an hour everything in the hut had changed. Seppel brought in a store of herbs from the shed, and Mark sorted them out, helping Ida to prepare a

solution that might relieve, if it could not heal, Hans's appalling injuries.

There was not a whole part in his poor ruined body, his organs had been kicked out of place, his back was cut into lumps of raw uneven flesh; he was not a man any more.

As Ida dressed his wounds he began to talk excitedly in a thin high voice. He did not tell them what he had done, because that he did not know—no one had ever told him why he was taken away and tortured; but what was done to him, he told.

Twice, Mark, blind and sick with rage, went out into the remote inviolable moonlight because he could not control himself, before the senseless cruelty he had to see and hear. When the long tale came to its wavering finish, Ida began to talk to Hans, soothingly, tirelessly, pouring life into him through her voice and her eyes. She was as radiant, as if she had a secret joy in her power to give, until hope reached his worn-out, broken heart; and Mark saw him actually smile back at her.

“But what she says isn't true!” Mark told himself indignantly. “Can such a wreck get his strength back? Can he take up any sort of real life again—when what they've made of him isn't a man at all? And besides he daren't go back! There'll be some sort of a watch set on his farm and his brother—Wilhelm—well, brothers have been known to betray each other before now—those children looked odd when they said he was still on his farm! Not all peasants are kind by nature or religion! Isn't she giving him a hope that is a mere will-o'-the-wisp? And why is she like a woman suddenly—why is she so moving and so tender—it's the difference between a battery turned on and a battery turned off—she's making him believe in something he'll never have—as if it *were* in his own power!” At last Mark's watchful eyes clouded over; Anna and Seppel were already fast asleep; but Ida still bent over the poor broken body she knew she could not mend.

When Mark woke, he found the two young people up and out with their cows. Hans lay peacefully asleep and Ida sat on the doorstep, drinking the clean air.

The sky was cloudy, and a föhn wind blew. Anna brought them their milk, warm from the cow; and Ida gave them some money to help them with their needs. They did not want to take it, but Ida was firm, and said, “You might have a need—suddenly. No one knows now what they will need to-day! But be careful not to spend more than you usually do at a time. Lest the Germans are surprised to find you possess any!”

“To think we were afraid of you!” Anna said, as she and Seppel clasped their hands in farewell, “and you are angels of God and wise as hermits. Still, Frau Doktor, we shall say nothing—nothing ever—because we think as you think—we feel as you feel! Yet the priest might think differently. What is a sin—what is not a sin—we cannot tell now any more!”

“But we know we are children of God,” Seppel said coming up with his goats, “and if we are children of God—we must love one another!” He spoke with vehement earnestness, the little kids nuzzling fearlessly against his bare knees, his eyes fixed on Mark, as if he wanted another man’s support, for he was only sixteen, and that is not very old to know the whole duty of a Christian.

Mark, much to his own astonishment, found himself saying with equal earnestness, “Yes, that is all we need to know.”

They shook hands firmly as if they had settled something final, and satisfactory. Mark looked back twice, to see the goats playing round the boy’s steady figure. Anna had gone back into the hut; but until they were out of sight Seppel stood watching them.

“I wonder what it was that puzzled those children,” Mark asked Ida at last. “They seemed to think their priest might think they had done wrong—but could any priest want them not to help a sick neighbour?”

Ida walked on in silence for so long a time that Mark thought she had not heard his question. At last she said curtly and without looking at him, “You saw the man’s condition? It was incurable. He was only twenty-four—there was no particular reason, however, why he shouldn’t—in that condition—go on living for a long time. Well—I killed him. I always take morphia about now. I had to ask the children’s consent—and they gave it. To-night they will bury him. Could you suppose I would give him a false hope? I gave him instead an evening’s happiness—and eternal peace.”

Mark was silent. They climbed until nothing was round them but the sky. At last Mark said bitterly, “You asked them—for *their* consent, but *mine*? Why did you leave me out of your consultation—as if I were a child or a stranger?”

“Ask yourself rather, why should I drag you in?” Ida replied quickly. “You have something to do which is necessary for us all. You must not be hampered by anything else—anything extraneous—an extra danger! This thing that I have done is called murder. Perhaps one or other of those children—though I do not think it—will forget what they now believe—and

confess to their priest that I killed Hans of the *Drei Schlimme Räuber*. Now they cannot connect you with it—your name—your presence has had nothing to do with my crime—that I impressed on them—and they will not forget it.”

“You expect me to be grateful to you for what you have done?” demanded Mark. “You think I like being sheltered, at your expense?”

“I have not asked myself what you like,” Ida said coldly. “I alone am responsible for what I do. Personally I am content to have taken away a life of degradation and fear from a fellow man, but you have a code—you have told me about it, and it is not one—though I am sure it expresses you and that you are faithful to it—that I find any need to accept. How could I tell if this particular act—not necessarily considered blameless—might not violate your code?”

“You might have asked me what I thought about it,” Mark said with increasing anger. “In fact you would have done so had you trusted me.”

Ida was silent for a long time. “We live in very curious times,” she said at last in a softer voice, “and ‘trust’ is a very elastic term—to what extent dare we pull this elastic? I myself do not know, Mark—I am your comrade at this moment—I am your happy comrade—more than my will consents to be with you. That we proved to each other yesterday when we made great confidences to each other. I know you for a man who is no liar—you do not boast—you have courage—you are not empty-hearted—these things I have trust in and for some of these things I suppose that you have trust in me. But on this mountain, we have been doing what both of us have been trained for and enjoy. There is no problem in two skilled climbers being at home together on a mountain! But last night we came suddenly on something unpredictable. I had to decide quickly. Suppose I had told you what I meant to do and you had tried to stop me? By a word, those frightened children could have made what I did impossible and how did I know you would not say such a word?”

Mark met her eyes and saw that they were not cold and expressionless any more—they had a life in them that met his own, as if they sought, and expected, understanding.

“I suppose a man hates to feel left out of a decisive act,” he said at last reluctantly. “I agree with what you did, but it is true—it wouldn’t have occurred to me to do it.”

“It was not your business,” Ida reminded him. “We must stick always to that. You have only one business here in Austria. But this that I did was *my* business; it was my business not only as a human being but as an Austrian. That man’s courage was destroyed; if the Germans had turned up he might, to save being sent back to a concentration camp, have given us both away—and the children too might have suffered, for they let us stay. It was not only pity that made me kill him.”

“It was my safety!” cried Mark, stopping dead in his tracks.

“Call it what you like,” Ida said impatiently. “Half Europe will be dead before this war is finished. You exaggerate the importance of a human being. I did what I saw there was to be done—that is all!”

“There are some things that can’t be exaggerated,” said Mark quietly. “What you did for me—is perhaps one of them.”

Ida made no answer to this statement. They were off the ridge now, and difficult rock climbing lay before them. They roped in silence, and except for the quick exchange of their instant needs and actions, said no more to each other for an hour or two. But Mark felt as if their harmony of the day before had come back to them. He could even forgive Ida his gratitude. He reminded himself of what she had told him yesterday—the man she had loved had failed her—obviously he had not given her any reason for confidence; so it was not surprising that she was slow to feel it for any other man. Curiously enough Mark’s own confidence in Ida had deepened. He had spoken the truth when he said he had not been sure whether Mary was honest or not; but he knew that he was sure Ida was. Mary had been so beautiful that whatever she did seemed right, but Ida had no such charm for him—no such beauty. Mark was prepared to judge her harshly—more harshly than if she had been a man. He found that he even wished to judge her harshly though he was not sure why.

After they had safely negotiated their last chimney, and come out once more on a bare and level ridge, Ida said to him abruptly, “That little rise in front of us will show you Trafoi. I shall go down there, towards Landeck—and by nightfall you will reach your farm. There is a path nearly all the way.”

“Is your way down difficult?” he asked her.

“It is very easy,” Ida told him.

They reached the rise and saw far below them the little ribbon of the pass winding away between a range of near and frowning peaks.

“I am sorry—you will have no food till nightfall. I forgot to ask them for a little cheese.”

“I am glad you forgot something,” Mark said, looking down at her, with a reluctant smile. “It is rather pleasant to exchange roles sometimes. I have remembered the cheese, and brought enough for both of us.”

“Then we may as well sit down and eat it,” Ida said promptly, returning his smile.

The sun had come out in a lazy makeshift fashion often vanishing behind clouds and cooled by a constant teasing wind. Everything looked plainer, the mountains, Ida’s face, the shrunken valley in the distance. A thin screen of bitter sorrel, growing beneath the shelter of the rock they leaned against, shivered violently in the growing wind.

“And now, *Auf Wiederseh’n*,” Ida told him. She stood as high as his shoulder, very erect and gay, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

“We’ve been very dull to-day,” she said. “Almost like an old married couple, who have exhausted each other’s histories. This makes one feel—as I confess I feel to-day—a great deal safer!”

“Safer from what?” Mark asked her bluntly, for he himself had ceased to feel any safety.

“From all the dangers that beset us, of course,” Ida said laughingly. “Amongst others, that we might find each other too attractive. This we have certainly overcome by the help of our mutual boredom—a lunch consisting entirely of cold cheese—and a föhn wind! Let us be thankful for our mercies since we have not very many to be thankful for! Once more *Auf Wiederseh’n!*”

She was gone before Mark had time to do more than control an impulse that assailed him, to take her slender shoulders between his hands and hold her back by force, as if he couldn’t afford to be without her.

Chapter 18

To be alone on a mountainside, in touch with the nature he understood and revered, was to Mark as easing as the “Mass” is to a Catholic after long abstinence.

Yet for a time Mark was unable to enter fully into his old ecstasy. Something strange and painful checked him. Was it that he had come to enjoy—and was now missing—the mocking, astringent presence of Ida? Or was it the dread of seeing Lisa again and finding himself forced back upon his primary emotions? If only, he thought, he could have been like most men he knew, able to enjoy his sex instinct without any inner contact with a woman as a human being, he would not have felt so crestfallen and ashamed, and, above all, so unwilling for this fresh encounter.

When he had stood before the bared teeth of the unknown, and knew no way to escape from the terror in front of him but the way into Death itself, Lisa’s protecting love had been a living shelter. But now that the edge of his fear was dulled, so was the edge of his need. Lisa was no longer an elemental force releasing him into safety, she was merely a peasant girl whom he did not want to hurt, and to whom he still less wanted to be tied. Nor was he any longer afraid of the Nazis. They were not less dangerous, but he had by now grown accustomed to their dangerousness. They were even less dangerous to him than the perils of his own mind.

The ribboned stretch of the Pass glittered far beneath him, as he climbed, like a picture of his old, secure, well-trodden life. Yet he no longer wanted to slip back into its unperplexing sunlight. He preferred the precipitate paths over which he had to find his way, beneath the serried ranks of the peaks; dipping and climbing, crouching and clambering, over and under the dark wet rocks, never able to forget the enemy he might suddenly confront or the task that he must somehow or other accomplish. He felt a thrill that he had never felt before. He was being used—every atom of him was being used in a direction along which he was now satisfied that a man must go—or else lose all that makes life worth living. He knew—as he had never yet known—the full consent of his own will.

Just beneath him on an awkward footing of crag he saw again the white death flower. In the vivid light of the retreating sun the little group of Edelweiss, clinging to the edge, no longer looked silvery; they shone a burning, blazing white. Mark could quite plainly distinguish each slender stem, with its pale crown, the soft white felt protecting each fragile stalk and small leaf from the hot mountain sun. An overpowering impulse seized him. He slipped a loop of rope over the nearest rock, and let himself down to the crag's edge. "If I can't take her anything else," he thought to himself remorsefully, "I can at least take her a moment's danger."

He knew how Ida would have laughed at him with her indifferent scorn for this sudden sentimental risk. He knew that his life, until his mission was accomplished, was not his own. Yet the breathless moment in which he swung out between the world of sky and blue air beneath him, feeling his hands close over the delicate softness of the Edelweiss, freed him from remorse, and gave him back his mountain ecstasy. He clambered back swiftly on to the crag above him with the flowers safe in his hands.

The air grew fresher and colder as the light began to fail. Mark was so near the Planer farm that from moment to moment he expected to see the smoke rising from its chimney. Suddenly he heard the swift patter of approaching footsteps. Someone was clambering with careless speed over the rocks beneath him. Was it a guard or a fugitive? Leaning over the edge of the rock on which he stood, Mark saw just below him a woman bent double. She ran stumblingly while the loose stones rattled and slid under her feet, her breath sobbing as she ran. "Lisa!" Mark called down to her softly. "Lisa!" She stopped dead, threw back her head and gazed up at him, as if the heavens had opened. Mark scrambled quickly down to her side. "What is it?" he urged, taking her ice-cold hands in his. She trembled and shook so that she could not speak. "Is someone running after you?" Mark entreated. Lisa shook her head. "What has happened?" Mark insisted. "Try to tell me what has happened, Lisa." Big tears like a child's ran down her cheeks. "It is his life!" she sobbed. "We took it! Father and I. He is dead—Herr—one of *Them!* Dead—like a chicken! I ought not to have cried out when he caught hold of me! But he knew how to—he was a worse one than most. My arms were not free—struggling was no good—so I cried out! Father came—with a spade. He had been digging the new potatoes; and he—this one—I saw Father—and I knew—but he didn't! He believed, like all of them—that Father was weak and old. Father struck—I pushed him towards Father—and the spade—it went right down into his head—and his body went soft suddenly in my arms. Blood ran out like water on the ground. We could do nothing. He lay and twitched and then he stopped twitching. Should I fetch a

priest? He might betray us. Even priests fear Nazis! Should I get Peter? But I do not want to get Peter—he's married and he is so young! Andreas they have already taken from us. So—I ran—God sent me up this path or else He sent you down to me!”

Lisa stopped crying; her eyes became as calm as a child's that has been hurt, but is suddenly satisfied by the presence of someone older than himself—who becomes at once responsible for his pain. All Mark's reluctance left him. He suddenly loved Lisa with ease and without confusion as a man loves a child.

“It cannot matter that this Nazi is dead,” he told her gently. “For such a reason it was right to kill him. You are quite innocent of his death and so is your father—so you don't need the priest. It is only necessary to hide the body—so that none of you can be made responsible. That is all we have to think of, Lisa!”

“Still he was alive,” Lisa said wonderingly, “and now he is dead. That is a big thing to happen to a man's life, Herr—even if he is a Nazi!”

“They take without thinking the rights and lives of others,” Mark said fiercely. “They break up everything that is human and beautiful. We *have* to destroy them, Lisa!”

“Perhaps,” Lisa said doubtfully, “perhaps, but up here—well, I have never seen a man dead before! Once I saw a sheep and its lamb both dead and I cried.”

The last light lay like a long golden finger on the small white farm beneath them. The column of smoke rising in the clear air was as blue as a forget-me-not and as solid as stone. There was no snow left. The gold of kingcups ran with the streams down the steep meadows. The pale cups of pink transparent crocuses trembled and shook in the waning light. On the kitchen floor, near the crucifix, where they had dragged him, lay the limp body of the Nazi guard.

Father Planer stood looking down on it, perplexed but not wholly displeased with his handiwork. Mother Planer had closed the dead man's eyes, and washed the blood from his head and neck. Now she prayed. She did not know what else to do, and when she looked up from where she knelt at the sound of unfamiliar footsteps, she accepted Mark's sudden presence as the direct answer to her prayers. The Planers were confused and distressed, not for fear of the certain death that awaited them if their deed was

discovered; but because human life was really sacred to them, and yet they had been forced to take it.

Only Father Planer felt that the deed was inevitable, and therefore in spite of its consequences he was satisfied to have done it. Still even Father Planer had felt it necessary to wash the spade and put it away in a shed, where he could no longer see it; and Mark's unexpected approach was an obvious relief to him. "He pushed it upon himself!" he explained as he grasped Mark's outstretched hand with his gnarled, horny one.

"Many times over," Mark told him with decision. "We have only to get rid of him so that when they come up to look for him, there may be no proof against you. How long will it be before they send to find out?"

"It might be to-morrow evening," Father Planer said, scratching his head, "or earlier. They are a suspicious lot these fierce ones—like a vicious dog—their tails go down between their legs before they bite!"

"How far away is the nearest precipice?" Mark asked looking down at the battered head. "If we tossed him over it would look as if his broken head was natural!"

"There is a good deep drop," Father Planer said with increasing reassurance, "a cow went over last summer and I fenced it, beyond the edge of our last slope—the ground breaks up for a few yards and then there's a hundred-foot drop—plenty of rocks too on the way down to bump off—his head would be well accounted for!"

"We must take a shutter to carry him on," Mark said, considering, "and we had better carry the body off now before the light fails. Lisa must go ahead of us, just in case anyone should happen to come up."

Mother Planer, who was still on her knees before the crucifix, screwed her head round to look at Mark. "Those flowers," she observed dispassionately, "you are carrying in your hand, give them to the Dead—in such a way that when they find him they may see he had a purpose. Men often risk their lives for such little, silly things."

Mark nodded. It was not what he had meant to do with Lisa's flowers. Her eyes met his, and the ghost of a smile touched her lips and vanished. She, too, knew what Mark had meant to do with the flowers.

They carried their burden in silence through the cold dusk—a little wind blew sharply against their faces, it seemed to come from the bright coldness of the first stars. The moon rose larger and heavier than the night before. It was no longer honey-coloured, but a dead world that looked as if it were

made of white and sparkling glass. It gave them light enough to see their way when they reached the rocks. Lisa flung her apron over her head and turned with her back to the path. They put the stretcher on the ground while Father Planer stepped forward cautiously to choose the best place from which to drop the body; and then Mark looked for the first time at the dead German's face. Even in death he looked as if his will still tried to force itself upon an unwilling victim.

Father Planer stepped back. "Here," he said, "we can send him over best!"

Once more they lifted the stretcher, and this time it seemed to Mark as if it were heavier than before.

They moved carefully and slowly over the uneven ground, to the sheer edge. Then Mark counted softly, "One, two, three—over!" It was like some dreadful game—or the start of a long-ago innocent, sporting event. Mark felt the shutter tip and lighten suddenly—and then the muffled blows of the body striking against rocks came up to them intermittently through the still air. "Na! Na!" Father Planer muttered uneasily, "he earned it, that one!"

Lisa gave a little shriek, like a frightened bird's, after each sound.

It was almost dark when they got back to the farm. Mother Planer was cooking their evening meal. The room was in its usual order, nothing had altered or looked strange. Only when the meal was ready they sat down and ate with Mark, as if he were no longer a guest but a son of the house.

They asked him what they could do to help him about his plans, and entered with their usual practical tranquillity into this new emergency. He must get a *Grenzschein*, they told him, or rather Peter must get one for him—he must use Peter's name but he must go from over Galtur before he dropped towards Meran where Peter had never been. This would simplify everything and he must return the same way then there would be no suspicion. Peter must remain on his farm where no one was likely to come, and therefore no one would know that he had not used his own *Schein*. This could be arranged by Lisa to-morrow. To-night they would all sleep in peace in their beds; and to-morrow morning early, it would be advisable for Mark to take to the loft again above Franz Joseph.

It was hardly necessary for Mark to urge upon them, as he did, that they should all act to-morrow in exactly the way they usually acted, because it had not occurred to any of them to act in any other way. "Try to believe that nothing has happened," Mark begged, "this will not only help to blind the

Germans but it will be of use to you yourselves, because then you will get over it all easier; and look as you always look.”

“I have not changed much,” Mother Planer observed thoughtfully, “now that I have finished praying, and the water has dried on the floor there is nothing that is not the same. Only that one—wherever he is now—he had also a mother! Perhaps, since he was good in no other way—and we are all children of God—he may have been a good son. For her therefore I am sorry. It was for her I prayed.”

Father Planer put out his hand to the hook on which his long crooked pipe hung. He said nothing at all; but he looked as if he were finding more comfort in his pipe than usual. Lisa glanced across the table at Mark, and smiled; but she did not come near him. She put a stone hot water bottle between his glass-cold sheets; and when he went to bed, he found, in a mug on his dressing table, one of the Edelweiss. Perhaps the flower had fallen on the path, out of the dead man’s buttonhole, or perhaps Lisa had secreted it while she so firmly fixed the others in—so that there might be no mistake what the dead German had sought for, before he fell.

Chapter 19

It took Lisa a long time to come back with the *Grenzschein*. She started at dawn, while Mark was still asleep. Peter's farm was several miles away, and the Wildspitze is by no means an easy mountain.

When Lisa reached the farm it took almost as long again to explain to Peter exactly what he must do and why he must do it. Peasants are seldom in a hurry except when confronted by a physical emergency, then—if they are accustomed to it—they act with precision and skill; but if it is a danger they have never met before they are apt to act impulsively and wrongly; and when it is not an immediate physical need, they prefer not acting at all. However at last Peter understood that he *must* go down the mountain and get a *Grenzschein* for Mark, under his own name, because it would help Mark to thwart the Nazis. He must leave his hay half-cut, although the weather had been sent by Providence—and might equally well be interrupted by Providence—since there were thunderclouds about. Lisa fortunately could cut hay as easily as she could cut bread; and she promised to go on cutting until Peter returned. His young wife Kathie had to be told why Peter was leaving the hay—but neither Planer told her very much. They listened however with extreme patience and no answering volubility, while she made all the objections that naturally occurred to her, and which she would not have made, had either of them seen fit to tell her a little more.

When Peter reached the Thal, it took him some time to convince the authorities that he needed a *Grenzschein*; and longer still to decide that he might have it; so that it was near sunset before Lisa returned with it to the farm.

“All the better,” she told Mark, who was safely secreted above Franz Josef's head, “for now the *Schein* is valid for all to-morrow; I saw the guards too starting off—the long way up here—before I took the quick way across the waterfall. They will be here in less than an hour, by then, the parents expect them, and those ones will hold them back till everything is in order. Perhaps they will search here for Herr Braun—or try to—but I thought of a plan while I was coming home. I will conduct them to the barn, and then by a little mistake I will slip Franz Josef's door off the latch, so he will bounce out like a ball; and I will scream ‘The bull is loose!’ and while

he is scattering them—and be very sure Franz Josef knows how to scatter them—you can crawl out of the window at the back down the ladder—and run into the wood. They will not know that anyone is here—so they will not be looking out for anyone escaping. It is better than if you tried to escape *now*—because they will be coming up through the wood—and God knows whether—in their fearfulness of missing Herr Braun—they may not have sent other guards to look for him along the Border! You might easily run into them; and be suspected. Naturally I will give them time to take cover—before I let Franz Josef out. I would not have even those ones meet his horns! I will scream only once. Is that clear?”

“It is very clear, Lisa,” Mark told her, “except that if you open Franz Josef’s door you will be yourself in danger!”

“From Franz Josef? *Ach nein!*” Lisa said with conviction, “for one thing he knows my apron. I always bring his food and water in this apron; and for another after I slip the latch I shall be behind the door. Before him is the meadow—it is there he will wish to be—immediately and—alone! Those men, he will not like on the meadow! *Ach nein!*”

“Lisa,” Mark murmured, “Lisa!” He leaned down as far as he dared from the loft and Lisa looked up at him with shining eyes, from the further side of Franz Josef’s substantial form. “You understand,” she whispered. “It was that dead man! *He* came between us last night. I had to think of him!”

“I understand,” Mark answered. He wished he could think of more to say to Lisa but he couldn’t; and with Lisa it was never necessary to say much. Her eyes that were so kind and true and full of love, were satisfied, for she saw the answering tenderness in Mark’s eyes, nor did she know that his tenderness was not the same as hers, but that of a man for a child—a friend for a friend, without the ecstasy and urgency of love. Not having anything further to say, Lisa slipped into Franz Josef’s stall and swiftly unfastened his nose ring from the staple in the wall. Franz Josef stared angrily at her, shook his heavy head and blew out his annoyance from his nostrils; but he had hardly time to feel invaded, before Lisa was out again, saying to him softly over the partition “*Nah! Nah!* Franz Josef, you will like it better that way!” After all Franz Josef very well recognized Lisa was a woman; and a woman who fed him, so that if she made an intrusion, however exasperating to his dignity, he could afford to let her off easily.

Once more she looked up at Mark. “Adieu!” she whispered. There was light enough to see how blue her eyes were and how soft her parted lips.

Lisa had plenty of time to reach the farm before the guards came into sight.

When they appeared Mother Planer was making the extraordinary noise in the doorway which brought the chickens, from every direction simultaneously, towards their last meal of the day.

Mark could not hear the conversation that took place, but he could see that Father as well as Lisa and the chickens, were joining in. It was most unsatisfactory from the Germans' point of view. For if you are not accustomed to a Tirolean peasant you might just as well try to understand the language of an excited hen. Also none of the Planers wanted to be understood—they wanted to embarrass and mislead. "Why?" Mother Planer demanded, shaking a gaunt dirty brown finger in the guards' faces. "Was not Herr Braun at the farm?" What had they done with Herr Braun? Was he still in the Thal? But Herr Braun did not do shabby things like that! A nice, civil-spoken guard to whom they had all grown accustomed. Would he desert his meals then? Why should she prepare meals for even a Nazi who did not appear to eat them? Who would pay for all those uneaten *Knödeln* of the best quality? For the potatoes? Let alone the milk which, since the *Reich* gave them no fodder for their cows had become as sacred as wine? Would Herr Braun pay for what he had *not* eaten? Would the *Reich*?

When they could get a word in edgeways the guards assured her that the *Reich* would always pay for what had been ordered; but they were not responsible for the absence of Herr Braun. Where was he? It was what they wanted to be *told*—not to be *asked*.

Mother Planer's voice rose higher and higher, the chickens, unaccustomed to be called for meals and then deprived of them, shrieked and clucked on almost exactly the same note. Father Planer growled deeper and deeper. The pigs, being excitable animals, always expectant of their latter end—joined in the chorus. The drama increased with the search. Mechanically the guards entered the farm and with them, not at all mechanically, streamed the chickens, a duck, the family Planer and an escaped pig who, with the ubiquity of pigs, took a leading part in the proceedings. Slowly they circulated through all the farm buildings in turn, until at last Father and Mother retired to the kitchen door, exhausted but triumphant; and Lisa led the guards across the meadow towards the barn.

Franz Josef was already furious. Never had he heard so many uncouth noises just at a time when the havoc of the day should have been over. Also his last drink was late. Besides, being free in his stall from the check of his

nose ring, he could the more easily thrash himself into a passion. He bellowed so forcibly that even the loft above him shook. Straw flew up into the air. Beneath Mark the noise and fury increased with every second. He could just hear Lisa in a penetrating voice rather unnecessarily explaining to the guards that here was an animal that got sometimes a little excited! They had better not come quite so near until she saw that Franz Josef was quite secure. Still, naturally, she realized that they must search the barn! The door clicked, it swung open—Franz Josef, incredulous with rage and the sudden possibility of gratifying it—stepped cautiously into the meadow. For a moment there was complete silence.

Franz Josef appeared to be afraid of himself. He swung his great head slowly—his red eyes slewed from side to side. In what direction should he attack first? He pawed the soft ground under his feet. “The bull is loose!” shrieked Lisa. Franz Josef heard the provocative voice, he saw two strange men in the middle distance—and with the velocity of a bullet he charged them.

Mark had already corkscrewed himself out of his window—and was half-way down the rope ladder when Lisa screamed again. There was something in this second scream that made Mark hang dead still on his ladder. The first scream had been what he had expected—shrill, dramatic, self-propelled, but this scream was different. It was less loud and far more terrifying—it was itself terrified. After it there came a shot; and then no sound at all, not even Franz Josef bellowing. Shot or no shot, his mission was his duty; and he must do it whatever the cost to himself or others. Mark let himself down behind the barn and ran for the woods. The woods seemed a long way off, though he was a swift runner. He reached them at last and the path that led towards Trafoi. His legs went on running, but his senses, his heart and his mind were not with them. That second scream dragged them back. They stayed with Lisa at the farm. There were plenty of little noises in the wood. Birds settling for the night; small animals seeking their suppers; mysterious anonymous rustlings; but Mark heard nothing. He did not feel the insects bite or the brambles tear his legs. He pushed on reluctantly further and further from his heart. He could not go back now. There was nothing he could do to change whatever had happened. It was dark before he reached Trafoi, the quality of the moonlight seemed to grow softer, the sky was a deep and tender blue. Now he was at the frontier, small lights twinkled, hard, mask-faced Germans asked him innumerable questions. Why was he so late? Who wanted work? Was it necessary to seek it in another country? Who was he going to visit? Why must he visit them? One after the other the worrying, irritating official sieve drove him through its

meshes. Then came the Italians. They shrugged their shoulders, and spat in the thick white dust, but their questions were perfunctory. After all, this peasant was only going from one locked prison to another. Why should he tell the truth? Perhaps he was going to work, perhaps to see a relation, perhaps to make love to a girl! In any case his pass was valid till the following midnight. He had no money; he was carrying nothing; cigarettes? Perhaps a handful—well—he could go on!

Mark stumbled out of the circle of lights into the merciful oblivion of the deep, unpeopled darkness. What a farce men made of the free open world! Everything in nature was more man's friend now than his fellow man. A piece of paper—or you could go nowhere—and do nothing. A pass stood between you and eternity. It stood, indeed, between you and life. Rules and rubble—these were the creative gifts of man to the twentieth century!

It was late dawn before Mark could look down on Meran. The soft Italian light had changed the visible world. The houses shone like pearls—faint purple shadows covered the young vines; the mountains on the other side of the valley were veiled in amethyst and rose.

There was no ease in Meran, for it was Fascist and as strongly guarded as all the frontiers of Fascist lands. But the liquid, gracious light penetrated Mark's senses with a strange benevolence. Everywhere roses bloomed and pale clouds of wisteria drifted across the houses. The young green of the vineyards promised a rich harvest. Even the men and women of such a land could not be altogether repressed in their human flowering. The peasants Mark met moved more fluently, than where the rigid stamp of the German mind had been clamped down across the frontier. Even Mussolini could not prevent Italian days from shining, nor Italian greetings from being natural.

Mark, following his instructions, looked for the house of the secret agent in the outskirts of *Obermais*. He came to a shabby raspberry-painted shack with a vine trellis in front of it and a small vineyard half-way up a little hill at the back, a curious place to find a link with the British empire. Yet he had been told "a red house standing alone before you enter *Obermais*". A little girl came to the door, barefoot, sallow and dark-eyed. She stared at Mark for a long time before she could be persuaded to fetch her father. At last a peasant appeared, dressed as Mark himself was in short leather breeches and an open shirt. His eyes had a blank innocent look under dark brows; they were the unexpected blue of a speedwell. "I seek work," Mark told him, "either in your vineyard or whatever else you can give me." Mark spoke in Italian but the answer came to him in Austrian. "There is no work here," the man said, making with his fingers the sign of the evil eye. "Perhaps if you

have no work, you have pity,” Mark finished the password. For a moment or two the man looked as blank as ever; but he moved. He shambled into the house, and returned with some bread and goat’s milk cheese. These he set out on a rickety iron table under the vine trellis. Once more he vanished and returned with wine in two chipped mugs. “Bottles,” he explained, “like many other things it is better not to show. Here we have nothing to look at but ourselves—and yet everything is visible. To have nothing to show—and to be visible, that is the nearest anyone can be to safety in a Fascist land. I have been expecting you for a long time. What have you brought?” Herr Schröder—for he now pronounced his name in the same soft Austrian drawl with which he had greeted Mark, sat down on the other side of the little iron table and took out an old and blackened pipe. “What I have brought is important,” Mark said after a moment’s hesitation. “I had been told I might meet here an English agent—the stuff should go immediately to England.”

“I am an English agent,” Herr Schröder told him. “I am also a friend of Father Martin’s. To-night I will take your message to Venice—somewhere in one of the lagoons off the sea wall I meet a naval friend. It is very quiet there—he’s coming in a motor-boat—but he doesn’t bring it right in—they are too noisy. He swims well—he takes back what I bring, in his head—and where it can’t get wet!” Herr Schröder leaned his elbows on the table; and changing his Austrian drawl to those clipped, expressionless and even tones, men use without having learned them—from the air they breathe beyond the cliffs of Dover, he said, “My real name you see is Laurence Courtney; and I played for Somerset.”

Mark gave a little sound that was half a laugh and half a groan. He dropped his eyes to hide how deeply reassured he felt, at this sudden recovery of brotherhood.

This was a man to whom he need say nothing because he could so easily tell him everything. The sharp pressure of responsibility loosened itself and fell from him; and suddenly Mark felt so tired that he could have gone to sleep where he sat in the small iron chair with his head on the table. But he didn’t go to sleep, instead, he pulled himself together, rubbed his eyes, drank his wine and began to talk.

Herr Schröder sat, peaceful and torpid as a cat, puffing lazily at his pipe, and nodding slowly from time to time. Mark’s long list of information unfolded itself, piece by piece, accurately and precisely from his long-drilled mind. On a scrap of old newspaper close to his hand, Herr Schröder wrote an occasional note. “You have a phenomenal memory,” he said when Mark had finished. “Have you any rice paper? No? We use it now occasionally. It

is easier to eat! I will give you some in case, later on, you have specifications or graphs that cannot be remembered in the air. Otherwise this method of yours is far the most practicable. Have you a pill?" Mark shook his head. "What sort of a pill?" he demanded. "Dr. Eichhorn should have given you one," Herr Schröder said reprovingly. "Especially with such a good memory: you see you must not fall into the hands of the Nazis without being able to get out of them! Better, naturally, *not* to fall into their hands—escapes are really very rare indeed—and I sometimes marvel at the untutored imaginations of those who retail them—in books or travellers' tales. I simply do not believe them. We should never under-estimate the Nazis. They have almost foolproof methods: they break down only because hearts are sometimes necessary as well as minds. Also some can be bribed—but very few. Italians can be bribed easily. Germans are too virtuous—especially when they are committing crimes. However this pill I shall give you will prevent torture and I find, however unnecessary as a precaution, it is extremely helpful as a reassurance. You have a small shallow pocket in your shirt—very easy of access—and it looks like a throat lozenge but do not mistake it for one—so! Now you can come into the house, which is full of my Italian children—I have an Italian wife—a good Italian of course—and they cannot therefore be kept quiet—or I will take you up to my vineyard—noiseless enough by the side of a stream—there is shade, and you can sleep. It is no use returning in the heat of the day—also by evening there will be nobody much about. You do not of course return to this farm of yours? You go back over Galtur perhaps to the Schloss? A shade longer, but if this Herr Braun is found at the foot of a precipice—there will be a good deal of suspicion and every stranger will be questioned."

"No, I go back to the farm," Mark said. "I must—this girl, the one who helped me—she screamed twice, when it had been arranged that she should scream only once."

"A peasant girl—though none in this world can be more faithful to a trust," Herr Schröder said kindly, "screams easily."

"Still, I must go back," Mark said decisively. "It will not be dangerous for me. I know every step of the way, and when there I can take precautions."

"The best precaution to take in such circumstances," Herr Schröder said, knocking out his pipe and rising from his chair, "is to be somewhere else! However, it is your own affair; but sleep on it."

Mark followed him to the back of the house, and through the young vines to the stream.

“My wife will give you food at sunset,” his host told him. “I shall be gone.”

They stood for a moment looking at each other uncertainly, not for want of time, but perhaps from want of things to say that were bearable to put into words.

“This war,” Mark said at last. “You who live here among the whole bloody lot—and yet are one of us—shall we get away with it?”

Herr Schröder smiled slowly, a sceptical, indolent smile that entirely belied the fixity of his intent. “We must!” he said simply.

Chapter 20

The little farm lay, like something dropped into a crystal, in the clear stillness of the dawn light. Nothing moved; nothing had changed. The green of the steep meadows shone like a back-cloth under the crop of grey rocks, out of which the Wildspitze rose in all its grandeur, storming the blue depths of the untroubled sky.

The sun had not yet risen over the peak but its light already made the dew upon the meadow cobwebs dance like jewels; the beasts were still asleep in their stalls; no smoke rose in the keen air. The shrine cast a long black shadow over the shut crocuses. Mark moved cautiously from one rock cover to another until he reached the eaves of the big barn, connecting with the chalet. Only Lisa's and the boys' room looked out on this side of the farm; and it was easy for Mark to climb from the roof of a shed beneath it, on to the balcony that ran the length of both their rooms. Frontier guards and visitors always occupied the front of the chalet; they even had their own staircase. Only the Planer family, and the greatly privileged Mark, ever used the boys' rooms; or climbed the chicken ladder that led from the kitchen to the north side of the house.

Lisa's window was unexpectedly shut; but it was not latched. Very softly Mark pushed it upwards and stepped into the little room. It was very clean and bare, and filled with light. Lisa lay on the narrow bed as if asleep, smoothly, as poured-out milk, but Mark knew before he reached her side that she was dead. Everything was in order, and with her hands clasped on her breast, dressed by her mother for the last time, Lisa awaited her burial. The little wound above her heart was hidden, nor was there any trace of shock or pain upon her serene features. But something had gone from her face; Lisa's expression, innocent and kindly, full of spontaneous and untroubled loving, had passed with her spirit, out of sight.

Mark knelt beside the bed and pressing his head close to that cruel stillness, cried like a child. It was as if his heart would never know again anything so easy or so kind.

He had told Lisa nothing of his life; his mind full of knowledge, tied to history and filled with literature, had never had anything to do with her. Nor

had his plans envisaged their future together. Lisa only understood the life of a peasant girl on a mountain farm. Without animals and the growing earth, her church and her neighbours, she would have been lost. Nor could Mark, except for a few weeks out of a full year, have borne to live her manner of life with her; yet deep, deep within him, his heart cried out against his loss. The roots of Mark's being felt dragged out of him. With no other woman would he ever again feel the ease and lightness of a laughing child. Time and life stood still together; and he had no idea how long he had knelt till the sun grew warm on his shoulders. Perhaps a little of Lisa's spirit reached him for suddenly remembering the old Planers, Mark pulled himself together, to go downstairs, to meet and comfort them. He tip-toed first into the boys' room next door, expecting to find Peter, for whom he felt sure they would have sent. But the room was as empty as Mark had left it. The Edelweiss was still unfaded, its soft white flowers hung limply from the cracked blue mug where Lisa must have placed it, to greet his return. Perhaps there had been no time to reach Peter; and no one to send. "An Edelweiss is about as useful to her dead as my love would have been to her living!" Mark said bitterly to himself—yet because Lisa had smiled, when she saw it in his hand, and guessed perhaps that he had risked his life to pick it for her, Mark took the flower in to her, and laid it on her closed hands.

He crept downstairs in his stocking feet, for he did not want to wake the parents into their new sorrow if they were still asleep. "Halt! Put up your hands!" a strange voice shouted stridently, as he opened the door into the kitchen. Mark had forgotten there might be a guard. He felt much as a man might feel, moving about in the dark when what he thought was empty space becomes an unexpected piece of furniture. Now he was face to face with the first Nazi he had yet met as man to man. Mark did not put his hands above his head; he simply stared at the young stern face gazing into his own, with a faint surprise that anyone so young, with so open and pleasant a countenance, should order him to do so foolish a thing.

The flaxen-haired, blue-eyed boy could have been little more than twenty. Was it this child, Mark asked himself, this nervous, kindly-looking child, who had killed Lisa? The boy looked at him uncertainly. "Who are you?" he demanded. Mark sat down opposite him. "I am the lover of that girl upstairs," he said quietly. "I left her living; and I find her dead. Did you kill her?"

"No! No!" the boy said quickly. "It was a terrible accident—a mistake! No one meant to kill her!"

“Where are her parents?” Mark demanded. He lit a cigarette and handed one across the table to the guard. It was curious how instantly the old habit of firm and courteous leadership had returned to Mark. He was unarmed, and without any form of protection; but the embarrassment was all on the side of his well-armed adversary. The boy hesitated for a moment, and then laid down his revolver and took the proffered cigarette. “The parents had to be taken down the mountain for questioning,” he explained. “I myself took them—to explain what had happened so that they would not be punished harshly. They will be allowed to return—probably some time to-day—even a priest and some relatives will be permitted to accompany them from the *Thal*. Meanwhile they sent me back here just in case anyone turned up.”

“And if anyone turned up?” Mark asked grimly, “just as I did now, for instance, what are you to do with him?”

The young man looked profoundly disturbed.

“I don’t want to do anything!” he burst out after a pause. “I am from *Bayern*. I, too, worked on a farm. I promised the old people I would milk the cows this morning—and I helped the old man attend to them yesterday—before they went down—while the mother—well, the mother, you understand—she was with the girl! And now I know who you are—if you *didn’t* kill Braun—I shan’t have to say anything! I simply shan’t report you!”

Mark shook his head. “I didn’t kill Braun,” he said curtly.

“Then that’s all right,” the boy said more easily. “If you *had* killed Braun—naturally I must do something! Braun was one of my comrades. The body was found yesterday, at the foot of a big drop—it was thought he had been climbing for some *Edelweiss* and fallen over. Then no one killed him! But what happened *here* was different. It was a queer-looking accident and my comrade Heiss sent up here with me to look for Braun—well—the bull killed him! What is left of him is still in the barn waiting for an officer to come up here and examine it. I advise you not to go in there—it is *schrecklich unangenehm* to look at!”

“What exactly happened?” Mark asked.

“It was this way,” the boy explained, wrinkling his smooth forehead into knots. “We came up here—as I told you—Heiss and I—to look for Braun—he was overdue and directly anyone is overdue—someone is sent to find out why. In all the occupied countries we are told this will be so—for a time at any rate—even in Austria, which is of course *not* Austria but Greater Germany. Still a soldier’s life is a dangerous one. *Heil Hitler!*”

As Mark made no response to this reassuring expletive, the boy went on uncertainly, after a pause, “The family here were simple people, like my own, so that I could understand them very well—but both Braun and Heiss—they came from towns—couldn’t. They were not rough—but they couldn’t understand them; and the animals got in their way; and that annoyed them. The girl went out to the further barn, where the bull is kept, to see that he was quite secure—for he was making so much noise we could hardly hear ourselves speak. It was obvious he was a wild one! Well—somehow or other—it must have been that she couldn’t manage by herself to secure him—for out he came, though without touching her. She shouted to us to look to ourselves; and there was just time to get out of his way. I jumped for the hen-house, but Karl was too proud to jump—he wanted to shoot. ‘A pity,’ I thought. ‘He doesn’t know what a good bull’s worth!’ The old people had gone back to the house by then, quicker than you would have expected, but even old people can move quick when a bull charges. Heiss was in a panic; and he isn’t too good a shot either! The girl had come right out into the meadow—maybe to entice the bull off Heiss. Maybe she thought she could stop Heiss firing—for she screamed again, that made him more in a fluster still—and somehow or other she got into the line of fire—and he shot her dead. Just clean through the heart it must have been—for she threw up her arms and fell all in a heap, and never moved again; and that did for old Heiss because before he could fire once more the bull was on him. Nothing could be done about that—not with a bull that size who’s a natural killer! We couldn’t get him off Heiss—and anyhow the old people had got to the girl by then; and couldn’t think of anything else. But you see how it was? You can’t lose two guards on the one farm, and not find out why—so I had to take the old people down for the questioning, though naturally they didn’t like leaving the girl!”

“Will they hurt the old people?” Mark demanded. “Are you sure, even after what you’ve told them, that they won’t?”

“No! No! We are very correct!” the boy replied proudly. “We do only what is right—especially when a case is clear! We have all been told, ‘The Austrian is your brother—but a younger—a weaker brother—treat him as such!’ We shall let those old people come back to their farm.”

Mark nodded, he was interested, in spite of his grief, to find out how the mind of this good enemy worked.

“I can see,” Mark said cautiously, “you are a fellow man—a true comrade—for though I am after all an Austrian—I am a peasant like

yourself—and no Nazi. I don't always know what to think of this new *Reich*—and of Hitler who has made it.”

The boy's face lit, “Our Leader!” he exclaimed with reverent joy. “Well, you must know—he is always right! That he is inspired by God—there is no question! Think what he has made of Germany! Already it controls Europe—France is falling—England is a mere mouthful—we shall control the world! Much that we must do may be hard for us; but we have only to be staunch and obey. Hitler sees further than we do; he sees through pain—through torture—through the break-up of homes and countries to the peace of the whole world. If the world had only seen this, as Hitler saw it, there would have been no war—but when the war is over—then all will see it! Except perhaps the Russians,” he added after a moment's ecstatic thought, “we are not quite sure about the Russians; but if they do not accept us—then they too will have to be fought! But if they give us the *Ukraine* there will be no need for any more war. Europe is ours—America and the black people have no weapons—so to-morrow we control the world!”

Mark looked at this grandiose prospect without comment. “And you yourself,” he ventured at last, “if you were told to hurt a girl—to kill a child—to torture an old man—this you would do—for Hitler and in order to control the world?”

“But we should not be told to commit such crimes,” the boy said proudly, “unless of course you mean debased people like Jews or Communists—such dangerous rebels we might have to kill—like vermin!”

“Yes,” Mark said quietly, “but you see they are *not* vermin! They are human beings like yourself!”

The boy shook his head obstinately. “If I am ordered by my Leaders—naturally I must obey them!” he explained. “If I disobey I should not be a good soldier; and my death would be useless to the Fatherland. Besides there is my blood. I am German.”

“But what about your life,” Mark insisted. “Can that be made useful by committing crimes? My girl upstairs—who was shot—her life was of more value to this earth than her death, do you not think so? Why, if you Germans are our brothers, must you station armed guards upon our farms, who know nothing about animals, and may kill our girls, even by mistake?”

The boy looked pained and scratched his head. It was obvious that he was not accustomed to think, and found the process both irritating and exhausting. “It is enough!” he said impatiently. “I am being very lenient

with you. I could have shot you at sight! But do not think I am not sorry about your girl. I am very sorry—but it was an accident! As for our being up here on a farm—that must be for a time so close to a frontier. Things happen on frontiers—dangerous people might escape across them. There must be guards until there are no dangerous people left.”

“Well! Well!” Mark said, giving up the argument, “I hear the cows lowing to be milked! If you will let me go my way into the *Innthal* I shall be grateful. I have work to do, and do not want to lose time over useless questionings.”

The boy agreed eagerly. Mark watched him for a time before he left him. This lad from Bavaria knew his work well, and milked the cows as carefully as if he loved to handle animals. Before they parted, they breakfasted together on food they found in the kitchen.

“I am sorry you have to go,” the boy said, as Mark swung his rucksack over his shoulder for departure. “Staying up here all alone with these dead people, even if it is daylight, I find it *unheimlich!*”

“Yes,” said Mark rather drily, “I can imagine that you would. Before I leave—what has happened to Franz Josef—the bull? Did you feel it your duty to kill him too?”

“No,” the boy replied, flushing uneasily, “after all I was alone after Heiss was killed. I had no orders about bulls! The farmer up here, he said, ‘Leave him to walk off his murder—and then together we will pitchfork him home—towards his stall!’ And this we did! It was difficult—but driving in the cows before him, helped us. They must decide down in the *Thal* what must be done with the bull!”

“I hope,” said Mark, holding out his hand to the boy, “that they will do nothing! After all he avenged my girl!”

The boy shook hands with Mark warmly. “Heiss was my comrade!” he said regretfully, “but after all—I, too, have a girl. I thought yours was a little like her somehow—I can understand your feelings! *Heil Hitler!*”

Mark could not, for the moment, force his lips to this salute. “*Grüss Gott!*” he said firmly instead, turning to climb the hill behind the farm. The sun had drunk the shadows up from the shrine. The crucified figure under the penthouse was bathed in golden light. Mark stopped beside the shrine to look for a last time on the farm. It seemed suddenly very simple to Mark, looking up at the Figure on the Cross, to love enough to die for one’s friends—that was understandable to any human heart; but to hate enough to kill—

to kill even friendly innocent people for the sake of hate—that could not be understood by any human being until you had destroyed his humanity.

Chapter 21

Down in the valley of the Inn, the streets were full of laughing barbarians. Bells rang, flags flew; children with their arms full of flowers sang and made holiday.

Mark listened incredulously to the boastful triumph of the quisling-hearted. If it was incredible that France could fall, it was still more incredible that Austria should rejoice at the defeat of Europe's Light-bringer. "Is it true? Is it true?" Mark asked himself incredulously. "Can the Maginot Line be turned—can't they fill this gap at Sedan? Is it really true that France is falling?"

As he climbed the steep slopes of the Wetterstein towards the plateau, above the deep ravine where the Spanish horses were hidden, the sun beat down on him with ruthless strength.

"Is it true," Mark asked Hermann fiercely, as the small side door in the barn sprang open to admit him. "Is it true, Hermann, what they say in the valley, that France is falling?"

Hermann closed the door quietly after Mark before answering, then he said cautiously, "We have a radio here and listen in every night to London; it sounds bad even there. They are not defending Paris. I know the Gräfin is unhappy—when she is unhappy she rises every day earlier in the morning. To-morrow the horses dance as usual. Nothing has happened since you left here; but there is a bad feeling in the air. The horses feel it. Emerald forgot his figure in the dance on Saturday; he excites himself always the most, but even Pearl feels it. Twice, if you will believe me, she stumbled on our early ride this very morning—a horse as steady as that one never stumbles with a heart at rest. There are people who believe that beasts can foretell nothing and have no instincts wiser than a man's; but they have not lived with animals as I have! They know when a storm is coming! You would grant that, I suppose? Every horse knows it; every seagull! Why then should they not know when storms in men's hearts are coming?"

Mark nodded. He had taken his last climb too quickly, and was glad to rest in the shadowy barn, eating and talking with Hermann. He did not notice how much more quickly the time passed, nor how interested he was

now in Hermann's simple talk, whereas before he had thought it commonplace and dull.

When Hermann left him to announce his arrival at the Schloss, Mark went to each loose box in turn, to renew his acquaintance with the horses. While the three others treated Mark with wary courtesy, Pearl instantly recognized the sound of his voice and came forward to the edge of the stall, nuzzling her velvet nose against his shoulder. Her dark eyes rested on him without fear, her delicate ears pricked forward as if not to lose anything he wanted to say to her. Mark slipped into her stall, resting his head against her shoulder. The touch of her firm, sensitive body comforted him. Was it possible that in everything living, treated with respect and friendliness, there was this same element—so often overlooked; so terribly misused; but indestructible and, when used rightly, such a strength to the heart? It was fanciful to let himself be reminded of Lisa by a horse, and yet Pearl comforted him in the same way as Lisa had comforted him, when he was as full of fear for himself as he was now for his country. "You see—you see," he whispered to the horse, "if France falls we shall be quite alone!" Pearl stirred gently; she seemed to breathe in his helpless anguish; and share it with her quiet strength. He heard the sound of quick footsteps approaching the barn, and dragged himself reluctantly away from her, to find that Ida had returned with Hermann. "Ah! so you're here," she said in her light cool voice. "Well—you did what you wanted? You met your friends? Your mission was O.K. as you say in England?"

Mark nodded. "Yes—but France?" he demanded wretchedly. "All day I've heard nothing but German ecstatic forecasts of the defeat of France; and I have heard them from the lips of Austrians!"

Ida sat down on an upturned bucket; crossed her slim, shapely legs, and lit a cigarette before answering him. "After two years of German occupation what else should you expect to hear?" she asked looking up at him with a quizzical grin. "When Austria was seized were your papers aflame in our interests? I understood that Schuschnigg's great speech was barely referred to in France and England—not even reprinted verbatim in *The Times*. Oh, yes, I know people in both the great Democracies regretted the occupation exceedingly; and were even allowed to say so! Do you suppose—do you really suppose that the people of Austria do not mind the fall of France? But what to the dead is a fresh corpse? And if they mind—under the Prussian heel—how dare they say so? My friend Mark, you have not yet realized what a mere luxury it is to feel sympathy, or if you feel it—to express it!"

Mark stared out from the open door towards the distant slopes of the Hohe Mund—how freely the great peak stood alone against the summer sky—but how indifferent to those who decided their own fates; but could not change one small flower growing in the crack of a rock upon his stony side. “But,” Mark murmured, “*think*—what will Europe be if France goes? For a hundred—perhaps for a thousand years? And what the world without France—without Europe—shall we be human still at the end of it? What will happen to science—what to religion? Will there be a single artist or a wise man left?”

Ida smoked silently, almost carelessly, Mark thought, before she spoke at last, without carelessness.

“Heroes,” she said, “are unpredictable! They can make nonsense of almost any obstacle. Perhaps we shall get enough heroes. I find, whatever happens, that I can still believe a little in mankind. I can even believe that it will escape the fate those nervous Germans have prepared for themselves and us. Hitler, Mussolini, this Tojo in Japan—what are they? Ignorant louts that have got into a powerful machine and believe nobody can withstand them because their machine is powerful! Yes—but they have against them men such as your Churchill, Roosevelt and that clever devil—Stalin! These men are civilized, educated and energetic—it is they who are powerful—as well as the machines. I will not give up hope because France, in an evil hour, is a house divided against herself and must therefore fall! Even if I give up hope for France—I will keep it for Britain—if Britain fails—then I keep my hope at least for man! Not for ever will he let unskilled immoral tramps control all the laws of Time and space—except the most important of all laws—how man should behave himself, in time and space. I have not given up my Spanish horses. Shall I give up the spirit of man? Not if ten thousand Hitlers held down for centuries every planet in the sky!”

Mark drew a deep breath. “I feel better after that,” he said, “please go on believing in England! We shan’t give up, you know, even if France falls. But we shall need all the faith there is for the next few years!”

“Perhaps for longer,” Ida admitted. “I don’t know why I should believe in you—as a people, I mean. You’re so ridiculous—but I do! You are so hopelessly arrogant—so blind, so overwhelmingly stupid—so benevolent—so tough—so admirably independent—so defencelessly optimistic—so—on the whole whenever you stop to think about it—honest!”

Mark laughed. “If you go on criticizing England you’ll make me proud,” he said, “or angry—I don’t know which—but in either case I shall become

quite cheerful—which I suppose is what you are trying to make me—I begin to see how your method works!”

“Then it is time for me to go home,” Ida said, throwing away the stub of her cigarette, and stamping it out neatly, “before you learn *all* my secrets! But first, go into Hermann’s room, where you will find the clothes you left in—change into them—and you will find me again, in the car outside the main door. We shall drive up to the Schloss—as if from the station. You see you are returning from the *Nervenheilanstalt* in Innsbruck since you could not stand the lead injections (these would have taken a month)! Nevertheless you showed improvement. Therefore you can be promoted to our general male section, where you will find we are only mad upon one subject—or I should say in one direction—the same subject always—self—but not used wrongly in *all* directions! You will even have a room to yourself—next door to Felix’s little apartment. There we can talk every evening, after the lights go out—and what is more interesting still at the moment we can listen, to what London says.”

Mark’s hand closed on Ida’s. “Ida!” he said urgently. “Ida!”

Ida returned the grasp of his hand with a quick warm pressure, but she pushed him away from her. “No! No!” she said. “You are an unhappy man! More unhappy than when we parted—though the world is much the same! I don’t know what this new unhappiness of yours is, but I do not believe it is altogether the deepening threat to France. Do not try to make love to me when you are unhappy! For one thing it is unfair to yourself—an ungenerous woman might take advantage of you—and accept it! Also, my friend, it is less than fair to me, for I do not wish to be used as a baby’s dummy and sucked at—just because your bottle with the real milk in it has been broken!”

Mark dropped her hand as if she had stung him. He had meant to tell Ida about Lisa; but now he knew that he would never tell her. He was so angry that he forgot how unhappy he had been before Ida had made him angry.

Chapter 22

The big oxen sweated and strained pulling a heavily loaded haycart up the field towards the barn.

From the west, large puffs of shining cloud rolled up across the unspent blue. The flies stung with fury, as if they knew the lifeless air threatened them with extinction.

Dragging the oxen forward with ruthless force and from time to time lending them the strength of his great shoulder was a flaxen-haired giant whom Mark had never seen before.

“One of our patients in your new group,” Felix, who was tossing the hay next him, explained. “He is a full-blown Nazi leader, from one of their filthy schools for leadership in the Reich, where men are trained in evil as if it were a profession. This one was naturally a good murderer so that even to the Nazis he soon became a danger. He killed dogs and other useful animals for sport; then a woman—finally one of his comrades—just such a well-trained useful sadist as himself! The Reich cannot afford to lose two such pillars of its household, and so this gentleman was sent to us. For a year before you came he was in the fractious ward with the other homicidals. You should hear your old friends Johann and Fritz discussing their adventures with him! The Gräfin too, no doubt, had such adventures though she never discusses them. We all suffered; and even Herr Rennenkampf himself was not without mementoes of his favourite sport—black eyes and cauliflower ears were the order of the day. I must admit for the last six months he has behaved exemplarily. Now we can trust him even with the horses.”

“But how on earth did she change him?” Mark asked, eyeing the disappearing figure of the tamed gladiator with curiosity.

“Well, I couldn’t say exactly,” Felix admitted. “She survived—which must have surprised him to begin with! She showed no fear—I even fancy that she succeeded in frightening *him*! But she has never told me how she does these things. This one—to my relief—never put his nose into my workshop. The fields—when he ceased to need murder as his particular form of self-expression—were his natural choice. But I should not say that he is yet cured. Look at his face and you will see that murder is still his aim;

and force his favourite method. But now, I should say, that he is concentrating entirely on the idea of murdering the enemies of the Reich, and for the sake of this great ideal, has consented to give up killing anyone else; until he has proved his fitness to rejoin the *Wehrmacht*, where his peculiar gifts can still be of service to his still more peculiar country!”

“Then he is not really cured?” Mark asked with disappointment.

“Not yet,” agreed Felix, “but a killer controlled; and in control of himself—is safer than an uncontrolled and uncontrollable killer. To change a man’s nature is possible only if he chooses to change it; but it takes longer than the Reich is prepared to give us, to *develop* such a choice! All the Gräfin can do with such a man as Rennenkampf is to make him reasonably safe to work with those whose aims are similar to his own. Watch him come back with his empty wagon—he’s still stupid with his animals for he has not given his oxen time to breathe quietly before turning! Talk to him yourself. You will find him ready to talk, because he thinks he has a mission to teach Austrians how to become Germans; it is a thing that the Lord God has so far carefully avoided. Then you will see for yourself how far his cure has got!”

The giant advanced across the field with terrific speed. Mark thought he had never before seen so perfect a physical specimen of manhood. Rennenkampf topped Mark by several inches; and his great width of shoulder gave him twice Mark’s breadth. Yet he was built and trained with such economy of strength and sinew that nothing about him seemed out of proportion.

Under a thatch of pale flaxen hair his hard eyes burned with a deep uncanny blue. His features were large and not unshapely though without sensitiveness. His face looked as if it were carved out of some hard unyielding substance rather than flesh and blood. Yet he did not remind Mark of a statue, though he was handsome in a curious impersonal way; since a statue has the artist’s soul in it even if its own soul is missing. This great figure of a man had everything a human figure needs—at its best and largest—only the significance was lacking. There was no spiritual value in the man urging his exhausted oxen up the field, neither his own nor his Creator’s. “If we do win this war,” Mark said thoughtfully, “it will be a terrible problem to deal with a whole generation like that!”

“The most formidable of all our problems,” Felix agreed, “nor do I think it can be met except by a counter training of our own, equally thorough, in the opposite direction! This would solve our problem; but of course the temptation will be to try to hurry the process by the use of wrong methods—

such as the Nazis themselves have used to produce this monster—force; segregation; cruelty—and this will but produce other monsters! Also we shall then have underground movements all over the world—abscesses full of poison which will start up everywhere. The contrary method to that of the Nazis should be our technique—persuasion, freedom to talk their silly heads off while the world is still sick of their crimes—the open life and as much courageous friendliness from those who wholly disagree with them (and are not afraid to prove it) as possible.”

“But would such methods be safe against such monsters?” Mark demanded.

“Oh no—not particularly safe,” Felix agreed with his quick friendly grin, “but I assure you safety will not be possible in the immediate after-war world. The worst of all our dangers, however, would be to take too many precautions. Have you asked yourself—is safety in itself desirable? What is necessary for the future is a training towards courage—universally applied. For in a world where all men were courageous and prepared to accept personal responsibility for the laws they live by—such a brute would know his scope so limited that he would find it an advantage to give up his cruelties. It is surprising to see what our patients willingly give up, once we have succeeded in proving to them that it is to their own interest to make the sacrifice! *Heil Hitler!* Herr Rennenkampf, shall we get the hay in before the storm bursts?”

“If we *work* rather than *talk!*” shouted the giant.

The huge figure held back his oxen for a moment with one large hand grasping their yoke. “*Heil Hitler!*” his brazen voice boomed at them. “At your service, Herr Mannheim! What is it you want of me?”

“Only to meet our Austrian friend here,” Felix told him, “who is helping us get in the hay. He has just joined your group. Perhaps you will show him round the farm for us when you have finished work?”

“Willingly, Herr Mannheim,” Rennenkampf replied with a politeness that seemed as external to him as the pitchfork with which he received their contributions and hurled them to the top of his already loaded wagon; then he swept on past them, with a tug at his oxen, leading them forward, as if the pace he had forced upon them was still less than he hoped to induce in them, by his own superlative energy.

As the giant’s eyes for one brief moment rested upon him, Mark felt a curious chilling sensation at the roots of his spine. It was as if he had come

into contact with an element that was anti-human. Had a mastodon risen suddenly out of that heavy thunderous air, and made its way towards him between the foothills of the giant peaks, it would have given Mark just such a shock of startled fear. The mastodon need not have seen Mark, or even had (against such a frail and insignificant atom) any hostile intent; and yet the beauty of the world would have been spoilt, its peace for ever shaken. Perhaps a scholar, above all men, is most horrified by finding a power that is unreasonable and incapable of human justice. In Rennenkampf's cold and crafty eyes there was just such a power.

This dense image of a man, splendid in height, perfect in shape and health, with all his physical powers trained to destroy was more sinister and repulsive in its effect on Mark, than the sight of the most sickly and misshapen dwarf, who had within his heart the quality of mercy. "To be unkind, is to be mad," Felix said quietly when they were alone again. "But unfortunately not many human beings have yet discovered this fact; so few of the really mad, outside a mental hospital, are ever retrained towards sanity."

Felix left him, but Mark worked on. An intense curiosity kept him near the object of his dislike. The storm collected itself slowly, gathering the clouds in serrated ranks; and hurling them against each other. Every worker in the field worked feverishly to get the last hay in. Rennenkampf performed prodigies of strength and swiftness, he drove his oxen forward as if they were kittens—pushing and pulling at them, almost lifting them over the steep ground, flogging them mercilessly to use their last ounce of strength in union with his own.

At last, the first great drops from the embattled clouds began to break; the last load was rushed into the barn, the workers ran towards the Schloss, and Rennenkampf, approaching Mark, said: "Let us take shelter in the barn. It will only be a short storm probably since the rain has come soon—there is no great danger when a storm is a wet one! See the lightning running up and down the hills; it is scarcely naked lightning—one could almost play with it. Have you heard the news? Paris is ours! France is ours! I can hardly bear not to be with my comrades! So great a day! Such a crown to our long preparation! Yet all is not over yet! I may still be permitted to help break up that accursed small island that gets in the way of our swallowing the world. Britain has always been like a fishbone in the throat of the great Reich. But at last—this time we shall swallow it down with the rest!"

"When will you attack England?" Mark asked. "Do you think you will invade it this summer?"

“Why not—they are at our mercy,” Herr Rennenkampf answered. “Do you think that two little divisions and a half mixed up with a few half-hearted Belgians will stand in our way for long? They will be exterminated—and then! But why do you not say ‘we’?” Rennenkampf demanded, swinging suddenly round upon Mark, with a dark significant look. “You are no longer an Austrian! You are a German! Never forget it, brother! For there is no such destiny as to be a German. It is worth any and every sacrifice. Even that of our blood and our homes! The private wishes of our hearts—what are they to such a wish—as that Germany should be triumphant over all? Here in this pest house of softness and disgrace I have learned one useful thing—and I pass it on to you for what it is worth—the wishes of our hearts rule us. A man *thinks* with his wishes; he *feels* with his wishes; he *acts* on his wishes. So we must discover exactly what our wishes are! We cannot be Germans unless we wish to be German. And we shall only be sure that we wish to be German when we find that we are obeying all that Germany teaches. Then our short and small desires will be swallowed up by this one great desire—like minnows streaming down the wide gullet of a whale!”

“It is certainly a great idea,” Mark said, feeling his eyes slide away from the hard fixed ecstasy of Rennenkampf’s gaze, “but you see I have been an Austrian for a long time. One does not easily drop the habit of belonging even to a small and harmless land!”

“But you must drop it!” Rennenkampf warned him severely. “Nor will it be difficult if you realize two things! One—that you are already by God’s mercy—German! It is your heritage. I grant, you have been grievously cut off—softened—blunted—rotted one might well say by centuries of unfortunate separation from the healthy core of Prussia. This is a fact—yet still the blood in you is German! Next remember also that the whole future of the world is ours! It belongs solely to the German race. Rome, long ago—by superhuman efforts—held a great fragment of this planet—but she lost it. The swift communications and the control of space given us by modernity will save us from any such misadventure. Once we have got the world in our mailed fist—and with Europe we shall have the world—it will never come out again!” Rennenkampf opened his enormous powerful hands before Mark’s disgusted eyes; and slowly closed them like a vice.

While they talked, both men had been attending to the needs of the exhausted oxen. Mark noticed that his companion never once glanced at the sweating, panting beasts that had served him so well all day and had made such heroic efforts for him. He carried out what had to be done for them, as

if they were not alive. When a loud prolonged rattle of thunder made them snort and back away from him, he kicked savagely at the nearest ox; and laughed scornfully at Mark who called out "*Moment!*" and gentled the nearest beast with hands and voice, till he was quiet again.

"I do not approve of all that softness," he told Mark. "You should get rid of it! Everyone in this place is tainted with it. Perverse—emotional—womanish! I shall make a very bad report on this institution when I get out. There is no proper teaching, no discipline, no orders! Why you are—unless in the worst wards—actually allowed freedom! You are supposed to learn by observation and experiment, without so much as a good clout on the ear. Intolerable waste of time! Where there is fear of punishment, and therefore instant obedience to the orders of authority, there will be no mistakes. Where I was trained in the first of our Leader Schools near München, we went all day long from one sharply ordered lesson to another. Severe? Yes! and we learned to take punishment. But the results! There we grew tough—tough as it were without question. Perfect mastery of perfect means was taught us. The waste there is here! The inadequate tools! I am shocked; daily I am shocked at the carelessness—the horrible freedom—the pitiful softness of those who should control us! 'If you please.' 'Will you come this way?' 'Can you do so and so?' What discipline you Austrians have to learn before you can be of the slightest use to us! And when I tell the Frau Gräfin that it is only by the sharpest and most forcible of methods that any lessons *can* be learnt profitably, she only laughs and says: 'How true! but we are such nonsensical people we lunatics! We must therefore use the silly methods that suit us!' 'Well,' I say to her, 'I am not nonsensical any more—if ever I was—and I desire other methods!'"

"What does she say then?" Mark asked with interest.

Rennenkampf frowned and shook his head. "To tell the truth," he admitted, "what she says has a certain logic. She says, 'Those who cease to behave like children can then be treated as adults,' and then she points out this business about one's wishes. I have already told you that one learns something here—but now that I have learned it—I shall soon be gone."

Mark said nothing. It was obvious to him that there was a certain unwilling respect in Rennenkampf's voice when he spoke of Ida.

Their task finished, they strolled down the Farm lands together towards the Schloss. The fragrance of the cut grass, the gathered harvest of June flowers, was part of every breath they drew. The light that shone out over the glistening world was clear and delicate as if it had never before touched

a living thing; and dare not come too close to it. The distant peaks were shaded from palest delphinium blue to darkest purple. “How beautiful the world is!” Mark murmured half-involuntarily. He met the blank stare of his companion with an astonished sense of separateness.

“Such thoughts are not worthy of a man!” Rennenkampf told him sternly. “Girls have fancies about fields and flowers; but we men should think of nothing but how we can grow in these fields, with the best economy, what the Reich needs!”

“But the culture we are to give the world!” Mark objected. “Will this be all it is?”

“What more should you wish it to be?” his companion asked, with a formidable thrust of his great chin. “This is a new world that we are making founded on material facts. In our hands lies its history. What we can produce from it and that only is our business!”

Mark had a sudden vision that took the place of the landmarks about them—it was a vision of blackened sheep under emerald green trees, of the little park he had crossed between the railings of Piccadilly and the gates of Buckingham Palace. Instead of the gaunt golden walls of the Schloss, he saw the squat and pleasant ugliness of the palace, the gay geraniums in front of it. The slim, neat figure of Reggie replaced the companion at his side, he almost heard the gentle diffident voice pointing out the dangers that lay ahead of them—as if they were the momentary inconveniences of a careless housemaid, which they were called on, without making too much fuss about it, to set right.

How in the world could there be, Mark asked himself, two such different men as Reggie and Rennenkampf both belonging to the same species? And to which did the world itself really belong—or—and this thought was to Mark the strangest, did it perhaps belong to neither of them after all but to every man who had so far never been allowed any real control of it?

Chapter 23

The only one of the patients Mark could bear to talk to, with Dunkirk burning into his brain, was Rennenkampf.

The Austrian patients only paid lip service to the war that was shaking the world to pieces. For them a complete Nazi victory meant better food and the least possible interference with their daily habits. They did not like Germans, and hoped that as soon as Europe was completely conquered they might see less of them. They could provide their own Nazis. They took no interest in Hitler, except two or three of the patients, who thought they *were* Hitler; and these merely stormed or wept if their identification with the Führer was disregarded. But Rennenkampf took the war even more seriously than Mark himself. For him there was no other subject. The Nazis won—or the world came to an end. Rennenkampf respected the British for their wholesale escape from Dunkirk. He admitted that none but a seafaring people of peculiar enterprise and courage could have staged such a retreat, with the German army at their heels and the Luftwaffe above them. But what had they escaped *with*? Nothing but their lives! The little equipment their few divisions possessed had been swallowed up with 50,000 of their comrades by the Wehrmacht. Now their island lay wide open—an oyster with its defenceless pearl at the mercy of the Führer. Nothing remained to accomplish but to clean up France and stretch out their hand a few weeks later for the British Empire.

Rennenkampf did not attempt to argue, he merely told Mark with unfettered ecstasy what was happening and what would happen, to the last of Hitler's feeble opponents. America and the overseas Anglo-Saxons were simply loot. Japan could busy itself with China and India, until the Reich were ready to take over from Japan. The Ukraine and Russia would be a mere mid-summer ramble for the German army. They needed Russia—Russia was a granary—but look how little Finland had stood up to the Red army!

The Communists had no discipline, they talked all the time; they might have been formidable had not Hitler so carefully hamstrung the Democracies from any attempt to link up with them. They really had an air force and some good paratroops. How laughable that idea Ribbentrop

dropped so cleverly into the ears of his British friends—that they should send Lindbergh, the American flyer, who knew no Russian, to report on the Russian air force. And he *had* reported, after a fortnight's visit, on what he had been cleverly shown—and *not* shown by the Russians—that their air force was useless! The party held their sides over that in Berlin. Because the British believed it. They took no trouble to find out what they did not want to know. A spoiled and degraded people the British—comfort-loving to the core.

Mark made no comments upon Rennenkampf's criticisms. He found it curiously fascinating to study at first hand, the fantastically formed Nazi mind. It even impressed him—it was, within its rigid limits, so complete.

Rennenkampf at twenty was both infinitely younger and far more experienced than the boys Mark was accustomed to educate.

What Rennenkampf didn't understand was knowledge. Of this he had so little that Mark was often left incredulous that at his age such ignorance could be real. He knew no history; no literature; no classical languages; no art; no religion. He knew enough mathematics and physics to be at home technically in the use of weapons. He understood how to work and mend a tank. He could pilot any German plane. On the subject of guns, pontoon bridges, mines and booby traps he was, although not an engineer, sufficiently expert to make a reliable use of them. He was a magnificent shot; a powerful swimmer; a first-class skier. He played no games, except football, which he despised, but acknowledged that games had physical and even moral uses. He knew nothing of animals. He had a contempt for horses—which he thought archaic; and had never learned to ride. He never read books except those dealing with technical subjects.

His feelings for women were purely primitive. When he wanted one, he took one. He did not so much discard his mistresses; Mark doubted from his description of these brief adventures, whether Rennenkampf had ever known a mistress well enough to discard her. He simply regarded all women, except his own mother and sisters, as the natural prey of man. You had, he explained to Mark, one kind of hunger for food, and another for women. It was right and natural for a man to satisfy both, in a plain and simple manner. Austrians were both too romantic and too complicated in their sex affairs, it was all part of their fanciful mildness which had to be cleared up. Mark found that Rennenkampf was really fond of his own mother and sisters; they were his devoted and willing slaves. They agreed with all the Nazi doctrines; and in return they would be cared for and protected by all good Nazis.

Some day his sisters, who were both younger than he was, would marry his comrades. He would himself one day marry a comrade's sister, of the same type as his own. Had Mark a sister? No, Mark was glad to say, a little drily, he had no relations except his brother, Oskar Pirschl, who was an artist.

Rennenkampf was concerned to hear that Mark had anyone in so low a category as an artist for his next of kin, until he found that Pirschl had actually painted a portrait of the Führer—that cleared up Mark's status completely. Rennenkampf became almost affable, when he thought that he had picked out as a possible comrade from this Austrian Rest Home, a man with such a distinguished relative.

It even excused Mark for preferring bookbinding to field work. "Still, you must never forget," Rennenkampf told Mark kindly, "that as soon as your cure is completed you will become a soldier! Everything you do from henceforward should only be done with this motive. If you read, it must only be books upon war weapons and their uses; in the same manner you must spend all your spare time in exercises, which will afterwards be of use to you. I myself will teach you the elements of drill. You cannot for instance practise too often the goose-step. You have good shoulders and biceps, but there is a terrible lack of firmness about you!"

Mark found that there was a complete fusion between Rennenkampf's thoughts and his acts. His emotions coloured both, so that he always worked at white heat and moved upon a single track.

It was as if giant blinkers protected his eyes from any other spectacle than that of Hitler's Reich. All other human hopes, standards of behaviour or conclusions of thought were insignificant or even unrecognizable to his absorbed consciousness. Nor did Rennenkampf seem to miss anything, for he was both passionately vigorous and happy. He knew that he could do superlatively well what was expected of him. True he had for a time misunderstood the instincts of his physical nature, they had even momentarily conflicted with the order of his Führer. They had seemed the same, he explained rather bewilderedly still to Mark, but it had turned out that he had been on a wrong tack altogether. He saw it all now quite plainly, Ida had explained to him that even his instincts, though healthy, had to be directed. Not by his own blind impulses or red-hot desires, but simply by the express orders of Hitler.

It was quite right, for instance, to wish to kill—this he had been taught and his instincts thrilled in obedience as he had thought to the lesson, but he

must not kill what he *wanted* to kill—even if he felt it to be right! Such impulses were to be instantly resisted. He must kill only what he was ordered to kill. Hitler only wanted killed the enemies he himself presented to his faithful Germans—for that purpose. To kill anyone else was to waste the powers of a good soldier.

“I really was mistaken,” Rennenkampf explained humbly to Mark. “I tell you this to help you, brother, for I desire to make you a good comrade. You have the physique for it, and I can see by the clearness of your grey eyes and the colour of your hair—not so flaxen as mine, but almost gold—the signals of your good Nordic blood. Together we will be allowed, I hope, to invade those altogether cursed British Isles, and lick them into a Teutonic shape. If I obey everything told me here—and indeed I shall obey even this woman they have set over us, because of her special knowledge—then I will ask for your freedom as well as my own! Think of England under our feet—have you by any chance ever been there?”

“No,” Mark said unhesitatingly, for he thought the less he knew on this dangerous subject the better, “I’m afraid I haven’t much knowledge about it, though of course here in Austria, we have seen, formerly, many English, and got to know their strange habits and even their ways of speech.”

“Yes!” Rennenkampf said reprovingly. “That is one of your un-Germanic mistakes! It is terrible to think how international your people once were. Corrupted and estranged from their brothers over the border. But all that is now over—we need never entertain one of those hated foreigners again—except as useful slaves!”

“You think there is nothing any of them can contribute towards the German Reich?” Mark ventured.

“Nothing at all!” his companion replied hastily. “Perhaps the French—silk stockings for our girls—but even that might in the end debase them! Let Europe model itself upon us, then we shall have a world worth fighting for!”

“But nobody left to fight!” Mark rather unkindly reminded him.

For a moment Rennenkampf looked blank and dispossessed, then his face cleared and his eyes gleamed once more with religious ecstasy. “There are the stars!” he told Mark impressively. “I asked one of our best professors of physics if there could not be in all this space about us, worlds constituted like our own in the same conditions of heat, oxygenized and lit by a similar sun and moon—where other beings not unlike ourselves might exist, and he said it was distinctly possible!”

“Ah, well,” Mark said, unable to control a smile, “it must be highly gratifying to you to think that with everyone else on earth fought to a finish, there are still other worlds to conquer among the stars!”

“I see nothing at all to laugh at,” Rennenkampf told Mark severely. “To a good German, as I hope you will one day become, when you get over being so *leichtsinnig* and unpractical, such thoughts are definitely inspiring!”

Perhaps Mark would have been able to listen with less equanimity to the gloating prospect Rennenkampf unfolded had he not been actively involved in reducing its possibility. He made a comrade of Rennenkampf by day—but at night, with Rennenkampf locked away in the ward till morning, Mark was free. Now at last, with a room to himself, he could take an active part in a regular shuttle service of news between Berlin and London. Once a fortnight Pirschl visited him with his collected information. Once every few weeks Father Martin met him for a similar purpose in the chapel. Ida’s small car always stood in readiness for Mark to use at night, at some little distance from the Schloss.

On the outskirts of Innsbruck, Mark dropped his car in the garage of one of Ida’s surgeon friends, and went by foot to a place on the railway line, where he met a Czech railwayman, who worked on the Brenner. Pollak was the carrier of messages to Italy. His son had been killed by the Nazis, and he lived for nothing else but to avenge his boy’s death. As he had always been a railway worker and had worked on the Brenner for the past twelve years, he was entirely unsuspected. He not only carried any messages to an accredited British agent in Italy, but he checked up on all the traffic between the Reich and Italy, adding his own reports to those Mark gave him.

Although their plan seemed foolproof, Mark and Ida never overlooked the least of their precautions. If Mark should be stopped on the road at night by any civil or military police, he carried a written order from the Schloss to bring back with him the surgeon from the suburbs of Innsbruck (in whose garage he stored the car), for an emergency brain operation. The operation had never been necessary, for the back roads were very unfrequented, and the doctor’s car known. No one at the Schloss except Felix knew any of the steps Ida and Mark took. Each member of the shuttle learned only his own part in its working.

By day Mark lived his normal life as a Depressive patient on slightly improved lines. He moped less, spoke more, and only expressed his nervous irritability by occasional outbursts. His friendship with Rennenkampf made excellent cover for these self-induced rages and it sometimes seemed to

Mark almost unfair to take advantage of Rennenkampf's newly acquired self-control.

Rennenkampf reported on his friend's symptoms regularly to Ida who took a malign pleasure in passing them on to Mark.

“In time,” Rennenkampf asked her a little wistfully, “should you suppose—this poor fellow—can become as normal as I am?”

Chapter 24

The battle of Britain was over. The sharp exhilaration of the October air triumphed in Mark's heart with his own amazed relief. The high meadows were still full of pink and mauve crocus lifting their transparent cups towards the sun. Groups of ghost-larches stood above them, yellow and wan like candles in daylight. The first snow sugared the Hohe Mund and his sister peaks, stretching far down the valley. A few tired Davids had withstood innumerable prepared Goliaths; and England had survived. The charred skeleton airfields still functioned. The cockpit of the Island still reeled under its daily holocaust of bombs; but the men of the shires went about their imperturbable business of living with their old resilient skill.

"It's going to hold," Mark found himself saying triumphantly to Felix as they walked through the pines towards the riding school, "till the United States comes in. Now I can believe that we shall win the war."

"And you think those far distant, so happy cousins of yours will really come in?" Felix asked incredulously, for he could not understand how even an Englishman could believe in so many miracles—all as it were placed upon the same plate.

Mark nodded, tight-lipped but still exultant; he tried to speak casually as if his heart was not behind his thoughts, but his joy broke through his words. It seemed to him as if he had never before known what happiness was. "They've thought—perhaps not surprisingly—that we didn't mean business," he explained to Felix. "Those six years' submission and semi-chumming with dictators made the Americans think that we were tarred with the same brush; and helped to drive them into isolation. Yet what we were trying to avoid after all *was*—War."

"You were naturally right in wishing to avoid this war, and surprisingly wrong psychologically in supposing that you had chosen the right method by which to avoid it. Also your timing was not up to date," Felix said with an amused smile. "Nevertheless when history sets to work to show us how the event came about—if she is ever free enough to show us the truth—I think we shall find a place for your Mr. Chamberlain after all. A small man

—who could not match his dreadful Hour but with something to admire in him since at the last he resigned when he could have remained in power. To feel his own smallness—and to have the courage to act upon it—was not despicable. Remember that he worked nobly until he died under his successor. The magnanimity of Churchill, that is comparatively easy to understand, for he is a great man, and the victor; but the magnanimity of Chamberlain—a defeated small man—has a great merit!”

“You are so tolerant, you would find an excuse for your worst enemy,” Mark said laughing. “Have you any of your whitewash left for Rennenkampf? I must say that in spite of his record I find something in him that impresses me.”

Felix stopped short and gave Mark a sharp, grave look. “No! I find him atrocious!” he said, walking on, as if he had finished with the subject.

“Seriously?” Mark asked, looking at his companion with new interest. “It’s really rather funny your saying that. Surely he has mastered his killer disease and made a notable recovery. I should have thought you would have admired him.”

Felix recovered his good humour, but he remained unusually serious. “He is a Nazi!” he explained, “that is what I find atrocious about him. I am not happy unless I am free to be unhappy. I do not believe in morality unless it is within my power to be immoral. I like horses that can dance; women who can say ‘No’ when they do not mean ‘Yes’; and books that are dangerous. I do not become strong because I am ordered to be joyful. You like Rennenkampf because to you he is still incredible. You do not believe in a world that will be run by him on the lines which have made him what he is. I wish I could share your belief.”

Mark was silent. The image of Rennenkampf—naive—sincere, disciplined—was still strong in his mind. He could not help sometimes comparing him favourably with his easy-going companion. Felix was the best company in the world, but he appeared to think, that nobody need do anything else but *be* good company. He never played games, nor took any sport seriously. It was true he could ride; but Mark found him disturbingly slack in his management of Emerald. He studied that impatient horse’s every nerve only to give way to it. The horse, Mark considered, would never learn to behave properly when he didn’t *want* to behave properly, while Felix rode him. All that he learned from Felix was how to conduct himself when, in an excess of zeal that would have queered his own pitch, he wished to be a model of good behaviour. “You are no disciplinarian,” Mark said laughingly

as they reached the barn. "I suppose that is what attracts me in Rennenkampf. He has conquered frightful impulses—and put them in harness for a cause that he considers good. I am surprised you can't at least admire his self-control."

"He has used force upon himself as well as upon others," Felix said drily, "that is what I do not believe in—the use of force. I do not say I should never practise it—one has to use force to control force—but somehow or other it always ends badly."

Mark noticed the shadow on Felix's face and wished he had not started the subject on such a happy day.

They were a little late and the horses were standing impatiently, with plunges and jerks of their great shapely bodies. The sharp frosty air had put an edge to their spirits.

On this bright and lovely Sunday morning the horses moved with greater skill and *élan* than Mark had ever seen in them. Ida and Hermann had already mounted Sapphire and Pearl; and were nearly as impatient as their horses.

The general had not been able to attend the school for several weeks, for during the autumn he always suffered most from his suicidal impulses; so that Mark had been allowed to take his place on Diamond.

He quickly mounted the strong black charger and rode him into the ring. The music had a thrilling resonance in the big empty barn, as if the spirits of those who had once heard it still lingered and enlivened its old cadences.

The four horsemen rode delicately to the tireless rhythm, like riders in a dream.

None of them heard the faint sound of a scuffle outside the barn, or noticed that the door had swung open. They were utterly unprepared for the menacing figure that sprang suddenly into the ring and broke up the dance.

Rennenkampf, brandishing a heavy stick, stared at them with lowered head like a charging bull. He overturned the gramophone, striking it into silence. "How dare you play this forbidden game?" he shouted. "Such a dance with horses is an obscenity! It is a sin against the Reich—you—our teachers—you, my comrade—you turn a beast into a ballet dancer! These animals are for work in the field! I shall expose you! I shall report you all!"

The three horsemen instinctively moved between the madman and the door; but Ida rode straight at him. "What are you doing here, Herr

Rennenkampf?” she demanded in her clear cool voice. “I do not remember ever to have invited you?” Her eyes met his unwaveringly, as she drove the full force of his discourtesy home at him. Rennenkampf moved sullenly backwards—no man likes to be accused of rudeness by a woman before other men. In the midst of his fanatical rage he felt a moment of uncertainty.

“Report us if you like!” Felix added scornfully. “What will be thought of your evidence?”

“I am a lunatic, am I?” Rennenkampf shouted back at him with relieved and renewed fury. “Well, you will soon see if you and your toy animals can come between me and the Reich!”

He swung his stick upwards as if to strike, glaring at each of the three men in turn, but Ida pushed Sapphire between him and the others. “Gentlemen,” she said, “draw back your horses! Leave the door free for Herr Rennenkampf. Let him make what report he wishes. What is it you can say to the authorities, Herr Rennenkampf? You have seen the Spanish horses dance? Well, do you really suppose that is news to the Gestapo? To be sure we have not advertised the fact! We too realize that we have disobeyed a regulation, and we have too much respect for the Nazis to ask them to overlook it. To whom do these horses belong? Well—when you have found that out—you will perhaps realize that the Führer will not be best pleased at notice being drawn to them! I do not think you are still a lunatic, Herr Rennenkampf, nor shall I discredit what you may choose to report by saying so—but I think you are a fool!”

For a moment Mark thought that the bubble of Rennenkampf’s rage had been successfully pricked and that all danger was over. Rennenkampf turned towards the open door, but Emerald chose that moment—confused and excited by the shouts and perhaps conscious of the antagonism in his rider’s heart, to plunge against Rennenkampf, crowding him backwards. Rennenkampf slipped, recovered himself, and turning struck at the horse’s head, with all his force. Felix wheeled Emerald to one side and caught Rennenkampf a stinging blow across the face with his riding crop. No one could stop what followed; it came too quickly. The great giant flung his stick away, dragged Felix off his maddened horse and lifting him like a rag doll above his head dashed him down with all his force. Felix fell against an iron bar and broke his neck.

Mark was the first to reach the motionless, limp body of his friend and see his twisted neck; but he could not believe that the little heap lying in the dust and sunshine was lifeless. He could hear the uneasy trampling of the

horses close to him—the barn door banged; and then Ida knelt down by Mark's side.

“It is hopeless,” she murmured, “see—he fell in such an awkward way! Help me to carry him to Hermann's room. Rennenkampf has gone. Even though this murder makes his report valueless, it will be used against us. We must act first! Hermann, what is the damage to Emerald?”

“It was a hard blow!” Hermann said bitterly. “I have got him into the nearest stall. You can hear him there, threshing and plunging in his pain! The others are still here, quiet but afraid. A fine end to their music! Is there no hope for our good Herr Felix?”

“None,” said Ida. “Hermann, give the horses a breathing space and then take Diamond and ride on to Hungary. Go by the mountain roads behind Wörgl to Lofer; and then through the Salzkammergut. Herr Pirschl and I will follow later with Sapphire and Pearl. We must take the horses to the Bezzeghy Ödöns. We cannot take Emerald. He is too frightened and injured for such a journey. Ride carefully, I will give you a note to take with you to show if you are questioned. But avoid the main roads. Now go; attend to the other horses! There is nothing more you can do for Herr Felix!”

Hermann took the other two horses to their stalls, while Mark lifted Felix in his arms and with Ida's help carried him on to Hermann's bed. It was extraordinary how light the slender figure was to carry, and how unlike death he looked when he lay there. Ida closed his eyes with steady hands but though she helped Mark straighten his limbs and even smoothed back his hair, she did not once look at his face. It was as if what she touched was a Thing. Nor was her mind on Felix, for when she had finished, she turned to Mark and said quickly, “Mark, I want you to do something for me! You must shoot Emerald—I cannot! But I will not have him suffer any more without his master. If we leave him behind the Nazis will get him.”

“But,” stammered Mark, “think if he could recover—he is so fine a horse!”

“He will recover,” Hermann's voice said from the doorway. “Forgive me Gnädigste, but can no one else take Diamond? I should stay here, for Emerald needs my care! You could lead one of the others—you and Herr Pirschl if it is too dangerous to take another rider!”

“Finer things than horses have to suffer under the Nazis,” Ida said incisively, “and yet we must not let a horse suffer if we can avoid it. We cannot take him with us—or leave him behind, Hermann. Go, and go

quickly, with Diamond. Where is our roof-watcher—bribed or broken should you suppose? Ah, here he is outside the door! He is only knocked out and will soon recover. I must go to the Schloss and make a few arrangements. Here is your note! Mark—you will do what I asked? Hermann, you have a revolver somewhere? Herr Pirschl must shoot Emerald.”

“Yes, Gnädigste,” Hermann said, speaking between the pauses of his breath, as if he had been running. “I have my service rifle—it is always in order. But to shoot Emerald! Well—it is perhaps safer—and if it is better for him—I would shoot him myself—but he is my child, that horse—I made him what he is—you cannot unmake a child—better the Gnädiger Herr should do it, after all.”

“Yes, it is better,” Ida agreed. Without looking at either of them she turned quickly away, till the pines closed after her. Mark went to Emerald’s stall. It was a long time before he could persuade the distracted horse to let himself be led out to the lakeside.

The shadows of the early afternoon crept like fugitives out of the wood, across the broken valley floor. The golden leaves of the silver birches in the meadows shone as if the whole light of the dying day had taken refuge among their slender branches.

Hermann came with Mark leading Emerald, his rifle hidden in his coat, until they reached the lakeside. “I must go back now,” he told Mark. “If I had had time I could have cured Emerald of this blow. It has not blinded him. His master saw it coming in time to turn his head so that the full force of the blow fell on his shoulder. Ah! he was a good horseman, Herr Felix! One would say he rode a horse by getting under its skin! Well—no Nazi has done that—or ever can. To kill, is easy—any fool can murder a man or a horse! But to make such a horse—or such a horseman—takes skill. That skill cannot be found among the Nazis!”

Mark held out his hand and Hermann grasped it. “I don’t hold it against you,” he said brokenly, “shooting my horse. Do it as to a comrade—quick and sure between the eyes. Blindfold him first, here is my handkerchief—and do not let him see the gun! These ones are not horses merely—they are Intelligences!”

The lake had grown black, and the air from the fresh snowfields struck with icy fingers. Hermann went back into the barn, leaving Mark alone with the horse. The dying day closed down over the little valley like the lid of a coffin.

Emerald did not like having his eyes bound, or his bruised forehead touched, but by now he had grown used to Mark's voice and the gentleness of his fingers. He only shuddered and moved impatiently, pawing at the earth as if to make sure it was still there. He had never, until Rennenkampf struck him, received an injury from a man; and this one monstrous act, so quick and so extravagant, though it had shaken him to the core, had not shattered his habit of confidence. He stood close to Mark without constraint for the sake of his voice and his company.

Mark measured off the space from which he meant to shoot. The light was gone. He steadied himself and took careful aim; he had only to shoot once. Emerald flung back his head; shuddered throughout his great body; and crashed. An echo caught the shot and brought it back against Mark's listening senses, like a reproach.

He felt as if this was the real death of Felix. In the barn everything had taken place so quickly, that it had seemed without meaning or significance. But this act was slowly taken; and had been meant. It seemed to finish Felix. All his kindness, his good humour, his wisdom—the beauty of the feeling he had had for the horse and for all living things—was gone like the day's short loveliness. Mark turned bitterly away from the black lake; and the dead horse. He felt as if he had helped to kill Felix, because he had admired Rennenkampf.

Chapter 25

It was late at night before Ida returned to the barn. The lines of her chin and brow were sharp with anger, her lips set as if they would never open. She looked like the Sleeping Fury in the Terme Museum. She put food before Mark, and even forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls, but she kept her eyes turned from him as if he were one of the objects of her anger; and she feared to set it loose upon him. Nevertheless without further explanation she took for granted that Mark would accompany her on her mad journey to Hungary, with the horses. A storm had sprung up out of the mountains, and drowned even the faint light of the stars.

They rode through a hissing downpour of rain in a silence that felt as harsh and bitter as the elements. The wind whistled and ran out at them from mountain gullies with the fury of an angry dog. They could see nothing but the brawling darkness, and hear nothing but the chaotic voices of the storm.

“Why go on this senseless journey at all?” Mark asked himself. It was most unlikely that they would reach the frontier uncaught; still more unlikely that they could cross it in safety with the horses. If Ida had this mysterious influence with the Austrians, why not use it to protect them without leaving the Schloss? If she had not enough to save the horses, why not let them be destroyed?

Were even these Spanish horses worth what they had already cost—a man’s life? Or what they might still cost—Mark and Ida’s work against the Nazis? Curious people, the Austrians, Mark told himself scornfully, sentimental and yet hard as nails. Ida was typical of them; she had left her dead friend before his body was cold without a tear or a sigh; yet for the sake of these three animals she was prepared to pit her life against both the Nazis and the elements.

Branches crashed across their path; stones rolled down from the mountainside. The horses shuddered with cold and danger; yet they pushed on nobly through the uncertain dark, their strained nerves obedient to their loyalty.

Twice Mark and Ida had to dismount in order to lead them through torrents of unknown depths and swiftness. The wind dashed buckets of ice-

cold rain against their faces, as if to blind them, out of personal spite. Pitiless reiterations of the scene in the Stadium drilled their way through Mark's tired brain. Why had he ever liked that murderous oaf of a Rennenkampf? Why had he not moved quickly enough to save Felix? That stick should have been snatched from Rennenkampf's hand before he had had time to strike Emerald. Did Ida blame Mark because he had not been quick enough? Did she think he had been the cause—however innocent—of Rennenkampf's having found his way to the Stadium?

Mark knew that half his anger was against himself; only half of it was against Ida; but he tried to pretend that this was the greater half.

The dawn came imperceptibly, cold and colourless, a mere withdrawing of the dark. The rain still fell as if it would never stop, but the savage spitefulness of the wind had been beaten down by it.

They were on a mountain road with pine trees above and below them. Through their wet pink stems Mark could see the valley lying wrinkled and shrunken in the hard grey light. Ida rode a little ahead of Mark, a mere gaunt and sodden scarecrow, her hair plastered flat against the whiteness of her face. The horses plodded on as if their hopes had vanished with their fears, and nothing lay before them but perpetual damped-down motion.

Suddenly Ida looked back over her shoulder. "Have you got such a thing as a dry match left on you?" she asked. "I have a feeling that I could bear your stony disapproval creeping through my spine better if I were smoking! I know all that you would like to say to me—and won't; but it makes no difference to me what you choose to think—except to my immediate comfort—that could be improved perhaps by a few whiffs of hot tobacco!"

"You never asked for my opinion," Mark replied stiffly, "so I didn't suppose that it mattered to you to hear that I think this flight ill-judged, and likely to be useless. At any rate I came on it. Push into the trees and I'll light your cigarette for you."

He was surprised but not softened to see how her hand shook as she held it towards him. The two horses stood together with hanging heads, grateful for the moment's respite. When Mark had lit her cigarette, Ida pressed it between shaking lips, drawing long whiffs of smoke in appeased silence.

At last she flung back her head, patted Sapphire's steaming neck, and turned him back on to the road again, saying:

"Oh, damn! You're so stupid, Mark! Why shouldn't I want to save something from the Nazis? These horses are all I can save—that was

Austria! You were happy yesterday because your country is still alive and has fought well. But I can never be happy like that any more! My country has never fought at all—it saved nothing. Austria is dead. Yet it was beautiful, and good people were happy in it—and these horses were a part of its beauty and its happiness.”

“I’m sorry,” Mark admitted grudgingly. “I’m always stupid with you! But I still don’t see much sense in what we’re doing. Would it not have been better to stay and meet Rennenkampf’s accusations on your own ground?”

“My own ground?” Ida asked with lifted eyebrows. “I have no ground! And you think I could meet Rennenkampf’s accusations ‘sensibly’ before the Gestapo? My good idiot, have you failed to see that I am so angry that if I met a Nazi just now, I could behave like Rennenkampf—and that would not get us much further! I had to run away or bring the whole house of cards down upon our heads!”

“But isn’t it down anyhow?” Mark objected.

Ida shook her head. “Behind us,” she explained, “we have left very good cover—both for you and for me. My father may be Nazi-minded—but he is my father—and an Austrian. He will know exactly what to say to the authorities. The moment he found out that I was hiding the horses, he will say—he killed them; and sent me to my aunt’s in disgrace. As for you—you are a poor patient, an unwilling spectator of the murder—and naturally you had a complete relapse and ran away into the wood in a frenzy, where you may be found hanging on any convenient tree. You will be well searched for—and you *can* be found when it suits us—and not before!”

“And Hermann?” Mark objected, “and only one dead horse—what about the other three? Do you not under-estimate the Gestapo?”

“I doubt if Rennenkampf noticed Hermann sufficiently to identify him,” Ida answered, “especially as he is not there now! As for the other three horses—the lake is supposed to be as deep as the mountains are high above it. The other horses can be at the bottom of the lake—and Emerald will be found dead on the bank. The Nazis are thorough, but the quality of imagination has happily been denied them; and it has *not* been denied to us.”

“But Rennenkampf,” Mark went on, after a pause, “I shall never understand why you told us to let him go, and make that report! You had only to say he was mad, and then you could have retained him, as well as discredited all he said. Yet you deliberately freed him to give us away. We could have stopped him, you know, the three of us, even without your help.”

Ida gave a shudder; the horses were moving side by side now and Mark could see her face.

“Don’t!” she said. “I know we could have stopped him! And then—but how could I say it? How could I make him feel that he was mad when he wasn’t? There *were* the horses! The patients rely on us to tell them the truth—only the truth—about their illness. How could we ever help them back out of their lies—and lies *are* their illness—if we did not always tell them the truth? You see—I could not, while he *was* sane, lock him up as if he wasn’t! And once he made the report I knew we could not obliterate the traces of the horses’ existence in the twinkling of an eye. Something would have been found out! But I did not know—I could not tell—that he would kill Felix!” She put her hand across her eyes, as if to blot out a vision that could not be blotted out from her heart.

“And now,” Mark asked after a pause, “what will happen to Rennenkampf? If you said he was sane—I suppose he will be shot? He certainly deserves to be!”

“He came back to see me last night—that was why I was so late,” Ida said, looking between her horse’s ears, and speaking as if to herself. “Two guards brought him back at his earnest request. They show that kind of mercy—these Nazis—to each other. He wanted to find out which he really was—mad or sane. That interested him. It did not interest him that he had killed my friend. He would believe no one else but me. It seemed that he wanted me to say he was sane, even though he knew that he would be shot for it. He could not bear to have gone mad again, after he had once regained his self-control. I told him that with such a self as he had, it made very little difference what he called himself. But I gave him the certificate.”

“A certificate that he was sane?” Mark demanded.

“No! No! That he was mad!” Ida said, turning her eyes full on his. “You see, I knew he *was*—from the moment Felix struck him! He will never again, I think, be sane. I could not let him be shot!”

“I can’t think why you couldn’t!” Mark said incredulously. “He is highly dangerous! He is certainly a murderer. And now he may live to kill more men—like Felix! What is there so sacred about insanity?”

“There is nothing sacred about it,” Ida said quietly. “Except that the sane are responsible for the insane, as the strong are for the weak; and that it is the opposite of being a Nazi—to believe this! But he will not kill another

man like Felix—there you are also wrong. There are no other men like Felix!”

“You think so much of him,” Mark said bitterly, watching her face, “and yet—he loved you, and you never returned his feelings!”

Ida frowned and turned her eyes away from his.

“Such nonsense!” she said impatiently. “This love you talk about! And you have the impertinence to be angry with me—because you think I do not care for my dead friend! Do you really suppose that I could work with a man for two years, ski with him, climb with him, think with him, dance and laugh with him—do everything *but* sleep with him—and *not* love him? How little you cold Englishmen know of women—or of love! With your pigeon-holed passions! I was not—if you will have it—*in love* with Felix! No! Have I not a right to choose my lovers? But I loved him. Have I not also a right to love my friends? I don’t behave as you expect a woman to behave? I am not a stick or a stone—nor even a well-brought-up lady who plays Bach, and won’t leave her husband for her lover! I am myself, Mark—and this is what I have every right to be! I have plenty of time to mourn Felix—all my life in fact—for I shall never find such another friend. But he is dead. I have the living to think of first! You—for instance! My father! My home! The future of my hospital! I must act to meet the danger from the Nazis. They could not forgive me if I cracked up under their noses in a furious temper—but if I am not there to forgive—if I am already in the disgrace which they wish me to be in—they may find it quite convenient, later on, to forgive me! As for you—I admit at the moment you are just as wet as if you were hiding in the woods round the Schloss—but in an hour I hope you will be warm and dry—which you would not be if you had to remain in the mountains till I could safely return to protect you with one of my fine stories. Now do you understand a few of my very good reasons for our journey?”

Mark laughed. Already he felt better. Wet and tired he might be, but he was no longer dispirited; and very much less angry with either Ida or himself.

“You explain so much—when once you deign to explain anything,” he told her, “that I can’t see the wood for the trees! And I don’t quite see why you should throw Mary up at me! Still, all this battery of reason fails to excuse you for moving a chap about like a pawn. Why do you arrange things over my head without consulting me? Why on earth couldn’t you have told me all this stuff last night—instead of turning up in the barn like a congealed thundercloud that won’t break! You might have tried to understand that I felt

like a raw egg myself, for having made friends with that murderer; and it didn't exactly add to my self-esteem to have you behave as if I were not much better than a murderer myself."

"Funny," Ida said with a flash of her old mockery; "but at the moment it was not your self-esteem that I was thinking about. But don't let having liked Rennenkampf disturb you! He was—in his way—quite likeable. He is greatly to be pitied—sick to death with all his wicked duties! Why, he is as soft as putty beneath that cruel hide; and he has done far more damage to himself than he could ever have done to Felix. Think how little power Rennenkampf had over himself—not enough to stop murdering when he wanted to! And then think of Felix. He was never blinkered or controlled by one of his own wishes. He could do anything he liked with himself. Wherever he went—he created life! It is true that he would be alive now if he hadn't struck Rennenkampf. But a man must protect his horse—he has to meet violence by violence. He died in a nice way for a man to die—one must not over-estimate death—it happens but once to each of us anyhow. But Rennenkampf, we may well pity him—for he is very strong—and he will live with that dreadful self of his for a long time; and now he will never be able to change himself!"

Mark was silent. The horses jogged on, the light grew stronger through the trees. Every now and then they met a peasant moving about his task slowly, in the cold dawn. The road they were on wound down into the valley, and out of it houses began to trickle towards them, on the outskirts of Wörgl.

"There is the priest's house where we can get shelter, and give the horses a few hours' rest," Ida told him, pointing through the trees. "But, Mark, if you choose—you can go back now, and I will find someone else to ride Pearl into Hungary. All you have to do is to let yourself be found in the woods by the lake. Be as depressed as you can and refuse to speak—till I come back and start lying for you!"

"Don't be an idiot," Mark told her crossly. "I am perfectly willing to go on with you now I know there is some sense in it!"

Ida made no audible answer, but her lips twitched, and her eyes gleamed as if Mark had told her what it both amused and pleased her to know, though it had not been a tribute to her good sense, for which she had been waiting.

Chapter 26

Hiding in daylight, riding from dusk to dawn, it was the fourth night since they left the Inn valley before they reached the Schloss of Gräfin Ödön Bezzeghy, in the Burgenland, twenty miles from the frontier. Their clothes had never been dry, their nerves never off the stretch since they started, but they had managed to arrive towards the end of their journey in a state of astonishing mutual harmony. There had been occasional breaks in their accord, when hiding in the drifting woods or taking refuge behind barns in imminent danger of arrest, each had taken a different view of the moment's emergency; and had expected the other to give way to it. But each had been secretly surprised and pleased at a certain willingness in the other, to make light of differences of opinion, and to adjust to what they found he or she could not overcome. Both had sound nerves and excellent manners and neither wished to override the will of the other.

When danger was actively upon them they had acted with surprising unanimity. Ida had a quicker wit, Mark the more imperturbable serenity.

“Ours has been a good combination,” Ida told him as they approached the small white village beneath the little hill upon which Schloss Bezzeghy had perched for several hundred years, ugly, solid and unchangeable. “But now we shall have to share a new way of looking at things together. We must become genuine Nazis! My cousin, Bezzeghy Ödön, is Gauleiter of this district, my cousin Fritz is a general in the Wehrmacht, mountaineering on leave. My youngest cousin Rudolf is in the Luftwaffe and we shall, I hope, escape seeing him altogether for he is the most obstreperous Nazi of the three. My aunt Elisabetta is a masterpiece of the old school—that is to say she knows perfectly the very little the women of her day were supposed to know. We can relax under her roof completely since there is no safety so great at present as in hiding from the Nazis in a Nazi stronghold. Besides the Bezzeghy are half Hungarian and therefore consider it a crime, even in a Nazi, to destroy a good horse! My aunt has brought up her family on the strictest sixteenth-century morals. She has taught them to believe that their honour consists in fighting for their privileges as if they were virtues, and that their sole duties lie in protecting their families, and standing by their class. A limpet and his rock are interchangeable in my aunt's mind and this

should be the family crest. Of course at the top of their class they place God and the Emperor. Now since we have no Emperor the Bezzeghy have put Hitler in his place—and God toes the same line as Hitler.

“My mother’s relations are what you might call natural Nazis. You will like them very much, they are all good sportsmen and have beautiful manners.

“They, too, will like you, but I think you must become a doctor of excellent Carinthian descent—Christian von Steiner is a good enough name—who has lived for a long time in America. They would not believe in you as a groom; and they would dislike you as a lunatic! But as a doctor of good family—on a brief holiday—you will do very well for the time being. But I am afraid you must be prepared for them to be a little pleasant about our relationship. It cannot be helped, for unless you were my lover they would think there might be something fishy about the whole performance. A little love affair—a little horse swindle, and all will be quite in order—do you agree to support this illusion?”

Mark put out his hand and laid it on Sapphire’s bridle, bringing both horses to a sudden standstill.

“I think you must know by now that I rather more than agree,” Mark said quietly, “and that there is—on my part—no illusion about it!”

Their eyes met and lingered on each other for a long significant moment. The laughter died out of Ida’s eyes; they changed to a deep, almost panic-stricken, gravity. “No! No!” she said at last beneath her breath. “Mark, my dear friend, we must not make this childish blunder! Believe me, this is a time for discomfort—danger, terror—perhaps even for death—but not a time for love!”

“How can we help loving when we are sure of each other?” Mark asked. “When you are cold, ugly and ferocious I am still quite sure of you—and when I am all the things you hate most—and want to kick up your heels at—you are still quite sure of me—aren’t you? It isn’t only the mountains or only the horses—it’s something a lot deeper in both of us—that has somehow got us together, and we can’t help it!”

“Oh, yes! I am sure of you,” Ida agreed ironically, “and I am equally sure that I am cold, wet and hungry not to mention dirty, and now I can think of nothing but a hot bath—my horses at rest in a good stable—and my next meal! To-night we shall sleep sound and without dreams; and I hope that tomorrow you will have the good sense to wake without them.”

Mark relinquished his hold on Sapphire's bridle. "As long as you understand," he said firmly, "that I meant what I said and that I only agree to postpone your answer! But I do not promise to wait for long. Our lives are likely to be both short and lived in danger; and that seems no very good reason for denying ourselves what we both want."

"What we both want most!" Ida said grimly, "is to destroy the Nazis!" She turned from Mark to her horse. "Sapphire," she said, "a good horse always finishes in the same style and in the same spirit with which he started. I therefore suggest that we canter gently up this rise into my family's courtyard—whether our bones ache or not!"

The barking of dogs, bobbing lanterns, and welcoming voices broke out all round them, as the great iron gates swung back. Hermann grinned reassuringly, springing from the darkness to Sapphire's stirrup. "Diamond is safe," he informed them in a low voice. "With the money you gave me—lies and a little luck—all went well! I see you have ridden your horses hard—but they will be well cared for—let me take them away at once!"

The Bezzeghys welcomed Mark as if he were a new and delightful kind of relation.

It was obvious that they were all extremely fond of Ida and entertained by her adventure. They took the problem of their visitors and their horses with equal sympathy and good nature.

Blankets and bran mashes already awaited the horses in well-prepared stalls. Rooms were in the process of being hastily got ready for their riders. Gigantic fires roared in stoves newly lit between passage and bedrooms.

Everything inside the Schloss smelled of old age and apples. It was a rough and ancient building, that had been lived in without fundamental changes for hundreds of years by the same kind of people.

The Bezzeghys themselves were like their castle, solid, primitive people, incapable of more than trivial adjustments. They lived in simple rather austere comfort, worked very hard themselves, and were worked for by a dozen peasants for whom their will was law. There was always plenty of food for everybody to eat of a home-grown kind accompanied by indefinite amounts of sour cider.

All the furniture and utensils of the castle had once been the best of their kind and were now long out of date, shabby, chipped or inconvenient, but often of some real intrinsic beauty or value.

These sifted layers of bygone tastes and wishes had a haunting quality as if they retained like a secret cipher, passed on from generation to generation, a message only understood by the Bezzeghys themselves.

Mark felt himself instantly at home with the castle and its owners. He liked the small round tower-room, more than half of which appeared to be fireplace, which the Gräfin used as her boudoir and where the family all sat about her after dinner. Here the Gräfin received them, regaling them with hot Glühwein and ham-breads, while she regarded them over her knitting, with kind, exploratory eyes.

“Yes, we still have our pigs and our geese,” she explained to Mark, who commented on the luxury of the thin sliced ham and liver sausage, “it is true we can only offer our guests now simple things to eat—just what the animals and fields provide—but after all we are at war, and we cannot expect more than our good soldiers themselves are given. This wool you see me working with now is extremely coarse, but if it keeps a man warm, I can put up with the effect on my fingers. Soon, with all Europe under our feet, we shall be able to provide something better. There will be no blockade then except what we choose to make for our stubborn enemies. Ah! What times we live in! What heroes surround us! What a comfort it is to think that decadent France has been brought to its knees, and that in a few months—weeks perhaps—those repulsive British and their fantastic empire will be no more! Such a race!” the Gräfin placidly murmured to Mark with ingratiating fervour. “Are they not, so arrogant, so inhuman, so endlessly stupid! More stupid, I believe, than even those childish Americans, who are at least rich, and who will now soon be able to help us spend all their money! My sons tell me America will fall more rapidly than the British empire as soon as that gives way. Only I am afraid we shall then have to deal with the Japanese who will be sure to have taken it first—never mind—those wicked Russians will soon cease to be our allies; but not, we hope, before they have cleared away the Japanese. Our great Hitler is so far-sighted, is he not? I have always felt we should possess the Ukraine—it seems as if God had meant it to belong to the Greater Germany! Ida, my dear child, some more liver sausage I beg! You have grown annoyingly thin! Your face is as hollow as a last year’s egg and it seems to hold nothing in it but your eyes! You should take better care of her, my dear Herr Doktor von Steiner—that is a Carinthian name, is it not? I think I may even have been at school with one of your aunts—Isabella von Steiner? a charming brunette—which they all say nowadays is such a pity! But I can’t think why—for the dear Empress Elizabeth—after whom I am named—was also a brunette! So convenient, dear Ida, for you to have a friend who is also a Doktor. Thus no doktor’s

bills! And also no inconveniences that cannot be dealt with as need arises! Ah, here are my two eldest sons, the Gauleiter you have already met, and my Fritz too, I think? A general in the Wehrmacht as perhaps Ida has told you! Funny to think of a Hungarian fighting in the German army, is it not? But really as long as the Nazis understand *who we are*, we may as well fight for them, as sit back on our haunches and make cheeses and chocolate like the Swiss!”

“That is very true Mama!” observed the General, when the vigorous old lady paused for breath. While she had been talking, he had already contrived to make two or three stiffly perfect bows, kiss Ida’s hand and shake Mark’s, as well as pour himself out, and drink with long, contented gulps, a huge mug full of Glühwein. “And now, dear Ida,” he remarked, smacking his full red lips, and cheerfully rolling a roguish eye from his cousin to Mark, “what is this that I hear about running away with the Spanish horses! Ha! Ha! We got your telephone message just in time to know what to say to the authorities when they rang us up. You had arrived, we told them, by the Blue train at Budapest and were already with us. No one will examine our stables, so no fresh horses will be discovered there. No servant of ours says anything they are not told to say to those *without* the Schloss. I do not say they always say what they are told to say to those *inside* it—the blockheads! But that is a minor matter! A man deals mildly with his own household—when they once know their places. To-morrow when you are less tired we will make a plan! It is agreed—and who knows there may even be a little money to be made by it! It was very naughty of you, Ida, of course, to disobey the Nazis! But I have already examined the horses. Naturally they are sadly over-ridden, but I can see they are the cream of the earth! I am sorry we cannot retain them here permanently, but Ödön says in his position everything has to be accounted for in the long run. No! No! to kill those horses—with all due respect to our dear German brothers—that *would* have been a crime! I always say no man in his senses abuses a good horse, kicks a good dog, or beats a good mistress! *Hein*—von Steiner? We may have our faults we border people—but thank God we have all the instincts of a gentleman.”

“Thank God indeed,” Ida agreed with a twinkle in her eyes. “But my dear cousins, I knew I could rely on you! Still you must not put yourselves to any danger or inconvenience for us! To-morrow, as you say—after a night’s rest we will discuss our plans. Doktor von Steiner has a few days’ leave, you understand he has lived so long out of his country, poor fellow, that he has half-forgotten our ways! A little trip like this will be just the thing to make him feel more at home again!”

Both cousins nodded sympathetically and smiled at Mark with so much meaning that he found himself not daring to look at Ida for the rest of the evening.

The old Gräfin nodded and patted Ida's hand with great sympathy and satisfaction. This was the way, she thought, that a beloved niece of more than marriageable age, who was nevertheless unfortunately prevented from marriage, should behave. It was only natural and right that she should have a lover and as her father was a black Catholic, wholly Austrian, whose mother had actually been suspected of Jewish blood, he was naturally bourgeois in his moral standards. The only possible thing for Ida to do therefore was to bring her lover to the home of her nearest relations on her mother's better-born Hungarian side—where there was a little more knowledge of the world.

The Gräfin privately considered that Ida had done very well for herself. This von Steiner was younger and far better-looking than Ida herself was. He had the air of knowing, there could be no mistake about him, whatever clothes he wore—or however trampish he looked. "Ödön, my dear," she said to her eldest son, "show Herr Doktor von Steiner to his room; and I will take dear Ida to hers. Your clothes shall be cleaned and pressed for you both tomorrow; and your breakfast sent up to your rooms. You will understand there is no hurry at all to come down—and no one will disturb you before lunch-time!"

Ödön nodded; his manner to Mark, while no less kind and welcoming than his mother's, was considerably more guarded. He took his position under the Nazi régime much more seriously than the rest of the family took theirs. "This escapade of Ida's," he said when they had reached the guest room, "is of course much too lighthearted for the times we live in! I understand you have been away in America for many years; and only lately, as was but right when war called you, returned to the Fatherland—that explain why you have not yet fully realized what belonging to the Greater Germany involves. We easy-going Austrians and Hungarians must learn stricter ways! But mind you we shall not suffer from this—quite the contrary—we shall improve! The red pestilence which threatened both our countries will now be stamped out. Once dispose of all our Jews and Bolsheviks and our people will have learned their lesson. You agree with me?" He asked this question sharply, and was obviously relieved by Mark's quick nod of assent.

"But do you not sometimes regret," Mark ventured to ask him, "that we must use these medieval methods of Gestapo and concentration camps?"

The Gauleiter frowned reflectively. "No!" he said at last, "on the whole I do not regret them! Tramps—criminals—these red Intelligenzia—are they not all better locked up and made of some practical use in the world? A little roughly handled too I admit—but how else teach the hardened than by hardness? Here and there," he added, looking about the vast bare room to see if anything was missing which could reasonably be expected by a guest, "we might relax a little of our rigour—among friends—and people of our own class. We understand Ida's situation, for instance, very well—and we will do our best to help you both over this little incident of the horses. Often things can safely be hushed up, if one goes the right way about it! Poor girl! Well—hers was a sad story and no one in this house fails to give her the greatest respect and affection. She is one of us, and had things been otherwise her position would have been very creditable—very creditable indeed! You are sure there is nothing else you want?"

Mark assured him there was nothing. The vast shadowy room had no boundaries to Mark's tired eyes. A great four-poster bed stood out from the wall, a lovely piece of Gobelin tapestry hung near it. The light from the hidden stove flickered over its silken figures as if they were still moving in the chase they had long ago started upon. In one corner there was a painted Tirolean cupboard so large that an entire group of people as well as their clothes could have been lodged in it; and in another a small tin washstand paid its service to modernity. The rest of the room was given up to space and shadows.

Mark would have liked to find out why the Gauleiter thought Ida's situation so particularly creditable. Did they like her being unmarried? Who had been this lover of hers, whom they must have known since he had taken up ten years of her life? And why had there been no marriage? But he could ask no questions about Ida, nor did he even wish anyone else to tell him what he did not know. He was in a strange glow of happiness and relaxation.

Perhaps never in his life had he felt a greater sense of relief and joy than the warmth of this great room poured into his fastidious and lonely senses.

He knew that Ida's "No" had not been her real answer. If she had not loved him, she would have been neither frightened nor evasive; and she would have made herself perfectly plain. As for himself he knew that he loved Ida with his whole complicated repressed and fastidious nature set free into comradeship. He did not love her swiftly and lightly with his senses alone as he had loved Lisa; nor with the incompleteness of frustrated passion as he had loved Mary.

This new emotion that he felt for Ida at once possessed and released him. Only death itself could end it, for Ida had done for him what he had never been able to do for himself, she had changed and enriched the texture of his life.

Chapter 27

The two most remarkable things about the Bezzeghys, Mark discovered, were their sense of intrigue and the strength of their principles. They really believed and practised the Nazi system, even when they skilfully evaded the most repulsive of its personal austerities.

All day long the praises of Hitler sang in his ears. Other leaders might make mistakes, but Hitler was above all blunders; and the system he had evolved was infallible.

Besides, if there were not the Nazi system there would be the Red Peril! A thousand times rather Hitler and all his rigours than the rising tide of the Common Man's Universe—with all its rights.

No peril was too great to avoid Bolshevism. Every country which did not see this was acting as a short-sighted criminal; and a class renegade.

All Jews, all Leftists, all insanely religious people, who took the wishy-washy ideas of religion found by the Protestant hearted, in the New Testament—must be stamped out.

All such people were sub-human, the Gauleiter explained to Mark, who might stand in need of such explanations since he had been for so long in America—and that was all there was to be said about them. The rich men in the U.S.A. would soon accept this truth if they had not already done so, the greater part of the British Plutocracy was only awaiting the right moment in order to bring a favourable end to the war, and put over the Nazi system in an English way.

Mussolini, who was a good fellow though he had to be kept in his place, was dealing in a highly successful manner, through Franco's help, with the South American Republics. They had been trained from infancy towards Dictatorships and would give very little trouble. The United States were simply loot; and would collapse as France had collapsed, directly Japan struck them.

As for Ida, she took an enthusiastic part in all these discussions, and looked ten years younger dressed in her cousin Berta's smartest summer clothes. She teased and flattered her cousins; petted her aunt; provoked and

made eyes at Mark, as if she had been born anew as a frivolous and charming woman without a care, for whom any man would be delighted to work or take any risk in return for her bare existence.

The Bezzeghys adored her, accepted Mark as a brother; and by the time their guests had rested sufficiently for fresh activity, had arranged a plan for the transfer of the horses.

They would do anything in the world to help transfer the horses to Hungary, they told their guests, except take any personal risk of offending the Nazis. No member of the Bezzeghy family must fail to appear as innocent as at their first Communion. This of course included Ida; she must be doubly innocent, both as a Bezzeghy relation and as a woman.

Providence had already pointed the direction they might safely take, because their friend and cousin, Rudolf Málnássy, had already bought Jasper four years ago; and had always wanted the other Spanish horses; and he could well afford to pay a good price for them.

There would be no risk to him in this addition to his stable for in Hungary the Nazis left the big landowners extremely free. The little matter of the price could be settled immediately by a friendly family visit. Rudolf would bribe the Hungarian guards on his side of the lake—the Gauleiter would provide for those upon his own. These were fortunately Austrian Nazis—and not wooden-heads from the Reich.

The horses must be swum across the narrowest part of the lake nearest the Málnássy estate during the night. German sentries could not be bribed safely to overlook anything, either by day or by night—so there was nothing for it but a cold swim.

What, Mark tentatively demanded, would happen if anything *did* go wrong?

A curious silence fell over the family council. Ida looked down at her extremely pretty feet, in their remarkably smart and effective Budapest shoes. Then the Bezzeghy sons looked anxiously at their mother.

The Gräfin laid down her knitting and made a masterly speech. What she wanted Mark to see, through the veil of her elaborate and enchanting phrases, was the extremely natural role he was called upon to play as a family scapegoat. Lovers, the Gräfin inferred, were always chosen for the part; and this time Mark had been well chosen. He could swim, he could ride, he looked the part of a gentlemanly adventurer. Boiled down in the plainer language of Mark's private intelligence, he and Hermann were to be

free-will offerings for Nazi vengeance. The Gräfin did not say so—but she delicately implied that this was what lovers and servants were for.

Hermann's was to be an even simpler and more straightforward offering than Mark's.

If the Nazis caught Hermann they would quite understand what to do with him. Indeed in the case of a dear friend of theirs, almost a next-door neighbour, the Nazis had already shown their grasp of the situation. A servant is a servant, and when an irregularity occurred, this servant had simply gone to prison for two years for his master. The servant's family had been well looked after, and he himself compensated when he came out. Something of the same kind would no doubt be arranged for Hermann. Still it was to be hoped that nothing would go wrong.

The beautiful manners of the Bezzeghys hung in front of their rather dubious morals like a cleverly arranged smoke screen. Mark did not wish to believe it of them, but he reluctantly admitted to himself that behind this screen the Bezzeghys were greedy, dishonest and rather cruel people. They saw no other rights than their own. They were not cruel to their servants only when they were certain of their services. They were not consciously greedy—all they asked was that no one should be allowed to check their natural desires. Above all they would never have admitted their dishonesty.

This lay so deep that they felt every trick they played was a mere skilful exercise of their enlightened intelligence.

"You see," the Gauleiter explained a trifle apologetically, as the Gräfin smiled approvingly across at Mark and took up her knitting; "my brother and I are at the moment very tied up with the Reich—very tied up indeed! He, as a general of the Wehrmacht, must be of course above suspicion, and I need not point out to you the duties and standing of a Nazi Gauleiter. I can give you and Ida the hospitality of my stables for a few days, since they would not be liable to be searched; but I should not care to expose my servants to questioning were these very fine horses to be seen and talked about as under my care. I have great confidence in my servants. Their interests are ours, and they know it. I have given my orders, and they will be carried out; but occasionally even the best of servants gets drunk—and then his tongue unlocks itself, and out pop secrets. It is best therefore that we expedite the matter. You agree?"

Mark agreed and to his astonishment Ida promptly seconded his agreement. She agreed about everything—the transfer of the horses, the price to be obtained from Rudolf under pressure; the execution of the project

—the complete exclusion of herself and her cousins from all active participation in the adventure. Although careful to avoid the appearance of neglecting Mark, she nevertheless skilfully evaded being left alone with him so that he was left wholly uncertain of her actual intentions.

Ida had already explained to Mark the ritual of an accepted love affair.

In public Mark must always be at her side. She must direct her conversation at him. They must support and consider each other in every way, otherwise, Ida explained, the Bezzeghys would be extremely shocked.

Opportunities were made for them to be alone together, but they were not pressed. It was taken for granted that Mark and Ida would make the best use of such hours “off” for themselves. But only on one such occasion did Mark find himself able to speak freely to Ida. Even then Hermann and the horses were present. Hermann had accepted his orders without surprise or complaint; but he had asked if his Herrschaften would not come out to the stables in daylight, and see the horses together for the last time.

The three horses stood, splendid and impatient, in the stable yard.

They knew well they were being shown off; and added to the spectacle by swift and graceful movements full of pride. A sense of hidden drama made them prick their sensitive ears, sweep their tails and lift a hoof occasionally to paw the resistant cobbles. They were just as nervous, just as delicately naughty and free as was becoming in well-bred horses. But they did nothing to shake the perfect poise a Hollywood beauty might well have tried in vain to copy from them.

Their quarters shone with the ripple and polish of a summer sea. Saddles, girths and head harness seemed made of some gleaming substance robbed from a field at dawn.

*All in the blue, unclouded weather
Thick jewelled shone the saddle leather.
The helmet and the helmet feather
Burned like one burning flame together.*

Perhaps the horses were listening for a music they would never hear again; and expecting a drama in which they would never more take part.

Nothing happened to them now, except that hands they knew stroked them, and gave them sugar; and long familiar voices spoke to them in a friendly way that made them pleased and proud.

“Don’t think,” Ida said in a low tone to Mark, “that I am going to touch any of that thirty pieces of silver my good cousin will extract from Rudolf. They will themselves keep what remains over from the bribes they think it wisest to expend. Nor shall Hermann suffer if things go wrong!”

“Do not be anxious for me, Gnädigste,” Hermann begged. “For the guards on the frontier are well known to the servants here. Good men who will not open their mouths—nor notice what goes on under their noses. Besides, they are my horses—why should I not take risks for them? I made them what they are.”

“That is well said, Hermann!” Ida told him with a flash of appreciation in her eyes. “What we make is ours—and nothing else is!” She held out her hand to Hermann, and he took it and shook it warmly, as if it were the hand of another man.

“*Leb’ wohl!*” Ida said, turning back to the house so quickly, that Mark did not see that her eyes were full of tears.

“Let me ride with you—at least to the river, to-night, as well,” Mark suggested. “This first attempt must be the hardest!”

“No, Herr, I think not,” Hermann replied; “two are not as safe as one. Besides, I already know the way, and should anything happen to me this first time, you would still be there to save the other two horses. Four years ago I took Jasper across, hunted all the way and got a bullet in my shoulder; but the horse was saved! This time no one knows even that the horses are alive—so it should be wholly easy.”

Yet all that night Mark could not sleep. He kept thinking of men tortured; men hunted; homeless and hopeless people caught in the Nazi net and praying for death in concentration camps. He heard the grim monotonous croaking of the frogs, like the drumming of savages in his ears; and saw again and again Felix’s young dead face and limp body, falling from Rennenkampf’s terrible hands.

At dawn he rose, to haunt the stables for Hermann’s return. At last he saw a shadow slip through the iron gates and ran to meet Hermann limping back after a long twelve hours’ tramp.

“Didn’t they even send one of their own damned horses to meet you?” Mark demanded bitterly, forgetting his honour as a guest in his indignation at the Bezzeghys’ unruffled selfishness.

“A man is safer on foot, Herr,” Hermann reminded him soothingly. “I do not say I would not be glad of horses to bring us back to-night, for the way

is long, and we should save time. There are posSES about too, I nearly ran into one, both coming and going. They are like fleas these Nazis—they get under every man’s jacket. But Diamond—he’s steady as a rock, as you know, and he helped me to get by them. A horse like that is worth what risks one takes for him.”

A step sounded behind them on the cobbles. Ida stood there, muffled in a long fur coat over a pair of pyjamas. “There is coffee ready for you, Hermann, in the kitchen,” she said smilingly, “the servants are still asleep—but I knew where to find it! You can have a cup too Mark—since you are up so early!”

Her voice, and the old look of her, hatless and with no care at all for her appearance, warmed Mark’s heart.

This was the comrade of his adventures, and not the cousin of the Bezzeghys.

Chapter 28

The Bezzeghys stood on the steps to see Mark off. From their point of view nothing had been left undone that could give grace to the occasion. They had given their guest a merry, even magnificent dinner, winding up with a bottle of Tokai brought up from the cellar by the Gauleiter himself. In the course of the next half hour Mark might be in the hands of the Nazis, and none of the Bezzeghys would stretch out a finger to save him, but that seemed to them no good reason why they should not make these last few minutes as pleasant as possible.

It did not even seem very hard for Ida to part with her lover. She joked up to the last moment—patted him genially on the shoulder and gave him her hand to kiss; then the darkness swallowed him. Mark waited below the courtyard gate for what seemed to him hours, under the dripping trees, before at last the silence stirred, and the dark shape of the horses loomed up suddenly close to him.

“We were detained, Herr,” Hermann explained breathlessly. “A strange fellow came into the stables, and I couldn’t bring the horses out till we were rid of him. Let Pearl lead till we pass the village. She sees better in the dark. Sapphire can take over later, when his eyes have got accustomed to it. We must ride fast.”

As Mark mounted Pearl he was conscious of her little movement of satisfied recognition. She knew her rider. The way was unfamiliar to her and she was nervous of the dark, but her whole being rested confidently in Mark’s will, and she kept all her senses sharply on the alert to fulfil any demands that he might make upon her. The feeling of being rather ill-used by Ida left Mark. Perhaps to make no suggestions was her way of showing her trust in him. Yet few women let their lovers go into danger without some fond and useless warning.

The one thing that was necessary, Mark reminded himself, was to share the whole of the responsibility with Hermann. Quite apart from what the Bezzeghys expected, Mark expected this of himself.

“Hermann,” he said under his breath, “can you hear me speak without my raising my voice?”

Sapphire drew nearer for answer.

“If anything goes wrong,” Mark said urgently, “you know very well what to say, don’t you? This is a plot between us alone! We knew the horses were to be killed. You had the order from the Gräfin’s father to kill them. And I got you to help me run away with them instead! We have never been inside the Schloss. We bribed the Bezzeghys’ groom, whom you knew well, to hide us and the horses in the stables, so that we could sell them and pocket the money, in which the groom would share. The Gräfin does not know that we are here! I am the vagabond-lunatic Pirschl, but I was always allowed—because I understood horses like a gypsy—to help you take care of them. This has to be packed so well in our minds that nothing else will come out. No matter what happens! Remember I am half a gypsy—therefore the criminal idea was *mine!*”

A low laugh that was not Hermann’s, answered him.

“You!” Mark gasped. He felt the quiet night fill suddenly with ecstasy.

“But yes!” Ida answered, still laughing. “Did you really think I should let you go alone? My cousins think I am in bed and asleep—and that is what I hope I may be—when it next occurs to them to think of me again. I made all my arrangements with Hermann long ago; and under my cousin’s lovely Paris dress this evening I wore my battered riding breeches. Now, we had better be silent till we reach the village of Rust. That is where our friends the smuggling fishermen will meet us to guide us across the Lake.”

There was very little sound now that they had left the village behind them. What little breeze there was sang gently in the trees, with an undertone of sadness. In a distant pond frogs kept up a monotonous chanting. Sometimes all sounds stopped suddenly as if they were checked by an invisible baton; and they could only hear the faint creaking of their saddle leather and the almost noiseless clop of their horses’ hooves on the grassy path.

The late moon rose slowly over the rounded hills. Nothing seemed solid enough for earth. A white mist bathed the park-like meadows; all the crops were gathered in and the earth rested in a living pause before the winter snow froze it into the fixed immobility of death. The smell of frost was already in the air, yet the summer lingered like a late and well-loved guest who cannot bear to leave the scene of so much jollity.

Mark had to drag his mind back to danger and war; for they seemed to him unnatural, almost incredible things.

“It is too late to ask you to go back,” he said at last. “I certainly have no right to be glad you came; but now that you have come—well—whatever happens we shall have had this together!”

“Yes,” said Ida a little grimly, “and whatever happens—which matters to me a good deal more—we shall share it together. Did you really believe I intended to take advantage of my cousin’s immunity?”

Mark was silent for a moment. What had he believed? What did he know of her? He knew only that if she were there the world was beautiful.

“I don’t think,” he said at last, “that I was quite sure what you meant—that I ever am.”

Ida gave a faint but slightly mollified laugh.

“Well,” she said, “I forgive you, but at least you might have remembered that the Schlern Witches always ride by night!”

Mark turned to look at her. The spectral moonlight shone on her small erect figure now close to his own. He could see the brown fur collarette high round her slender throat, the points of which bent downwards like the brilliant brown necklace of the mountain flower. Her thick ginger-coloured hair burned red above her pale and rather tragic face.

“Do not stare at me, Mark,” Ida told him mockingly. “Look out for rabbit holes instead. They are more worth looking at since we cannot afford a stumble. Are those men or trees standing out of the mist?”

“Only trees,” Mark said, as two shadowy posts bore down on them in a white sea. But a moment later Pearl heard a sound, and stopped dead. Mark signed to Sapphire to follow, and drew Pearl close under the shadow of a barn. The two horses stood side by side, motionless, like statues made out of darkness. Three men came down the road talking and laughing; they passed so near the horses that they could have touched them. Neither horse stirred, nor made a sound, until the men’s footsteps died away into complete silence.

“Wonderful!” Mark whispered softly, half to Pearl and half to Ida. “How did you teach them to keep so motionless at will?”

“They know what we want,” Ida said gently. “What they have been taught is to do what their friends *want*! It is astonishing that this can be taught so easily to animals—when men themselves find it so difficult to learn! But an animal does not lie! It knows that devotion is behaviour. Men and women do not learn this very easily!”

They rode on in silence till they reached the hills. Once an owl gave his wild predatory shriek close to them, and Ida said: "Now I know what a mouse feels like before the iron beak strikes him!" But she did not sound afraid. It was as if she too felt as Mark did, that there was no room for fear in their bedazzled hearts; yet neither forgot the need there was for fear.

"We can begin to breathe now," Ida said at last, "and even talk a little. It is a long time before we have to become frontier conscious! Tell me—what do you think of my cousins the Bezzeghys?"

"They are your cousins," Mark said courteously, "and you seemed happy with them."

"Happy?" Ida exclaimed. "You give me very little credit, Mark, for my brains! I am not happy with the Bezzeghys, but I am very clever with them. If I were not—well—where would be my horses? We live in an immoral world, and to live in it at all, we must sometimes lean on immoral instruments. But we should not judge the Bezzeghys too harshly perhaps, for to be a natural Nazi is not so much a crime as a habit. Still I admit it is a habit that if we are ever to make a decent world—we shall have to learn to avoid!"

"I do not mind your avoiding the Bezzeghys," Mark complained. "It was me—not the Bezzeghys that you appeared to be avoiding at the Schloss. In spite of the fact that you told me I was to be your lover!"

"Well, so you were," Ida remarked complacently, "a little backward from the Bezzeghys' point of view—more as it were like an elderly husband than an ardent lover—but still, considering such short notice, nothing was seriously out of place. I avoided you in private simply because I was afraid of you. Not *for* you—this time! But *of* you! I don't see that I could pay you a higher compliment! I had to manage somehow to keep my head—perhaps it is less strong than you suppose. Anyhow I had to keep it!"

"And now?" asked Mark. "What are you doing with it now, Ida?"

"I am prepared to lose it!" Ida replied promptly. "But not till I've had a cigarette and unfolded my next plan. Please, Mark, remember what we have at stake to-night! Do not tempt me to forget it!"

Mark stopped Pearl on the crest of the hill they were climbing, and let the two horses rest. There was nothing below them but an empty sea of mist—or beyond them—but the shadowy distance stretching away towards the unseen lake they had to cross before they reached even approximate safety.

“This new plan,” said Ida, lighting a cigarette and puffing gently at it, “is for you to go at once to Berlin to Pirschl. Not to come back with me. All that business about being found in the woods—it is impracticable. Dr. Helder, whom I left in charge, is too intelligent—he would see you were not hungry and might guess you were not mad! There will be Gestapo men too about the Schloss for a time anyhow, and I do not know how much they will put me under observation or curtail my powers. Even before all this happened I was becoming a little nervous—you had gone so often with your night messages—it is so easy to become careless! You see, in the life we live there is no escape once the Nazis get you. Where to stop—to change tactics—should always come before the danger occurs—afterwards it is too late.”

“Is that why you asked me to help you save the horses?” Mark demanded, putting his hand out till it covered hers.

“It might be partly that,” Ida agreed. “I knew that it would be better to stop the messages for a time—or to change our method of sending them. It will also be better for me not to have you on my mind when I go back to the hospital—there may be other things for me to think about.”

“You know you are going into some special danger?” Mark demanded angrily, “and you don’t want to let me help *you*—though you are always willing to help *me*—is that the sort of trick you are trying to play on me?”

“I am with you in very great danger now,” Ida answered calmly, “and I asked you to share it with me, Mark—but I was *really* happy at the Schloss. You might have guessed! For two whole days and nights—you were there with me—and we were both safe. Of course I was happy! I found—to my surprise—that I had remembered how to be happy! For, for so many years I had forgotten how!”

“You tell me these things,” Mark said, “when I can’t make love to you—I had rather you told them to me when I could!”

Ida laughed. “You are so practical,” she said. “You English! Well, one day perhaps I shall. Be content to-night that I already see the moon over there is not just a moon—but something quite remarkable. There are the lights of Rust, and from Rust our friends the fishermen, whose century-long vocation is smuggling, will lead us to Moerbisch through the reeds. To the south of the lake across the frontier lies the town of Kroisbach. The Málnässys’ estate is only a short way beyond it, and except for the mosquitoes which are mortal near the lake, the ride is easy. I know every foot of it, once the lake is crossed, because I went there often as a girl to hunt or dance. It seems curious to remember those light and easy times, and

a little odd of the Hungarians, I have always thought, to put themselves into the straight jackets of the Nazis. From now on distrust whatever you see. The mist is fantastic and you will not be able to tell a sheep from a ghost, a cow from a goat. Every twist of white fog is designed by a *Poltergeist* to delude you. Better trust Pearl, for she at any rate will guess whether she is being confronted by an animal of flesh and blood or a mist-monster. We all believe in ghosts about here. It is the ghosts who do not believe in us.” Ida’s light laughing voice died into utter silence. They held their breaths to listen, but no sound came from the endless meadows, expanding and contracting round them as the fog opened or shut them in. The white sea of fog gripped and swallowed them in an effortless stillness. Here and there the sudden spire of a tall poplar rose like a warning finger. The cry of a water bird in the distance broke the silence with a sudden clatter; it was repeated close at hand, and out of the mist a man’s figure emerged with startling solidity. “Here Aladar!” he stated. “You come from the Bezzeghys with the great horses! I am sent to guide you!”

“It is well,” said Ida. “Long ago I knew your family and helped them make the hay. I am of the Bezzeghys! May we not taste the great wines of Rust and rest our horses before we cross the lake? Is it possible for us to go by boat, or must we also swim?”

“We must wade—perhaps swim; and on the open waterways take to the boat!” Aladar explained. “We must trust in God, Frau Gräfin, for the reeds have a strength beyond that of a man and it is as if they had a covenant with the mud, to drag or suck men under. But do not be afraid, Franz and I have taken many fugitives over. For hundreds of years there has only been the one way through the reeds of the *Neusiedlersee* and only a few families know it. But what you live by you remember! The landlord of an inn close to the lake will serve us well with his own wine before we need to start.”

Ida and Mark dismounted, and followed Aladar into the village of Rust. There were only a few peasants about in the streets, and all passers-by, even the horses, were mere wavering shapes with indistinguishable features.

The inn before which Aladar halted was a shiftless, derelict-looking house of only one story; another man, murmuring “*Hier Franz!*” stepped out of the shadows and led the horses into a yard behind the Inn.

When they entered the black cavernous doorway, they found themselves at the top of a flight of stone stairs that led down into a kitchen two cellars deep. The kitchen stretched on all sides of them, piled high with wine barrels. A glowing fire threw its shifting light across the floor, the leaping

shadows greeted them. The landlord stepped forward courteously out of the gloom; he too had shared in the bribes already bestowed by the Bezzeghys; and would have still more when the adventure was fully accomplished. Then the fishermen joined them; and all five of them sat round the fireside together, drinking the famous red and white wines of Rust. None of them in Rust, the landlord explained, liked the new order. "We little people have to take what comes," the landlord explained to Ida. "It is in the big towns that these plots are hatched out with those tow-headed Germans. None of us have ever cared for it! When a Jew gets through their meshes or, maybe, a Red for Russia—or even one of our own great people, like yourself Frau Gräfin, with an idea of their own to hatch, well we guide them across the frontier gladly and pray God to protect them! No German comes into Rust without our knowing it, and our own big people who go the same way as the Germans—well—we know *them*! And we take our own precautions. Our cellars, too, are deep in Rust, and not only wine can be stored in those big barrels we keep roof high below stairs. A man's body can fit into one of them, and loaded down with stones would never come up again, if it found its way into the lake. So we should deal with village traitors—if we had any! Men who have lived in the same place all their lives—well, they know their neighbours!"

A long consenting pause followed, while the three inhabitants of Rust exchanged a grim, and perhaps reminiscent smile.

"A curious thing this Hitler is—and his Nazis," Franz at length ventured. "You would say a strange maggot eats them! They can't let other people live! Now for my part I see no sense in killing a man I don't know—why no animal or bird—or fish even—kills except for food—or because he has an enemy! But these Nazis—they strike and kill all over the place—for the mere fun of the thing! Do we get more food out of this war of theirs? Certainly not—we get less! and our sons get killed—without knowing who it is that kills them. I ask you what satisfaction there is in that?"

"You are right," agreed Ida. "There is no sense in the Nazis! But what can you expect of a people who worship Hitler rather than God—it is *unheimlich*!"

"Yes! *Unheimlich*!" agreed the three peasants with emphatic nods. "Lady, we see that you are wise and though you belong to the Bezzeghys—you are not one with those who push away all that we believe, to become less than men. We therefore drink to you—and to this good man—doubtless your lover!"

“We hope your journey,” added the landlord courteously, “will be a profitable one, and that your fine animals will prosper!”

Ida raised her glass. “Thank you,” she said. “May we then drink together to the horses? Since as you truly say they are fine and noble animals and my friend and I ride them to-night for the last time!” The five men lifted their glasses and drank the sound sweet wine of Rust to the health of the Spanish horses. Nor did it seem to them a strange toast since to a Hungarian fisherman a good horse is linked both to Romance and Property, and therefore worthy of the best a man can think of him. “Would it be safe to ask you for a song?” Ida begged when they had emptied their glasses. “I have heard Aladar here sing in the hayfield long ago when he was a boy—I remember he had a good voice, and doubtless you also sing well?”

“But perfectly safe,” they all three agreed promptly. “No one will hear us! Nor have any of these new people forbidden us to sing!” The three men looked at each other, and then glanced away into the shadows, and cleared their throats. Aladar began, in a high strong baritone and the others quickly caught up with him. They sang, one after the other, the sad, swift songs of Hungary. Mark could not guess the words, but the music in spite of its wild gaiety had always a tragic ring, and whether it told of love or death it moved more quickly and more fiercely than the Austrian *Lieder*.

At last Aladar said, “We must drink no more wine if we are to get the better of the rushes to-night! Lady, are you ready?”

When they reached the street level, the lights of Rust were out, and its little world wrapped in sleep. The invisible moon was at her height; and through the mist the lake stretched before them like a silver floor.

The horses trembled and shuddered at the feel of the water, but their riders led them gently step by anxious step down into the lake. Aladar led, carrying a lantern, and Franz dragging a flat-bottomed boat behind him, brought up the rear. For a moment the reeds, high as a man’s shoulder, swallowed them. From time to time the reeds drew apart, and a space of deep water shone before them. Then they took to the boat, and their horses swam beside them. After the first tingling shock the cold of the water, still tempered by the long summer sun, was not unbearable. Then the reeds drew in again, till without Aladar’s lanthorn, it would have been impossible to find their way by boat or on foot through the impenetrable watery forest. The thick mud, below the shallow water, sucked ominously at their feet. The occasional splash or plunge from one of the horses, set the water birds shrieking wildly with a fierce flutter of rustling wings in their faces. But as

suddenly as the panic noise had broken and spread from shore to shore all sound dropped; and they were once more in a world untouched by time or man, swallowed in deep primeval silence. Their bodies shone like silver shadows, but to themselves each one felt small, vulnerable and very cold. Even the horses kept as close to their leaders as they dared; as if they feared the strange water world about them. Yet nothing happened, only the mud shifted beneath their footsteps, or reeds sharpened their sides together, like knives, when the wind reached them.

The moon sank slowly behind the blanched darkness, until the flicker of Aladar's lantern was all the light that was left, to guide them through the uneasy sea of mud and water, back to the solid earth. The occasional vicious bite of a mosquito was almost a relief to Mark since it served to remind him that they were actual human beings in a real world.

The pathway narrowed until they had to push back the sharp reeds with their hands, and struggle with them as if they were enemies. "We are nearing the bank," Aladar said at last. "The ground grows firm, be careful the reeds don't drag you under. Step where I step. Here on the patch of open water we will await you in the boat. Take my lamp, lady, we shall need no light! Here is the thorn tree with the hollow branches shaped like a fork—it will guide you to us. From the thorn strike a straight path to Kroisbach. The frontier is already crossed—you are in Hungary! May God speed you! We will wait here till sun-up for your return."

The horses scrambled and heaved themselves up out of the reeds on to the bank. The ground, though still marshy, no longer sucked at their feet. "We're free!" Ida said to Mark. "Do you feel different? Or am I imagining that a hand is off my throat and I can breathe again! I think I must be warm and dry, and that the very air smells sweeter!"

"Not much sweeter," Mark replied grimly, for he was out of sympathy with the Hungarian atmosphere, "but anyhow the horses are safe!"

"They're safe, but they aren't ours any more!" Ida reminded him.

Once more they mounted, and rode on. The dead level meadows they had left behind them, stretched again in front. The only difference was that the landscape was without hidden terrors. If they were discovered now, neither death nor torture awaited them.

In the darkness they skirted Kroisbach and came to the walls of the Málnassy estate, where Rudolf's grooms soon joined them.

For one brief moment Mark found himself looking at Pearl by lantern light, as if she were not a horse, but a being from whose profound and deep intelligence he could draw a courage that was greater than his own. For the last time he stroked the firm velvety neck, and gazed at the proud head with its ears pricked delicately forward. The great sad eyes were fixed upon him, so full of acute intelligence that they seemed to read his heart; and to know that they would never meet again.

Ida stood talking pleasantly to the grooms—very erect and composed—her hand on Sapphire’s bridle. But when Mark joined her she moved quickly away into the merciful darkness. She made no sound, but Mark knew that she was crying bitterly.

Chapter 29

They skirted Kroisbach once more, which lay a patch of deeper darkness across the blanketing fog, walking in silence, until on the verge of the *Neuseidlersee* they reached a small isolated grove. Mark had been following in Ida's footsteps like a sleep-walker. He could see nothing, but he felt her suddenly whirl round and face him.

"Mark!" she said urgently, "I can't go back! Not to that torture house! I am afraid, Mark, afraid! I could have borne it! I *meant* to bear it when it was only me, but now we've been together—I can't bear it! You must see I can't! We needn't go back! We're strong—we're skilled people with something to give. Let's get out into the new world—beyond Hungary into Russia! It can't be a worse prison than the one we've left! After all they're making something new in Russia—they're not destroying life itself! And if they don't want us—well, we can but die, and what a mercy to *be* dead—in such a world as this!"

Mark put out his hands and found hers in the dark. They were ice-cold and trembling. In a moment she was in his arms, her heart hammering against his heart.

Mark tried to steady himself as well as her. He too had thought of escape, but the thought of it had been beyond the region of his will. He had seen it as a man, bewildered, but not yet mastered by thirst, sees a lake upon the desert sands, and knows it for a mirage. That Ida could be controlled by her wishes had not occurred to him. He thought of her as invulnerable as Joan of Arc—frozen into a magic armour of courage.

Her voice crying out to him in frantic terror shook his whole being.

"Haven't we done enough?" Ida sobbed. "It's so senseless! So senseless, Mark, against them! They can break down anyone. We can't keep out of their hands! They tear a man's self-respect to pieces, and women—you know what they do to women? They throw them out to their young guards to play with! We can only destroy other people by our courage Mark, we can't help ourselves."

Mark tried to think about courage, but he couldn't. There was only the automatic response to those dangers which he had always practised; and this no longer seemed to him like courage because these new dangers were unimaginable dangers. The only thing that came into Mark's mind when he thought of courage was Father Martin saying to him that to-day there had to be a new kind. But Father Martin hadn't told him what the new kind was. At last Mark said desperately to Ida.

"There's Father Martin. Wouldn't we feel rather as if we were letting him down, if we didn't go back? And Pirschl—and the man in the railway I work with—and that surgeon?"

"They'd be safer without us," Ida whispered. But she couldn't say that they would *want* to be safer. "Father Martin has his God," she murmured after a pause. "We've nothing but ourselves! Oh, Mark, let's stay together!"

Her hard sobbing checked for his answer. The white silence of the fog pressed down upon them like an unbearable load. Even the reeds were still. They were utterly alone. All round them a world of water birds slept securely in their misty paradise. Nothing human breathed near them. Two miles away the fishermen waited for their return; but they would not wait after the sun was up. They would go home without hurt or anxiety. The Bezzeghys would make inquiries but not for long. The Málnássys had their horses safely; they were not responsible for the invisible messengers who had brought them—and vanished.

Anything might have happened to such adventurers. They might have been drowned in the lake—strangled by the reeds—carried off by frontier guards to an unknown doom. Who would be the wiser if they disappeared? Who would be the loser if they gave up the fight? Mark had always supposed that men took their precautions against temptations by knowing how to face them. But this masked temptation seemed to have no face. Never had his home—that small vulnerable island and all it stood for—its decencies and its strange freedoms and taboos—felt further away from Mark. It was as if he had suddenly lost England in space, and would never find it again. The flat lands of Hungary stretched away endlessly, in boundless meadows, under solemn, close-pressed skies. They might have reached already the vast steppes of Russia. A featureless, profound land, untamed and inhuman, surrounded them.

Since Mark was already suspected, was not his task accomplished? To stop before the whole thing blew up—and both he and his fellow-workers were caught—would surely be wisdom? What was a small island off the

coast of Europe? What were the imponderable substances of codes and principles compared to Ida's exhausted body in his arms? Hadn't they done enough? Suffered enough? Her incredible courage was spent at last, because she had no more strength with which to keep it alive. When he thought of driving her back into the shambles of the Gestapo the mist tasted like death on his lips. Still he had got to be sure their choice was right and to be sure for both of them. If they turned as fugitives towards semi-hostile countries, they must give up their own. They would be deserters. They would even betray the cause they had fought for—since to desert is to betray. How would they bear the thought of this irrevocable failure if they were allowed to live their lives out in a strange land?

"I'm so tired, Mark," Ida whispered. "I'm so tired! I'm so afraid!" She began to sob again, tearlessly and without a sound.

He could feel her sobs at his heart, as if it were a wall between them and safety which Ida was pulling to pieces. He felt himself invaded and swayed by her fear; yet suddenly he heard himself saying drily, as if something within the core of his being had at last been reached and was different from what he had hoped and expected:

"I think we've rather *got* to go back, Ida, haven't we?" Mark spoke in English; he had forgotten to be an Austrian.

Ida stopped sobbing. She even gave a little shaky laugh, as if she were secretly relieved by Mark's decision. "Oh," she said, "you think that, do you? Just without any sense at all. Because you are an Englishman? Then I suppose I'll have to go back too, Mark. It would be unfair of me to try to make you come with me, by going on alone."

"Yes," Mark said heavily, "that would be unfair." It didn't occur to him that it was equally unfair to take her with him; because perhaps he knew that her choice as a woman was more conditioned than his own. Ida would not have wished to spare herself, except to spare him. The point of her escape was gone unless he escaped with her.

Mark wondered if he ought not to explain his decision; but he was not sure that he had any reasons left; nor did Ida seem to expect any. She gave a curious little sigh—like a disappointed child who accepts the end of a hope which he always knew was too dazzling to be carried into execution.

"If we all got out," Mark said at last, rather awkwardly and stiffly, "they might win!"

Ida laughed again, mockingly now, and as if her self-respect had been restored to her.

“Why, you idiot!” she said, turning back towards the path, “you incredible British idiot. They *might* win! Haven’t you ever thought of a map? Don’t you know yet that your mere speck of an island is against the whole world? Oh, of course most of the world would *like* you to win—but they aren’t going to help you to—they daren’t—or can’t—or won’t! Never mind, we’ll go on fighting. Perhaps no one is ever beaten who goes on fighting! He just dies winning something nobody else has got!”

Mark heard the sound of a new courage in her voice—it was the last desperate courage of the hopeless brave. Ida would never give in now—and never even want to—because she had ceased to want. He had driven her into the last ditch of despair. It was a strange and terrible thing to have done to another human soul, and the more terrible because in a sense Mark didn’t share her certainty of defeat. He still didn’t believe that in the end the Nazis *would* win. He could not give Ida a reason for it; but he had suddenly realized when her fear had reached the core of his heart that it couldn’t go any further. It must turn back, because he couldn’t stop fighting. Some of Mark wanted to run away; but not enough; not enough—even for Ida. There was a sense in which he was more afraid than she, for by going back he might be throwing her to the wolves. It wasn’t much use saying, even if it were true, that if they went to Russia they might never forgive themselves; and that a bad conscience would be worse than torture, because perhaps a bad conscience wouldn’t be worse than torture. None of these incalculable consolations were any good in advance, since by the time the blow fell there would be no use in calculating any more. You went on or stopped according to what you found you actually were doing. They were advancing, approaching the lake, against all reason, against all the common sense and tenderness of love. They were going back to the Nazis. The ground beneath their feet was not only wet now, it had become unsteady. Every now and then Ida stopped to shine her flash lamp on their uncertain way; and then all round them the startled birds stirred and called out, until the familiar darkness resettled over them; and the world was once more swallowed up in mist and silence.

“It is as well that I used to play over every inch of these shores as a child,” Ida said to Mark over her shoulder. “My feet seem to know the way as one’s fingers do on the piano when one has been learning a piece by heart. I can see nothing on the ground or in my mind; but I’m quite sure we’re getting close to Aladar and Franz.”

A chill dawn wind slanted across the reeds. They shivered and clashed together, breaking the edge of silence. The sound spread further and further in ever widening circles and increasing volume until all the world of water weeds and rushes quivered and sang together. A bird cried out, hard and shrill, as if at the approach of an enemy. Another and another bird stirred from its sleep and called, but now less fearfully, as if each cry gave the next bird more courage.

The mist thinned into a desolate featureless greyness. As suddenly as the chorus had risen, the birds' voices sank into silence, but now the silence pressed less heavily upon the earth, as if it were thinned out by some unseen presence behind it; as the driving mist was thinned out by the light of the rising sun.

“The false dawn,” Ida murmured.

Water sprang up between tufts of thick grasses, dragging at their reluctant feet. They could hear the faint lapping of the lake against the reeds.

Ida lifted her torch three times, calling each time with the shrill cry of a water bird. A voice answered them directing them towards where a boat lay in the weeds. At last Mark made out its firm black shadow a few feet away from him. He lifted Ida bodily, and carried her over the mud and icy water now reaching to his chest. She lay huddled at the bottom of the boat without a sign of life. Mark couldn't help thinking, as he clambered over the side of the boat after Ida, how much simpler it would be if she were really dead. Then he would have had nothing to fear. But he knew she was not dead. People can be without food or warmth—hope or kindness—without any sort of security; they can have forgotten comfort; and beauty can have become an idle word to them—and yet they go on living. Time indeed has very little to do with living except at its beginning or near its end. Mark had a curious lightheaded feeling that Time might lift dramatically as the mist was actually lifting, and show an unimaginable world. The past—the present—the future—spread round him as a static thing—not to be divided; and yet he had divided it by his decision to return. He had moved his future and Ida's—as the dawn wind was moving the mist away from the land.

“You were gone a long while,” Aladar said to Mark when they had negotiated the difficult passage between the reeds and were safely out on the wide empty lake. “We said to each other—Franz and I—a rare joke, wouldn't it be, if they never came back?”

Chapter 30

Mark had never been to Berlin before. He had never wanted to go there, even before the Nazis laid their spell upon the city. Now that it rose up all round him, bustling, self-determined, ordered, slumless, with that formidable strength which comes from a will unsustained by imagination, he found himself disliking it even more than he had expected to dislike it.

No exquisite churches expressed worship for something unseen; no civic or private architecture revealed a love of human beings and their homes. In all Berlin there were no secret pockets of beauty. The men who lived in these featureless strong houses had never felt sufficient pride and admiration for the human spirit to give it a fitting home. No poet of theirs had cried aloud, "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty!" Rather the men who had been their leaders in thought and action had flogged the Berliners on, with a desperate sense of ambition to become something other than man—something dominating, and of such cruel strength that those with a greater power of creative activity might be driven into slavery by them.

The Nazis had done very little to change Berlin outwardly; but they had sucked it dry of what spiritual liveliness it had once had.

The people who pushed forcefully past Mark in the streets were resolute, but subdued. It seemed to Mark that they were determined to do—but did not like doing—the jobs forced upon them by their Leader.

Victory after victory had made them surer of themselves than they had ever been, and yet had left them even more joyless.

It was as if they already knew that nothing in their inner lives could be enriched or released by victory over their brother man.

Mark found Pirschl's flat without difficulty; it was in an old house on the Schieffedam, more picturesque than anything he had yet seen. When he told a shifty-eyed concierge through a grille that he was Herr Pirschl's brother, the door was opened for him hurriedly, and shut hurriedly behind him.

“Third floor back!” the concierge told him in a surly tone, speaking over his shoulder.

There was not, Mark gathered, quite so much honour in being Pirschl’s brother as he had expected.

He knocked several times on the door, waiting in vain for an answer; tried the latch, found the door unlocked and walked in. He found himself in a big untidy studio, with traces of luxury, but no comforts. It was not empty. Sitting hunched up in a corner by an unlit stove, was a self-absorbed, derelict-looking creature, whom Mark could not at first believe to be Pirschl. Yet he knew, after a moment or two, that it could be no one else. Pirschl looked like one of those buildings that has received a direct hit—and yet kept its outside walls. The hollowness was within. His piercing myopic eyes were veiled and dull. He looked as if he no longer saw or heard or felt anything in the whole world. He stared up at Mark for a long time, giving him no sign of recognition. At last, brushing his forehead with a wavering hand, as if to recapture a vanished memory, he said slowly beneath his breath:

“I know you. You are Anton? My *brother* Anton—aren’t you?”

Mark nodded and sat down on an upturned box beside Pirschl. Mark said nothing for a moment or two, partly because he saw that this Pirschl was too weak and exhausted to take in anything quickly, and because he suddenly knew that he must reverse their roles. Mark had expected support, sympathy, an intense and lively interest and above all guidance in this unknown and perilous city ruled by mysterious monsters. Now these things, if they were to come at all, must come from Mark himself.

Pirschl went on looking at him with his dimmed eyes. “Yes, yes,” he said hesitatingly, “it all comes back to me now—on the mountains that day—how we chose it! They had not struck then, not at you, not at France, nor at me! I remember now—my brother Anton! Only then you were to be mad—and I was to be sane! Now it’s the other way round, brother Anton, you must be sane—for if I’m anything at all, and I’m almost nothing now, why then I hope I’m mad! Yes, I hope I’m mad! Only I still fear I’m sane!”

“What has happened to you?” Mark asked him in a low voice.

The studio was empty—the windows were all shut, the roof on which they opened showed nothing but chimney pots. Yet Pirschl looked round the room carefully before he spoke, as if the very dust and the shadows might have ears.

“They took Anna,” Pirschl said after a long pause. Slowly he struggled to his feet, and crawled from canvas to canvas, each one with its face to the wall, until he produced the one he wanted. He set the portrait on an empty easel with unfumbling practised hands, where it could catch the best light. A gaunt, angular, middle-aged woman looked out of the picture, with powerful, well-made hands lying open in her lap.

Even if the artist had wanted the slickness of beauty, there was none of it in his model. Yet Pirschl had got something into the portrait which must have been in the woman herself—something true and strong. Gazing at its strange unlovely pattern, Mark thought to himself—“That ugly woman must have been a good sort.”

“That’s Anna,” Pirschl explained briefly, crawling back to his seat. “She was my friend. She did a lot for me one way and another. I was used to her. I could paint while she was in the room. You know, it’s funny, but most women are too present—you can’t work in their company. They get in your way. They have to be looked at, or catered for, one way or another. But most of the time I forgot Anna was there. I made her sit to me sometimes; she had good bones and had once been a figure model. I saw her that way—the way she is in my picture—you’d say she was good, wouldn’t you? Well, she *was* good, and when a woman is like that—she’s paintable.

“We ran across each other when we were both down and out, so we just tramped off together a little drunk, and with our pockets empty. That began it. We’d been together two years when they took her.”

“Why did they take her?” Mark questioned.

Pirschl shrugged his massive shoulders. “It’s a long story,” he said at last, “and I’ve forgotten most of it, sitting here and going over it so often. Have you noticed that, Anton, the oftener you go over things the more you forget? Oh, you make up a lot sometimes, I know instead, you plaster it over and embroider it with wish dreams—all that you might have said or done—and didn’t—but the thing in itself fades out—you forget the way it really happened, while it was happening, and the way you couldn’t do anything—but let it come! The slap of the wave before it rolls you over and over—you forget that!”

“But I thought—we all thought—the Nazis were such friends of yours,” Mark expostulated. “Why did they want to do you such a bad turn—what harm had Anna done?”

Pirschl gave a curious mirthless sound—half sob, half laugh. “Harm—friends——!” he said. “What rot you snivelling democrats talk! This is a Dictator country—German or Russian—there are no friends left when man can torture man! They took Anna to find out what I was up to. I don’t see Hitler now—but he may have given the order. He’s not a bad sort in his way—but he’d skin his own grandmother alive to find out which way a carrier pigeon flew if he wanted the message. Anyhow, I’ve lost the right of access to him for a long time now—he’s been too busy with all his victories. He’s got all the world on his back now. Then the Picture Censor, I told you before, he’s always been against me—he visits artists to see if they’re painting the kind of picture Hitler and the Gang call ‘art’. He told me some time ago that I could only paint if I didn’t paint what I see. At first I didn’t care. I painted for the Nazis what they wanted—and for decent human intelligences on the sly, what they wanted. Those are the canvases you see stacked with their faces to the wall. They’re pictures. The rest I sold were just the paint thrown on to the canvas—with my knack of catching a likeness if I wanted to catch it. I daresay you won’t believe me, but I’ve lost the knack. I haven’t anything left now, my eye’s stopped seeing. It isn’t as you might suppose because I did pot-boilers. I did them with my tongue in my cheek for ages and the moment I took it out again, I could paint my real pictures better than ever. I never lied to myself, I always knew exactly which *were* pot-boilers. It was when I found there wasn’t anyone who wanted real pictures any more, that I suddenly couldn’t paint real or unreal ones—my eyes can’t see! It’s a complete black-out. Not a soul dared sit for me or look at my real stuff—the whole of Berlin has gone picture blind—then Munich—then at last, the last of all the Rhineland—where I took my pictures secretly and knew there were people who knew—and now there aren’t any. Not enough of a person to go out and weep bitterly—because he’s denied his Lord! It’s not that my pictures were so damned good, but they were the way things looked to me. They were honest pictures.”

“Not even other artists?” Mark asked incredulously.

“That’s just it,” Pirschl muttered, “there *are* no other artists! We’ve got to paint the way Hitler sees things or not at all. No one can create anything except Hitler; and he’s not an artist! He doesn’t create—he destroys! There mustn’t be an idea in the whole world that isn’t born out of that little louse’s uneducated mind. So I’ve gone blind. Something’s happened to me, I can’t explain, but my curiosity’s gone. In a sense I see you—I know what I’ve taught myself to see and think about you—but I can’t draw you, something stops me. There’s a clutch. Not for love or money can I put paint to canvas, and that’s made me suspect. They think I’m obstructing art. ‘Non-co-

operative' is the word. That's why they took Anna. They took her to find out why I'd stopped painting!"

There was a long silence. Pirschl looked as wooden as the chair he sat on; Mark too felt a curiously lifeless, dispossessed feeling. It was as if only Anna, looking straight at them out of Pirschl's luminous canvas, held any life. She was so alive in her simplicity in the way she held her generous hard-worked hands—that Mark, gazing forlornly at her, almost felt as if she would get up in a minute or two, out of the canvas, and begin getting them their supper.

By and by Pirschl stood up and shuffled towards the canvas, picking the portrait up and once more setting it with its face to the wall.

"I don't like looking at her," he explained shamefacedly. "I always see her. They tortured her to death. I know just how because I've watched them do it to other people. I don't suppose she died soon, either, because Anna was tough. She never opened her mouth from the time they took her—except to scream of course—and they got no good by it. One of the torturers is a friend of mine. He told me—he said they'd never had such a case, and that I might well be proud of her. But of course I knew already that she hadn't told, or I wouldn't be here; or you either. She knew all my secrets."

"But—but——" Mark protested, "wouldn't any of them help you—if Hitler didn't? Would none of the others? Why, I thought—I thought you knew all of them so well and could always get protection!"

"Protection," said Pirschl, "you ought to learn the language! Protection exists only as long as you're of use to the Reich and not one instant longer. I was their artist—yes, but if I'm not doing my bit—for whatever reason—why should they do theirs? Now I shall starve to death. I shan't bother about killing myself, though I shall, if they come to question me—I've got my pill. But suicide isn't necessary; and it gives them satisfaction. Suicide does their work for them, so I won't do that if I can avoid it! A man starved to death, who's a friend of Hitler's, once his favourite painter—that won't look so good, will it? You see, I've thought it all out. It's all I can do against them now that I'm suspect."

"Oh, no! No!" Mark urged. "There is Father Martin—Ida—and me—you needn't starve to death, Pirschl—we can surely manage something between us!"

"That wouldn't do at all," Pirschl exclaimed with sudden energy. "Because I'm now useless, should I make *you* useless? For perhaps two or

three nights you're safe here, because I've already accounted for you—you're my mad brother allowed out on a trial visit; but I daren't do anything more to help you, since I'm suspect. Passively till I'm dead—I still help our cause a little because there is a good roof behind me to escape from. Men come through this room even now—but very seldom and the next may be the last. I just sit here with the door open—I don't say anything, and I've never been told to lock my door. If they can get into this room without the concierge catching them, then they are welcome to get out of it. I shan't starve to death in a hurry. I'll last your time."

"I'm going out now to get some food," Mark told him resolutely, "and I shall leave money here with you when I go, and contrive to send more somehow later on. There's no need for you to starve, Pirschl! Any day something fresh might happen—any day your gift might come back!"

Pirschl shook his head with a mirthless grin. "You Island optimists!" he said. "Any day you think you can stub your toe against the Kingdom of Heaven lying on your doorstep. But the Kingdom of Heaven lies on no man's doorstep—it's only to be got by violence—and very few have the strength to get it. I'm an artist and arts are alive—and can be starved to death. My art is starved to death, and if you think I mind starving without it—you're a fool. Why should I live if I can't paint? There's no one to paint *for*—that's what's killed my painting! Besides, take the practical side of it—you *can't* send me money! All my letters are opened. If I go out I am followed. Everyone who comes into this house is watched. Some of our Runners bribe the concierge to get in—but he'll betray them one of these days if the Nazis offer him a higher bribe. Remember you and I have got to be frugal—there's only one thing to live on—and one thing to live for—to kill Nazis. We destroy them, or they destroy us! But go out and buy your food—but don't bring back too much or it will look suspicious. You're a kindly young man, and in return I promise not to start dying again till I get rid of you!"

Pirschl laughed again, this time it was a real laugh more like his old laughter; even his blank eyes had a fugitive smile in them.

Mark went cautiously downstairs and into the street. At one end of it there was a kiosk where men bought newspapers. The man who sold them watched the street. He watched Mark go in and out of little shops. He watched his return to Pirschl's home. If Mark had gone further afield another watchman would have appeared at his heels, and followed him.

The steady, slow-moving water of the canal accompanied Mark like a friendly animal. No one could leap at him out of its inert but unthreatening element. It held no eyes like the houses looking down on Mark, and no ambushes. Men could not walk on it, behind other men, to betray them.

Every noise in the street, and every silence between the noises, spoke to Mark now of danger.

The faces at every corner, the possible traps in every doorway; the chances and opportunities of each corner of the deadly city, were solid with threats. Perhaps Mark had never really feared the Nazis personally before. They had always seemed to him the figures in a nightmare dreamed by others. He had had his moments of panic, but his fears had never controlled him. His inner self had been as it were still an Eton master in an English school. He had always felt that there was some way out of the difficulties that surrounded him. His pleasant schoolboy code had provided him support enough against every evil hitherto through which he valorously struggled. But now he suddenly felt as well as knew that he was in a country where men tortured women to death in order to find out the secrets of the men they loved. He knew that his own clean, fastidious and hitherto private soul, could be torn apart, and stared at by the eyes of Public Torturers, and that not one thought behind his eyes was safe from such blasphemous intrusions. Mark had watched Pirschl's twitching face when he spoke of Anna; and he found himself believing in Anna as he had believed in Lisa.

It seemed to Mark that Anna's silent ghost was with him as he walked the crowded streets, warning him not against danger—that she took for granted—but against thinking that there was any ultimate escape, other than in the courage of his own soul. Had he enough courage, Mark asked himself, as he turned back into the blind pale street, where every footstep he took was being watched and noted down—to risk what Anna had taken?

Where had Anna's courage come from—where had Lisa's? It had not come from hate—though to hate was so spectacular; and so hard. Lisa had died for Mark—Anna had died for Pirschl—simply for love.

For love—Felix, too, had risked all he had—and at last his life. For love Pirschl had let his art go blind; and Ida had gone back to slavery. For love—Mark knew that he must go back to Pirschl's house and meet whatever came of it.

Chapter 31

Scraps of the old Pirschl floated back to Mark, over the unaccustomed food and talk; but they were infrequent, while for hours Pirschl sat sunk in silence, letting Mark come and go upon the errands of the day, or clean up and tidy the disordered studio. His mind seemed close shut to everything but its own bitter contents. It had ceased to move in any other direction or to react to any other stimulant. At night he lay, still fully dressed, upon a divan, fixed and silent, with wide open eyes staring sleeplessly into the dark.

It seemed to Mark as if Pirschl never stopped listening. Once he explained to Mark that since he kept poison on him, in a flash he could be safe for ever; but he could only count on this security by listening to every sound in order to select the instant of danger.

His whole life had shrunk into that of a mouse, who knows that a cat sits at the entrance of his mouse-hole. It is no good offering the mouse anything outside of his mouse-hole because he knows that the cat would get him before he could take it. Nor could Mark do anything to lighten the stubborn panic of his friend for he knew very well that the cat was really there. The Gestapo was watching Pirschl and would continue to watch him, though quite probably they would do nothing else till the end came. Perhaps they had received orders *not* to catch Pirschl out—unless indeed he made any real attempt to get out. Where he was, useless—hopeless, exposed and under their microscope—was exactly where they wished to have him.

To have publicly penalized him, or to have made away with him in any suspicious manner, would not have suited the Nazis' book. This was a man who had been Hitler's favourite. A quiet death of his own choosing, a public funeral and the opportunity for the Führer to appear again as the patron of the arts, sorrowing over his artist friend's grave—was exactly what was wanted. They waited for Pirschl to choose the date for his own funeral; but they would do nothing to hurry it. Nevertheless on the third night of Mark's visit something happened which brought Pirschl out of his mouse-hole.

It was dusk of a cold November day, Mark had brought fuel and food from the outer world; and had just succeeded in producing a good fire in the

stove. Pirschl sat close to it, warmed, but still sunk in his panic vigilance. Suddenly they both heard a faint scratching sound at the door; and then three distinct light taps followed by a fourth. The latch lifted, and a man crept in noiselessly on stockinged feet, closing the door softly after him.

Pirschl stared intensely at him; and then motioned towards the stove.

The cold sweat of agonizing fear stood out in beads on the man's forehead; and as he stretched his ice-cold hands towards the stove they shook and trembled.

"I'm on the run," he said at last hardly above a whisper, "but they didn't see me come in. I took off my boots on the stairs because last time they creaked. It's dark outside. If I might warm myself only—and perhaps if you can spare anything—eat? I must not stay long, I have an appointment." Pirschl nodded; and Mark obeyed his gesture, and brought in food from the tiny kitchenette. The man sat between them, eating as if famished; but he never lost control of his actions. Every few moments he stopped eating, looked round him and listened, and then went on again tearing off the food and swallowing it—without tasting.

"Is the roof way out still safe?" he asked at last, when he had eaten half of what Mark had brought him, and stowed the other half away in his rucksack. "I'd like a wash first if I dared take it. Could you give me enough warning?" "I shall hear them enter," Pirschl told him. "There's no lift. You saw for yourself; and the stairs are many and steep. If they come by the roof, the window is latched this side. Also I listen both ways, always. I don't go out any more. But I fancy the roof is still safe. From the third house left from here—you can get down by the fire escape. If you're in trouble there's a second floor window always open. The concierge there is one of our own men; but he's been in camp. He mightn't be able to stand it again—still he always keeps the window open." The Runner nodded and slipped into the bathroom.

Pirschl motioned to Mark to keep perfectly still.

They sat without moving till every sound in the house began to come through to Mark. He heard the door open and shut in the basement; he heard a tap drip in a distant room. He heard interminable terrifying steps on the stairs. Voices began to penetrate the floor and the walls. They were without words; but in the intensity of his listening stillness Mark found he could distinguish the rooms from which they came.

Time seemed to have disappeared with the Runner; but when he came back into the room again, time went on as if it had been like the Gestapo waiting for him. He sat down between Pirschl and Mark, moved back into his chair, and relaxing suddenly, he fell fast asleep. Mark saw that he was a much younger man than he had thought, and that if he had not been half famished and unshaven he would have had a charming civilized face. Barely five minutes passed before he sprang to his feet again, roused by some inner voice; and made for the window. The black-out curtain billowed into the room for a brief moment, and swung back again, as the window closed behind him. Pirschl turned his head, and watched him go without speaking, but the roused human look that had sprung to meet this visitor, remained on his face. When Mark asked him if he knew the man well he answered in his old natural voice. "Well enough! He's a reliable fellow that Runner of ours—from Rotterdam. All his family were wiped out so he took to the underground. He's done a lot of work. Freedom stations; messages, helping escaped prisoners, or guiding airmen over the frontier. There's no end to his jobs, except the one end, that hasn't come yet. But you mustn't stay here much longer Anton now—it won't be safe. Why did you come? Didn't I ask you? I forget. Since Anna died I forget everything—except not to be taken alive by them—that I never forget!"

As Mark told him the story of the Spanish horses, Pirschl leaned forward and listened with eyes that spoke at last.

"Well," he said when Mark had finished. "I am sorry about the horses! Something was made out of them—something beautiful—between a man and a horse. The music too was part of it—but it was more than music. It was a sort of pattern of life. Well—it is broken up, as are all the other patterns civilization tried to teach our poor race, and you, brother Anton! I can see you must not at present go back to Ida and the Schloss. There are—as I see it—two courses open to you—to get back direct to Innsbruck—and report to Father Martin. That is quite possible—and it is probably the safer course—or you could also get back to Innsbruck and report to Father Martin, by a longer and more dangerous route—you could for a few weeks until things have had time to take shape at the Schloss—be one of our Runners. We need new ones all the time, and we have very few who are like you, unknown and therefore not hunted. There are many friends of Freedom, connected in a loose organization, even in this country that chose the Nazis for its doom. In each town; and in many villages there is someone who passes on messages or who helps the hunted. We even try to save Jews; and some we have saved—though it gets all the time more difficult. Each of the Friends of Freedom lets the central organization here in Berlin know what

he can do for us. A room a man can sleep in—or just a meal and a window as I have here. These Friends do not know each others' names—nor the names of the Runners—but the organization can trace its workers if it is necessary. Sometimes we are betrayed by a Runner, or by one of those whom we think is a Friend—but not often—and no one person can betray much, since he does not know much. It is not necessary to take money with you. Each of us gives what he has. If you should be caught and questioned you have only to admit that you are my mad brother allowed out on a visit to me, but that finding I could not do more for you, you took to the road again and began to steal. It is really quite safe to be a common criminal in Germany to-day. Safer than anything else. They will put you in prison without torture where the Gestapo will not trouble to get at you.” “But Ida,” Mark objected. “If a message came from her to me here, I would receive it?” Pirschl nodded. “But she is not likely to send you a message,” he said after a pause. “She told you to come here—because she wanted to get you away from her—until she found out if she was burned too badly by her escapade. Well—when she *has* found out—she will consult Father Martin, who already knows that I am no longer a good cover for messages, and she will take for granted that I will have found for you some safer place than under my roof.” “But anything might happen to her! *She* may not be safe,” Mark objected. “Yes—anything,” agreed Pirschl grimly, “but she will be no safer for your knowledge!”

They were both silent for a long time. Mark considered if one day upon his own heart would fall the weight of Pirschl's silence; peopled with unendurable images. Before he talked with Pirschl Mark had believed that Fear was the worst experience of a man's soul; but now he knew that hopeless certainty is worse than any fear. “Let me know where one of your organizers lives,” Mark said at last. “I will act as a Runner on my way back to Innsbruck.”

“Good,” Pirschl said. “To-morrow I will give you a card of appointment with my name on it. It will admit you to see the consultant of the Berliner Spital. Even if you should be recognized as my brother rather than myself, and this is unlikely, it will not be important since you *are* my brother; and we can easily have the same disease. It is syphilis our disease, and although neither of us has it, the consultant will behave as if we had and could state if necessary that we were both his patients. But it will not be necessary! Our Herr Professor Hofmann is among those who have never been and are not likely to be suspect. A pure Aryan and highly useful to the Nazis, though less so than they imagine!”

In the morning Mark once more urged Pirschl to try to escape. "Couldn't you come with me?" he argued. "Is there no way in which you could get across the frontier as other men do? You have helped so many others, why can you not help yourself?" Pirschl shook his head. "If you are known, you will be hunted," he said drily. "The Führer's friend could not escape notice. Concern yourself only with what is possible. Believe me I am best exactly where I am. If you wish I will take some of your money. Even if I do not use it for food, it may come in useful for someone else. We can never have enough money for our cause—for few of the rich belong to it. Perhaps you receive enough for yourself through Father Martin?" Mark nodded. "I can always get more," he said, "but what will they think—Ida and Father Martin—when they know I have left you caught in this trap?"

"They will understand very well," Pirschl said drily. "Father Martin will think God is responsible for me; and Ida will know that since I cannot paint I shall be happier dead. Perhaps it is a little unfortunate that I should have waked up again so thoroughly before dying. It is a long process at my age—and I had not meant to wake up. But on the other hand I am glad that you waked me for I was always interested in your part of our experiment. I will tell you this. Your face has improved since you lived with lunatics—it has become more serene. Now I should find you much more interesting to paint. Perhaps you have learned to feel more than you once felt. Believe me the English make a mistake about emotion, it should be visible and expressed. Taboos on the human heart are more dangerous than any risk we run by using our emotions. Sensation is the life of man; it is his actual energy. To suppress it, is to lose creative power! I should like to paint you now—not because you are more brave. I daresay you were always brave enough; but because you are more friendly!"

They parted early the next morning. Pirschl grasped Mark's hand with a long firm pressure; but he kept his other hand close to the pocket which held his ultimate safety.

Mark stopped at the door and looked back at him; but Pirschl did not return his gaze; he had sunk into his chair by the stove; and had already begun listening.

Chapter 32

The Frauenkirche was ice cold but so crammed with people on Christmas Eve, for the midnight Mass, that Mark found himself pressed close against the pillar near which he had managed to find a standing place.

Very few of the assembled Munichers were devout or regular Catholics but the same passionate instinctive longing had brought them together late at night, into this freezing building, in order to celebrate the birth of a Christ, all of whose thoughts and actions they had been trained to repudiate.

Consciously, or for the most part unconsciously, they came together because here for this hour, and in this building, the burden of their State slavery was lifted off them.

It was not only that the church was a momentary refuge from the Gestapo; but apart from security from actual danger, they were being released from the tightening pressure of the State upon their private lives. Husbands could be aware of the love they still felt for their wives, while families became more certain of the tie that bound them together; friends stood side by side with friends, without fear of betrayal.

God asked nothing of them. He made no exactions or inquisitions. In their Father's house there were no distinctions, no penalties, and no sacrifices but His own. Here they were free. They could come and go as they chose. They could keep their minds idle; or dream forbidden dreams. While they knelt upon the cold stone floor they could take counsel with an Invisible Presence, who would keep their secrets.

Only a few hours before, Mark had arrived in Munich, after six weeks of secret underground existence. A lifetime divided his present self from the Mark who had said good-bye to Pirschl in Berlin. His life as a Runner was so absorbing, so swift, so uncertain, so utterly unlike anything he had ever dreamed of *as* life, that he found it hard to force himself back into a reasoning human being—part of a whole—in which religion and humanity had once seemed natural to him.

This pillar against which he now leaned was his next port of call. When the service was over it was here that someone would speak to him, and give him shelter for what was left of the night, and his orders for the next part of the journey. This was as much as Mark expected now of security—to be found—to be told where to go—to be sent further on.

Even direction eluded him. He might be sent to a place, and find himself travelling in an opposite direction in order to reach it. He might be told to find a person whom he had never seen, and must never mention nor describe; and when he found him, be prepared to risk his life to save him. Perhaps the person he was to find in Munich was pressing against him now, or kneeling before the brilliantly lit altar; and yet not one face in all the hundreds round him was familiar to him.

The Mass had begun. Priests came and went, their white vestments stiff with gold, carrying on the rhythmic pattern of their ancient ceremony. Few of the congregation took an active part in the service. They were attending to something within themselves, released by a Power that was beyond themselves. Many of them had no more definite faith in God or another world than Mark; but never in all their lives had they so wanted to believe in God, and in another world. Mark understood and shared this feeling; he too longed to know that there was something beyond this cold and senseless slavery of the German Reich—this endless dwarfing grip that squeezed out more and more all the beauty, all the meaning of human life.

Here in this church there was still beauty. Here was an idea if not a reality—which lived and moved and had its being apart from all earthly authorities. Here in the Frauenkirche was something greater and older than any State authority. Here, and here only, could those who had so helplessly dedicated themselves to an idol, feel free as only the sons of God are free.

The deep drone of the organ, the occasional piercing sweetness of a boy's voice, "the blessed mutter of the Mass" restored to those who listened, a little of their lost self-respect. A spirit penetrated their passive aching hearts, touching them anew with hope, perhaps with generosity, before it let them go. It flashed through Mark's mind that man can never be free unless what he worships is also free.

Hitler, in forcing his gigantic megalomania upon the people of Germany, had driven a whole country mad; now, just for an hour, Mark could watch sanity stir and flicker in the faces round him, as he had often watched it stir in the faces of the insane at the Schloss, when Ida momentarily roused them into a sense of their human brotherhood.

Here and there in the Frauenkirche a face dropped its masklike rigidity and became touched with beauty. Mothers smiled at their children; husbands looked at their wives with a protective tenderness they had long hidden even from themselves. Old men and women relaxed completely, as if what they had come for was simply to cease to struggle in the coils of this new Laocoön.

Some of the congregation still kept their look of strain and tension as if trying to get from what was taking place before them, fresh strength to carry on what they still thought of as the highest of human duties—obedience to their Führer. Only the young—and Mark noticed with surprise that there were many young—did not want to be released from their burden. They loved it and longed only to press forward with its weight upon their shoulders until they found themselves conquerors of the world. They saw no reason why they should not harness the Unseen Powers to their brave New World.

It was in fact what they were there for. Their Führer believed implicitly in a German God; and these blind children thought that Christianity might well develop further in such a direction under Hitler's guidance. Then they could carry on whatever was precious and sacred in the religion of their childhood, while giving up nothing of their new powers and responsibilities to the State. The young who were in the Frauenkirche were busy weaving the Christmas Mass into the Nazi pattern. Was it altogether their fault, Mark asked himself, that they had never learned from their parents, or from the priests swaying before the altar, the indelible pattern of an opposite logic?

What did they think Christianity was? What had he, Mark himself, thought it was, until he found his life—his very consciousness forced wide open at the mercy of his fellow men—who had forgotten mercy?

This ceremony in the churches unvitalized by action, was but a symbol of a fiery truth. The handful of stubborn people working in the underground movement, whose lives took place on a peak of courage and self-sacrifice, where all the values of the human spirit were heightened into heroic virtues—these men were the real Christians! They loved their brothers as themselves, or Mark himself would not have been alive leaning against a pillar in the church of the Frauenkirche. In the life he had been leading for the last few weeks, there was no time to show emotion or to express the bonds of fellowship in words; but every act of a man or woman for another was a sacrament.

Nor were their enemies the Nazis nearly as implacable as these men and women were implacable. No weapon in all the savage armouries of the Nazis was as terrible as the weapon of the spirit. The Nazi hate was a feeble emotion compared to such men's love.

This feeling, Mark thought, was the best and truest feeling he had ever known. It burned in his heart when he thought of a man forced into the bestial cruelty of a concentration camp, or publicly disgraced by a senseless racial slur. Mark knew now for the first time what Christianity was—it was every virtue, every emotion, every instinct that drew a man nearer to his fellows. It was worth all that he had suffered in these last weeks to understand it. He had learned to take food, sleep and warmth as only occasional necessities, and practically everything else as luxuries. He had become so inured to risks that they merely heightened his senses. Dry bread or a cold potato had become as pleasant to him as a dinner at the Ritz. But beyond all the miracles of his changed habits was the fact that he felt men were his brothers. It was this feeling that he recognized in the church tonight. It gleamed on the faces of those who were released from the Nazi madness.

“We are here,” they seemed to say, “because after all we know that we belong to each other. Because we are children of the same Father. We are not alone! We are not cut off here in this church from the other children. We are not only Germans any more!”

Had they known that there were any Jews there—as indeed there very probably were—these people would have pressed closer to hide them from the Nazi-minded; and would have prayed that they might not be found.

Perhaps the young ones might not have understood. They might have acted as Paul would have acted before the vision of Damascus; but they too, as the Host was held up for one brief moment to bless them, all alike sank on their knees in unconscious solidarity.

They may not have believed that God was in the action. Perhaps they were merely being kind to their parents, or carrying on an old childhood's custom, but for a moment it seemed to Mark as if a great wave of common feeling surged through the church in which the voluntary breaking of a life, to give more life to the world, was for ever justified.

A long curious sigh passed over the church from the lips of that helpless multitude, perhaps a sigh of sorrow, perhaps merely of cold and weariness; or of wonder what the next year might bring forth before the Christ Child

came again. It sounded like the sigh that comes from a sinking ship, when the ocean swallows the living into its restless grave.

One by one the sacristan extinguished the altar lights. The great doors opened and the icy air of the dark night streamed through the church. The dangerous streets swallowed the worshippers into their separate lives.

The service was over, the Communion between hearts that for an hour had become human, had already passed. Mark was a fugitive again; he pressed himself uneasily into the shadows, hoping that no one would notice him before his summons came.

At last a voice whispered close to him: "I am ready, my son. Come with me!" And Mark followed one of the priests who had been officiating at the Mass into the sacristy, where he was to sleep, until Christmas Day began.

Chapter 33

S now was falling fast when Mark left the Frauenkirche. The heavy cold of dawn bit its way treacherously into his face and hands. The cold of Munich comes both from above and below the city; the valley through which it runs is flat and intersected with snow-fed streams from the mountains; and from the mountains themselves visiting blasts break through the penetrating river fogs, and edge the valley's whole temperature with fury. It was difficult to move, or breathe, or see, against the sudden onslaught of the wind. Yet in its brief pauses Mark caught glimpses of the icy splendour the elements had poured upon the empty streets. The pompous heavy houses, copies of Italian or French Renaissance Palaces forced into Teutonic blocks of stone, were now re-shaped by a fantastic covering of snow into forms and texture more beautiful than even their stately originals.

The sky, laced with puffs of blue-grey clouds, was colourless, and so clear that Mark felt as if the earth was a chance atom of dirt flung upwards by a careless child momentarily staining the lucid air through which it would soon fall, and disappear for ever. He felt as if no material thing could long exist in this rootless light of dawn. He himself moved over the light powder snow like a soundless ghost. The city slept, and all its hideous secrets and cruel sorrows, were as silent as if they had been dropped into a grave.

Before he left the church an anxious, sleepy priest had forced into his hand the address of his next contact. Trains and trams were no longer safe for young men who were not soldiers, and who might be hauled off and examined for registration at any moment. Mark must go on foot to find a man called Karl Reuss of whom the priest knew nothing except his name.

Reuss lived in a cheap flat in a suburb beyond the Siegestor—so far out that it was more like a village than a suburb. Mark must see that he was not followed the priest urged, and on no account come near the Frauenkirche again.

From time to time Mark crouched into a doorway for shelter, and looked behind him; but the broad avenue was always empty, except for the small ice-clad trees, and the scurrying thick snowflakes which grew brighter and more transparent as the light increased. Mark passed the university, and

glanced across the street through the wide gates of the English garden, where everything was wreathed and garlanded with snow. He went through the Siegestor, and at last found the short street of modern working-class flats where his new contact lived.

In answer to his muffled knocking, the door was flung wide open; and Mark found himself looking into the face of a fair young giant with a composed and friendly countenance, and remarkably steady blue eyes. “*Hier—Reuss!*” the young man told him, with a sudden brilliant smile. “You come from Mass at the Frauenkirche?”

Mark nodded. His cheeks were too stiff with cold for speech.

“Enter,” Karl Reuss told him, “my wife will soon have something warm ready for you to drink.”

Mark found himself in a neat tiny hall that led direct into a large living-room, one door of which opened on to a minute kitchen and bathroom; while another on the left of the hall led into a room not much larger than a cupboard which contained a divan bed for the Reusses’ only child; and a desk and books for the master of the house. The living-room was evidently where Reuss and his wife slept, ate and received their guests. It was scrupulously clean and tidy. The whole flat was in its simple way beautiful with intelligent cleanliness and order.

The sudden warmth and stillness and the relief from struggling with the elements made Mark feel dizzy and helpless. He was thankful when his host pushed him into a chair close to the stove and left him alone. He could hear the child ask her father eagerly, “Has the new Santa Klaus come?”

“Yes,” her father told her, “but he is too cold to talk just yet. I have put him by the stove to thaw; wait a little longer before you see him. When he has had his breakfast you shall go in and have yours with him!”

Apparently the little girl agreed to her father’s suggestion, and they fell to whispering Christmas jokes to each other. Mark heard a gay ringing laugh, which ran on and on in his heart with a curious beauty. This was something he had not met in all his dangerous contacts—a home where a child could be happy—a man who met his eyes with absolute serenity—and now a young woman, who, less handsome than her tall husband, but full of the same sense of pleasant welcome, entered from the kitchen carrying a daintily spread tray. A vision floated before his dazzled eyes, coffee, rolls and butter, an egg and a spray of holly. “Happy Christmas!” his hostess said to Mark, as if such a thing existed. He stood up to greet her, and tried to

smile at her with his stiffened lips, but she pushed him back into his chair, and said quickly, "No! No! You are frozen and starved with cold—please do not move *Mein Herr!* We are so pleased to have you with us on Christmas morning! You come like a Father Christmas and we have explained to Rosa—our little one—that you are Father Christmas out of a job. Everything has been taken away from you—even your reindeer! And it is we who are to give you the presents!"

Frau Reuss put the little tray on a shining glass table beside Mark and vanished back into a kitchen very little larger than she was, closing the door carefully behind her, so that Mark could eat in peace.

The aroma of the coffee penetrated his whole being. The beauty of the simple room, the easy kindness of his young hosts brought tears to his eyes. It was odd to want to cry because he was happy; it was odder still to feel that the kindness of two perfect strangers should make him feel so happy. He had brought deadly danger into their home; every minute he stayed here he was a menace to them, yet far from wanting to get rid of him, they were as delighted to receive him as if he had brought them a fortune. Rosa, when she was allowed to appear, dressed in her best and warmest clothes, was a small unformed image of her father. She looked upon Mark as a promised treat, and had a pair of woollen gloves tied with scarlet ribbon to present to him as a Christmas offering. She and her mother were going out after breakfast to the nearest church, which had a *Krippe*, and after visiting the Christ Child surrounded by His sheep and oxen, and perhaps a camel, they would, she explained, return to cook Christmas dinner for themselves and Mark. Everything for this feast had been bought already; it was to be a dinner full of secrets and surprises, and Rosa, sitting on Mark's knee, whispered the most choice of them from time to time into his ear.

"How can you live like this?" Mark asked Karl Reuss, when Rosa and his wife, accompanied by a new doll clasped to Rosa's bosom, had gone out. "It seems incredible! I did not know anyone in Germany to-day could be so happy—no one at least who believes as you believe!"

Karl Reuss drew at his pipe without speaking, his handsome open face clouded over for a moment. "We must make our own happiness," he said at last. "It is not ready made! It is not easy! Perhaps I could not make it at all without my wife and child. All three of us love each other. My wife Gerda and I are both teachers in the same working-class school not far from here. Rosa has already entered it. We live among our neighbours just as they do. We obey whatever we have to obey. I am perhaps older than you would suppose for I am thirty-eight. My military service is long over, and I am

considered a useful teacher. We are not exceptional in any way—neither enthusiasts nor heretics under the new régime—but fortunately so unimportant that nothing about us is particularly noticeable. But behind our outer life, we keep together an inner one. We know what is true and what is false. Freedom does not change. It has been true for thousands of years—for as long as men knew that there was virtue, and that man even against his desires and his instincts must be free in order to practise it. These virtues—these thoughts we decided were true long ago when we were free to think and to decide, and we cannot change them now just because sixty-five million people suddenly decide that they are true no longer—not if they declare this change a hundred times a day at the top of their voices!”

“But does no one guess what you really think and feel?” Mark asked anxiously. “You, after all, do more than just disagree with the Nazi tenets, or I should not have been sent to you with instructions. Has no one ever discovered your secret activities?”

“We take precautions,” Karl Reuss admitted. “But not too many! We live as openly as we can. But above all we are friendly! In all the group duties which are practised in the Reich to-day—some useful, some even admirable—we play an eager part. We have no enemies. Perhaps we shall not always be as safe as we are to-day for I do not think this war—in spite of all our superficial victories, will end as the Nazis foresee it ending. God forbid that it should! Human virtue would end for ever without freedom. Well—when the defeats which I foresee begin we shall lose all our outward happiness. We shall not have gaiety or Christmas feasts, warmth or beauty for our child, perhaps not even health, certainly not safety. But though we too must join in paying the price of our cruel misadventure, we shall have that happiness we miss now—perhaps the only real one. Since we shall *want* this misadventure to fail! Perhaps we shall have the joy of even having *helped* its failure; above all we shall never for a moment forget that evil such as the Nazi practice would darken the whole earth and blot out the soul of mankind unless it *did* perish. Do you not think as I do?”

“I may think it,” Mark admitted, “but I doubt if I could practise it with such courage!”

Karl Reuss laughed, “And you a Runner!” he exclaimed, “and I a mere stay-at-home! Well, we must not compete over our courage since we have plans to make instead. I am having my holidays and I propose to take a week in which to help you find a little more useful information to carry out of the country. I have an extra pair of skis, and to-morrow an old schoolfellow and myself start out at dawn on an *Ausflug*. All my neighbours know about it—

and you as that old schoolfellow will go to your home from the other side of the mountains—while I return here—when it is safely over. The snow is in the best possible condition, and there is nothing more innocent than snow. Now we study our maps!”

The hours passed like minutes. Rosa and her mother returned from their visit to the *Krippe*, which had fortunately contained even a camel with a black wise man thrown in, beyond Rosa’s expectations, and they prepared the Christmas feast, a few yards away, with little shrieks of joy and excitement.

The cold sun shone into the living-room, bringing out its dainty colours and the sensible contrivances of the simple wooden furniture. A great deal of it, Gerda explained, Karl had made in his spare time; and the rest had been the work of a carpenter friend; while an ironmonger friend had made all the glass and iron tables that were the pride and joy of Gerda’s heart. Her scarlet pots and pans in the little kitchen had come from a summer visit to Holland, where everything to do with food or household comfort was made as bright as tulips. After they had eaten their splendid meal, and every surprise and secret had achieved its full distinction, they went out to the Thiergarten to share Rosa’s Christmas with her favourite animals in the zoo. In the evening, when Rosa had at last fallen asleep, drunk with happiness, the three of them sat round the stove in friendly silence. Mark felt as if he had known Karl and Gerda all his life; their love and their laughter; the little family jokes and the hidden strength that bound them together had all been made his own. He did not want to leave them; still less did he want to take away with him, into danger, the main support and cause of all their happiness. He wondered that Gerda could bear to look at him with such friendly eyes.

“Look here,” he said at last desperately, “now I’ve studied the maps and have more or less got the journey in my mind, couldn’t I go alone?”

Gerda and Karl turned astonished eyes upon him. “Oh, no,” Gerda said quickly, “you see I understand what Karl must do! We have long ago agreed and decided upon it. He makes things as easy as he can for the Runners. In term time naturally he cannot go with them. But now in the holidays, he can see them across the mountains. Besides we have had our Christmas together. That would have been hard to give up! But now we need not feel too unhappy!”

Karl stood up, with his hand resting on his wife’s shoulder. He looked gravely and steadily across at Mark. “We love Germany,” he said firmly. “That may sound strange to you—our Austrian cousin—since we are now

acting against our Government and playing into the hands of our enemies. But even if you were British or Russian I should act the same. To be a German is important perhaps to us still—but to be a human being is far *more* important. Since we love our country and because we love human beings even more, we must fight against the Nazis with all we have. We fought long before the Allies fought against Hitler and we may go on fighting long after they have finished fighting against him. We fight to be free! I was one of the moving radio stations whom the Nazis never caught. We disbanded ourselves when life became impossible, but none of us has changed or stopped fighting. We fight for what we believe is Germany's good. We believe the worst thing that could happen for Germany as for the rest of the world would be her ultimate victory. We know that Germany was never threatened except by herself. Her only danger was that she had not the courage to be friendly with other countries. Instead, force was her religion and her one aim. But force, and the rule of force, is not only the enemy of Germany, it is also the unacknowledged enemy of mankind. Where money rules, when men compete with other men for gain, it is still the enslavement of man himself—that is the goal of such countries! This war will go on until mankind has changed its goal. Yet though all are responsible for a money aim, Germany *alone* is responsible for this outbreak to-day. She more thoroughly—I might say (for we are a conscientious people) more *conscientiously* than any other country—is responsible for training all her people towards aggression.”

“Yes,” Gerda whispered, “we are responsible! But it is terrible how Germany must suffer! All must suffer, but in the end, we shall be the worst sufferers!”

For a while all three of them were silent.

Mark had never thought he could feel sympathy for the country which had so trained itself to destroy the peace and beauty of mankind; but he found that he had begun to understand not only its guilt but its tragedy. He no longer separated Germany from the rest of the world. He could not forget the ugliness and evil in his own country—the tramps on the grass in the London parks—the mindless penal system grinding criminals down into their loveless crimes, punishing children who were the victims of a society that was itself criminal towards its uncared-for young; the base selfishness of a rich country towards those who could find no work because no one made it for them to find. He remembered France selling the freedom of her press; betrayed to her worst enemies by a handful of venal men, who ran all her banks and her chief industries. He remembered America, so great in

potentiality, so blind as to world obligations. He thought of each country not as separate entities any more but as millions of small homes like the one he was in, where families could make happiness out of their personal relationships and spread their knowledge into a unity of human brotherhood. But this splendid education of natural love had been kept as a private business and not understood as the main education of a human being.

There had been no training through homes and schools and colleges, for love, as Hitler had trained the young of the German Reich, for hate.

Christianity had been shrivelled into a dried mummy by the churches till its blood ran no more in its veins. Nothing had taken the place of religion, nothing perhaps could. If there was a law that man should love his neighbour as himself—then the failure to keep that law must result in catastrophe and would result in eternal catastrophe unless the law was kept.

Mark's thoughts grew misty and floated away from him; he was too tired to think them out to their end. He heard faint whisperings of gentle voices and movements, and woke up with a start to find that the divans in the sitting-room were already made into beds for himself and Karl. "Gerda will sleep with Rosa," Karl explained. "We must be off early."

Mark felt so safe that he knew nothing more until the chinking of coffee cups woke him at dawn.

As he stood in the little entrance hall for the last time, he held Gerda's warm firm hand in his, in a long clasp. "I'm glad I've met you," Mark said awkwardly. "I didn't know—I didn't understand that I could love a German as I love you—and your husband and Rosa!"

Gerda smiled at him with misty eyes. "But there are thousands like us!" she said gently. "You Austrians should know—in this—and every other country—perhaps millions, how can we count how many people are friendly with each other, and *want* only to be friendly with each other?"

Mark did not answer her except with his eyes. He left her to say good-bye to her husband, and stepped out into the dead coldness of the winter dawn.

The wind had fallen and the snow had stopped with its fall. The stars still cut their bright and splendid way through the dark. Mark wondered if the earth, on which he stood, made so clear and fine a pattern of its flight through space, as its kindred stars.

He stared up at the illimitable sky, and found that he had lost all fear of the great spaces through which the earth moved. He no longer shrank from

its rootlessness. Instead he felt that in each living creature there was some power of direction that kept it alive, and safe enough.

Chapter 34

Seven endless, golden days, and short deep-sleeping nights gave Mark back the whole of his strength. As he and Karl worked their way through the chain of the Bavarian Alps, sleeping every night at a fresh hut with groups of fellow sportsmen, Mark learned more of the current German mentality than he had yet known.

The complete moral obliquity of the young struck him more directly than it could strike Karl Reuss, who was partially blinded to it by custom; and by his own blood. The boys and girls they met were seldom Nazis, they were the healthiest and soundest Germans, some on leave from the forces, some taking brief holidays from exempted war jobs; many from armament factories, airfields or submarine bases. Their girls were their wholehearted and satisfied companions. All were enthusiastic supporters of the Hitler régime, profound believers in German culture; and quite certain of world conquest. They did not discuss politics but sometimes with proud awe they exchanged comments on their past or future triumphs. Not once did Mark see a shadow on their bright, healthy faces, or hear the slightest criticism of Gestapo methods, Jewish persecutions or broken pledges. Nothing appeared to be more serene than the consciences of these physically sound young men and women. They were good-tempered with each other, and obviously took their war duties and sacrifices extremely seriously, but they took nothing else seriously except their physical well-being. To laugh, to eat and drink, to make love, to enjoy the sport they were practising filled their entire mental horizon. No other subject came up. They never joined observation to experience. They were without philosophy, poetry or pity. When one of their fellow sportsmen took a toss and broke his leg, they carried out their bare duties of first aid, telephoned for an ambulance to meet the stretcher bearers at the foot of the mountain; and left him without a second thought. Not even his girl showed anxiety or grief for him, nor did she dream of cutting short her own holiday to accompany him down the mountain. A few hours later, she had picked up another young man, and was off on a fresh tour; and no one thought the worse of her for it.

After the day's sport, they spent their evenings in singing martial or sentimental songs. Karl had a charming light baritone voice, and could sing

without accompaniments, so that he was much in demand as a song leader.

Between the songs they chatted of their war exploits. Boys and girls alike expressed heartfelt satisfaction at the bombing of London. One or two of the airmen on leave who were present, had actually been on these expeditions; and were consequently looked on as heroes. But they spoke with horror of the bombing of their own cities, as if something sacrosanct had been broken open by savages.

On their last day together, Mark and Karl climbed alone to a higher hut not run as an inn, and seldom frequented by any but the most skilled skiers. They found it empty, left in perfect order by its last tenants, with firewood and blankets ready for use and berths made up.

They had grown very near together in their week's sport and comradeship and felt heavy hearted at their parting. Both knew that it was probably a final parting. To-night over their frugal supper they spoke more freely and fully to each other than they had yet spoken. Mark told Karl who he was and what he was doing, and in return Karl told Mark the full story of the terrible days before the Nazis took their final control of the German people. "Yet, until that last hour," Karl told him, "we wrote—we spoke on the radio—our bravest men and women, hungering for freedom, spoke of it brilliantly and truthfully as perhaps no one has ever spoken of it in this land before—until one by one they were strangled into silence. No one helped us," Karl went on after a pause, a little sadly. "We couldn't believe sometimes how friendless we were—not Russia—not the Democracies—not the Churches! All who we expected would be our friends failed us. We once thought Eden would save us by prodding England away from Chamberlain through his resignation; but nothing happened beyond that some of us felt we had lost a lukewarm friend. He had no burning words to tell the world. When he threw aside the work he was on, such words might have lit England, and saved France; but they remained unspoken.

"We read the *Manchester Guardian* as if it were a revelation from God, when we could get hold of it. We met occasional wandering English liberals or labour men, and found their thoughts like ours. We believed in them as drowning men believe in straws. It was only because we *were* drowning, that we could not see that they were only straws.

"We held on as long as we could alone—but one after the other of us sank and drowned. Many of us were tortured, but few betrayed their brothers. When men came out from concentration camps—if they came out at all—they were generally so hurt you couldn't get at them. They were

finished as men. Perhaps a man cannot really survive being tortured in cold blood by his brother. We have to believe in some part of every human being containing a spark of fellow feeling for another. Where you find he hasn't—well you lose your own!"

"But you survived!" Mark said gently. Karl shook his head impatiently.

"I want you to understand this properly," he explained, "so as to tell your people the truth. It is no use expecting us to rise against the Gestapo or to get rid of the Nazis. It isn't only that there are comparatively few of us who wish to get rid of them, nor that we haven't got weapons—or power over communications; and that we have the secret police always disintegrating any group we might be able to form—but there is something else we haven't got—out of which all successful revolutions are made, and which you've just been studying this week with me—we haven't got youth on our side. The solidarity of the youth of this country is wholly against us! How can we make a revolution without it? Every single boy or girl whom we tried to influence would betray us as a sacred duty."

"But why?" Mark asked frowningly. "It seems so queer some how! The *whole* of our youth in Britain is never any one thing or the other—it's enormously individual and divided. Of course we've got Nazis or Fascists as people prefer to call themselves with us, and we've equally got—perhaps rather more—Communists among the young; but by far the most of them—whatever they call themselves—are at heart liberals. Liberal, tolerant, interested, that's the way they *are*, but they seldom *wholly* agree or disagree with each other!"

"Yes, but your country is well balanced, normal," Karl explained. "Ours is wholly neurotic—we must be *all* because we suspect we are nothing. You in Great Britain feel comparatively certain of your own value. Our self-respect is based solely on force. It was shaken by the last war; it got completely fogged by our half-baked Social Democracy—trying to function under the shadow of the Wehrmacht, which was all the while betraying it. The German nation *needed* a Hitler before they could feel themselves men again! Nor must you misjudge Hitler just because he's mad. You must remember that he is mad in just the way Germany wanted. Nor must you forget that he is brilliantly, dangerously mad. Hitler is so concentrated, so superlatively one-idead that he has brought off what he promised to bring off, he's educated our whole German youth towards hate. He found them irresponsible, shamed, beaten, but as youth always is generous, full of courage, and wildly ambitious, he gave them a goal. He harnessed all their

wishes, all their powers—to one single satisfying aim—they were to conquer the world.

“Hitler lied to effect his purpose, but basically he was truthful. He believed in hate and acted upon what he believed. He saw that if you train the young in any religion that makes faith and obedience one thing—you get them solid. The young *like* religion, they like being made responsible, they like ordering about, and being ordered! They worship easily, if they can take an active part in what they are worshipping. All Hitler had to do for our discouraged young was to shake off their shoulders the unused ideals of the lying centuries behind them. It was a great relief to them to get rid of such moral junk. They knew these virtues were not honest because they had never seen them practised!

“They feel noble now. Look at their firm, healthy, open faces! They feel noble—and they act as criminals. Before Hitler’s education they felt criminal and very seldom—just here and there perhaps—acted nobly. You don’t understand, Mark, what a relief it is to give up being noble or pretending to be—and yet to have the feeling of being noble—perhaps for the first time—because *all* ideals are swept away from you—and you have only to obey!”

“No,” said Mark, drawing a deep breath, “I don’t understand. Because feelings don’t matter, facts remain what they are, whatever you feel about them!”

Karl laughed a half amused and half exasperated laugh. “No! No!” he said. “Feelings change facts; the whole German nation, as Hitler preached to them of their new glory—drew a long breath of relief. They *had* to have glory, don’t you see, and it was the only kind handed out to them. They were *not* inferior after all. They were noble! They were transcendent! Nobody could touch a German. Think of it, born into pure Nordic blood—and not needing to stir a finger about it! To be without responsibility, this is and always has been the dream of every neurotic.

“Blood and soil—where you stood—and what you were—German!—and all the rest of the world greasy, yellow and brown scum!”

“But that’s all nonsense,” Mark objected. “Surely a whole people couldn’t get drunk on hocus pocus!”

“Not by themselves they couldn’t,” agreed Karl, “but what Great Britain and France couldn’t see, before the blitz struck you awake, was that Germany was a revivalist camp, preached at by the most magnetic preacher

the world has ever known. We had always believed in force; but our faith had been badly shaken by defeat. Well—it was revived by Hitler! and became a thousand-fold as strong as it had ever been. Remember the Kaiser had already proved, by forcing the schools into intensive Nationalism, that he could make any German a warrior; Hitler merely went one better; he educated every child into being a *criminal warrior*. The whips had fallen out of our hands only to be replaced by scorpions.”

“But what will become of your people?” Mark asked, “when, and if, as I now believe, you really *will* be beaten again. How can such a youth as you will then possess—hardened by action into automatic crime—make a new nation?”

Karl was silent. At length, laying down his pipe, he said with sad gravity, “I also believe in the defeat of Germany—I could not live if I did not believe in it. And yet you cannot doubt that the defeat of my country is bitter to me—and the thought of our brave, misdirected children dying *in evil for evil*, is the greatest tragedy the world has yet seen—greater even than the horrible crime of which we are guilty against the Jews. For it is worse to perpetrate than to be the victims of such a crime.

“When I try to look at the future, beyond the war, I have to try to see it in the space of eternity. Man is only an infant. In no part of this little planet has he yet learned to walk without stumbling. Hitler has at least shown us a new and vital truth. If in one generation he could train a whole nation into aggressive hate, cannot a new Europe train its youth in the generations to come, into creative love? If we could see the Democracies come out of their ancient lies into the truth of loving their neighbours as themselves—we too should have a new goal worth changing our false one for: you and I are teachers, have we not seen how wonderful a wax is put into our hands? You have seen my little Rosa; do you think it gave her less pleasure to help her mother make a pair of gloves for a stranger than to make her own promised Christmas doll a new dress? We gave her the choice. She could not do both, there was so little wool and so little time! You saw she had chosen to make the gloves.”

Mark was silent for a long time. “But could *all* children choose the gloves?” he asked with a half apologetic grin.

“All children trained to love others as themselves would not, I think, hesitate between a living man and a doll,” Karl answered reflectively. “But how first to train the parents in order to train the children? Since it is only by seeing happiness come of love, that a child can see any sense in *practising*

it; and indeed if there is no happiness in loving there would be no sense in practising it. But we know there *is* such a happiness!”

“This woman that I love,” Mark said after a pause, in a low strained voice, “I have told you about her—Ida. I took her back into danger. I am exposing her now to great danger, if I once more join her. Should I do this? Should I try even to see her again before this thing ends! I know she is safe now. I telephoned from a public call-box to a friend of hers in Innsbruck. We spoke very carefully, but I gathered she was expecting my return. Tomorrow I could be with her again. I had meant to run my risks *with* her—but now I feel unsure. You say we must train ourselves in love—is it not part of my training to act for her good—whether it is mine or not—whether I ever see her again or not?”

“It is part of your training and hers, to do what is best for our purpose,” Karl said firmly and directly, knocking out his pipe, and refilling it slowly. “Love is not an object for one or the other—to enchant or to be enchanted by. It is no man’s occupation! It is instead the doubling of a great power directed towards a common aim. This Ida—as you have told me—*has* the same goal as yours! My Gerda and I have also the same goal—it makes a great strength this strength of two. To marry a woman who did not share one’s aim—that would be a disaster! But her death—your death—that would not be a disaster—as I see it—it would be only a tragedy; and what else can we now expect—until this strong tyranny we are fighting together against is over—but tragedy?”

Mark said no more. It was difficult for him, as an Englishman, to believe in tragedy; and still more difficult to believe in it because the next day he would see the woman he loved. But this last night, before Mark was to see Ida, he found he could not sleep. Twice he got up without disturbing Karl’s deep and quiet slumbers. Standing in the open doorway of the hut Mark looked into the vast, unhurried night, probed by innumerable stars.

A little twisted moon sank slowly through the empty bowl of the sky; each peak she passed behind grew bright as silver for a moment before fading into darkness. The hut cast a blue shadow over the fresh snow.

It did not seem possible to believe in that immaculate solitude, that a few miles below there was a city in the clutch of terror, whose citizens had trained themselves to be the enemies of mankind.

Chapter 35

Mark said good-bye to Karl at dawn. The day was cold and grey. Snow clouds massed themselves in the pale sky; and a white staring light brooded over the valley of the Inn.

Looking down from the precipitous heights of St. Martin's Wand, Mark could see Innsbruck stretched out on a white counterpane of snow, like a child's scattered toy. The valley looked as if he could have thrown a stone into it, yet he knew that he had before him a difficult and arduous day's skiing between himself and even the outskirts of the city. Far nearer, on the other side of the Wand, lay Schloss Salvator in a fold of the foothills, hidden securely in its pinetrees; but he dared not go to Ida yet before he knew from Father Martin what the exact situation was, and how to make his return plausible.

Skirting the big drop of the precipice he began to negotiate the long zigzag series of slopes which led to the valley. A Föhn wind had disturbed and altered the dry powdery snow, so that it had become soft and sticky, and in some places massed itself dangerously, threatening to break away in a series of miniature avalanches. Draughts of cold moist air drove down upon Mark between the peaks. The hard, false light altered landmarks and made distance difficult to measure. It was the skier's nightmare, tricky snow, bad visibility, constant alteration of temperature and wind-drive.

Hour by hour Mark plodded on, with infrequent moments of swift flight, down rare and unencumbered slopes. His eyes grew tired with intensive watching of snow surfaces, and when at last the snow began to fall in large persistent flakes, it seemed as if his very muscles slowed themselves, under the oppressive lifeless air.

All day long he had met no living creature. Now, towards three o'clock in the afternoon, he could hardly see a yard or two before his face. He must get off the mountains before dark; and yet to hurry over the deceptive snow was to risk an avalanche.

It was a relief, though it added to his immediate danger, when the open snowfield began to contract into a deep ravine, until suddenly the pinetrees swallowed him. To and fro he dodged them, with swift jump-turns. The

pinetrees moved like men, pressing on him, to cut him off; and Mark's tired eyes registered no difference, when what should have been a motionless group of trees, broke up suddenly into living men who rushed at him kicking his skis from under him. Mark found himself writhing face downwards in the snow, while his captors bound his wrists and ankles, and tore off his skis.

The posse of savage young Nazis did not take the trouble to find out who he was, or what he was doing. He was alone, on the slope of a mountain; and he might be a harmless peasant on his way home from a day's work, or a dangerous spy. It did not worry them which he was, since it was worth their while after an empty day, to find something or someone unaccounted for as meat for the Gestapo.

They were only a few miles out of Innsbruck and had a lorry waiting for them on a nearby road. They half-dragged, half carried Mark towards it, throwing him in, as if he were a bale of some inanimate substance, incapable of sensation.

Mark had no doubt whatever of what lay before him. He remembered what the British agent in Italy had told him, that few men ever escaped from the Gestapo. They just could not afford to be caught; and if caught must expect the worst. Mark had often lain awake sweating with the fear of physical torture. No matter how brave an agent is, such fear must assail him from time to time. Perhaps the braver men were the more they realized what they might be obliged to suffer before they gave in—or if they never gave in, through what inconceivable torments they must find their way towards a pitiless end. With his hands tied securely behind him Mark could not reach the poison pill he had been given for such emergencies. But a pang of relief shot through him when he remembered that he had somewhat unwillingly given Karl all the notes he had taken. Karl had said before they parted, "Better give them to me to forward. Innsbruck is a dangerous place. I shall avoid it and go back by Mittenwald where I know a shoemaker, who passes on messages. A German schoolmaster on a holiday is not so likely to be searched as an Austrian runaway mental patient, who may not be so very mental after all!"

Even if he were lost now, what Mark had done, he told himself, was not lost.

He had time, too, jogging along at the bottom of the lorry, to think out a plan. He had at least one identity paper on him—with the name of Pirschl's brother. There was nothing to prove he was not mad. They must find out for

themselves what he was. He would explain nothing; and look either senseless or furious. He would not open his lips.

The moment Mark began to make a plan, the cold panic of his fear receded. What was the Gestapo after all, he asked himself. It was only men—stupid, cruel, formalized men, not, as they thought they were—supermen. He himself was a man; and what they could do to him was going to be more unpleasant than his worst fears, nevertheless it was going to be done to him by men, who were *less* rather than *more* intelligent than himself. There might yet be some way out. If there was not, then his death would be exactly what long ago the Duchess of Malfi had foreseen hers “a hideous storm of terror”. But storms however terrible—pass. There was still the final mercy of oblivion. Funny how the great Elizabethan poets stirred in him of their own accord, as if their dead voices were alive again in his very blood, to help him meet his hour. It was how you looked at terror that mattered, not the terror itself. The great thing was to get the better of his own nerves. Fortunately he had had a week of mental relaxation combined with plenty of hard exercise, good food and sleep.

The young brutes round him sang “Lily Marlene” at the top of their voices, all the way into Innsbruck. The harsh coarse song acted like a stimulant to their blood.

A hotel where Mark had once spent a climbing holiday near the station, was now being used as the Gestapo. In the same old dining-room, where Mark had eaten his pleasant meals to music, surrounded by flowers, he was now dragged before a middle-aged man with bilious eyes behind large horn-rimmed spectacles. He was in uniform but did not look either intelligent or formidable. This officer examined Mark’s papers and remarked in a grumpy voice to his young captors, who stood as if carved, on each side of their prisoner, “Probably you have made a mistake again—and this will turn out to be another harmless peasant. He seems to have nothing to say for himself though—which is always suspicious! Take him away and search him! What were you about—on those unvisited slopes—near no farm—on your way to nowhere?” he demanded suddenly, turning his small yellowish eyes on Mark. Mark gave him a ferocious scowl; and then smiled a triumphant secretive smile at the ceiling. “Ah!” said the officer, “he pretends to be mad, does he? Many do that—but it is quite useless here! If you won’t speak,” he told Mark, “you will be handed over to those who will *make* you speak. They will be quite rough with you—do you understand?” Mark continued to regard the ceiling with a pleasant stare. He was conscious that the very fact that he wouldn’t speak to them, wouldn’t look at them, wouldn’t recognize

their existence, did something to them that they wouldn't have liked to admit even to themselves. It hurt their vanity and made all their ferocious posturing look a little silly. His guards had already loosened Mark's ankles; but his hands remained firmly fastened behind his back. They now frogmarched him roughly away; but not before he had noticed with a secret pleasure that the wallpaper was still the same little bunches of pink roses tied with blue ribbons. He could not think why but it reassured him to see that innocent pattern again.

To Mark's relief they searched him without discovering his poison pill fixed in a piece of natural wax in his left ear.

When the search was over they flung Mark into a small cupboard which contained half a dozen other men. There was hardly any room to move, and very little air to breathe. The room smelt of fear.

Mark passed a long unpleasant hour while the torturers were having their afternoon coffee with *Schlagobers* in the nearest café. His fellow prisoners were broken with pain and terror and could keep neither still nor silent. A boy of seventeen cried heartbrokenly for his mother. Mark concentrated upon loosening the cord round his wrists. He had practised this particular exercise for long hours in security; but he found it harder now that he was given so little room—and so little freedom in which to succeed. It took him the whole of a long hour to get the cords loose enough not to appear loose, but so that, by sufficient force he could in a moment free himself.

Fortunately he had his back to the wall and was in semi-darkness; a small blue light fixed far above him just showed the prisoners each other's outlines.

At last, the door was flung open into a sea of blazing light. "Let's have the lunatic first," a voice cried. "We'll soon show him it isn't worth his while to play being mad with us!"

For a moment Mark thought, "I was a fool not to have taken poison while I had the chance!" Then his fear suddenly passed into the energy of performance.

He was in a huge room, prepared now for the work before them. A row of heavy rubber truncheons lay on a table. Four men with white linen masks concealing their features, dressed in gym suits, had come in together. At one end of the room was a bath, with hooks above it to hang men upside down with their heads in the water. There was also an electrical machine and a chair near the open stove. No wonder the executioners wore masks, Mark

thought to himself. It must have given them a sense of security, and at the same time eased their consciences, to escape their own identities.

Mark let his eyes have time to get used to the light; his body hung passively between two of his tormentors. He let them feel how inert and at their mercy he was before—like a piece of live wire—he flung out both his hands, leapt away from his captors, seized a rubber truncheon in each hand; and turning, flung himself upon his astounded executioners. He moved with such sudden and silent ferocity, that for thirty seconds he did just what he liked with them. It was as if a mouse had suddenly flown at an expectant cat and torn off all its whiskers.

Then pandemonium broke loose; but Mark controlled and added to the pandemonium. He shrieked higher and higher till the room rang with his maniacal laughter.

Leaping from floor to table and back again, rushing between his opponents' legs, flying across their backs, hurling them backwards against the guards who had rushed in to reinforce them, Mark managed by sheer virtuosity of movement to prevent their cornering him. He dashed at them and leapt away from them by turn with such appalling fury that they lost their heads in spite of their numbers. He had not watched Steinbosch in the fractious ward going off the deep end for nothing. Mark added to the cunning of sanity the far more ruthless cunning of a madman. To his own secret astonishment he even *felt* mad and enjoyed the feeling. A wild glee, like that of the high mountains, filled his racing pulses. These men, accustomed to their weaponed ease, sure of their physical mastery of fear-racked, hunted, unarmed victims, were terrified of the acrobatic fiend, beating them with their own truncheons.

But though they were terrified, there were twelve of them; in time they could overpower even this incredible maniac. Mark's bones cracked under their blows, his pulses began to fail; the glee in him died down and was replaced by panic; his wits clouded. He heard a high whimpering voice that reminded him of Hans of the *drei Schlimme Räuber*—and knew it was his own. His pride, his dignity, his manhood faltered. Oblivion evaded him, his physical degradation mounted with his pain. Suddenly a voice he knew called out urgently, "You've made a mistake! Stop! Stop! You've made a great mistake!" but still the blows rained down on him; and then he became conscious that no one was hitting him any more. "I know this man," an agitated voice shouted, "and it is quite true that he is mad—very dangerously mad—as you must have found out for yourselves! It would have been much wiser of you boys to let me have a look at him before you

set to work. He comes from the Nervenheilanstalt at Schloss Salvator. I myself signed his certificate. He even attacked me once—but I got the better of him because I knew how. You have treated him very ignorantly. Besides you don't realize who he is! He's the artist Pirschl's brother. The man who died the other day and the Führer himself went to his funeral. Yes! This is actually the brother of Hitler's favourite artist whom you've set upon in such a clumsy manner. You've broken a leg—his left arm's fractured, one shoulder out—look at his face—his jaw's broken—another inch and you'd have had his eye out! What a spectacle you've made of him. I don't say anything about his internal organs—he'll have to be examined under chloroform for that! *Dummköpfe!*” The young Nazi thugs stood abashed looking down at their victim, as young sport dogs might do who had forgotten their orders and mangled the bird they should have retrieved whole. Mark could only see through a red blur the enormous familiar face of Lauterbach bending over him, before a shot of morphia eased his pain. He felt himself tenderly borne away under expert instruction.

Air and darkness swallowed him, nor had he recovered consciousness when, after a swift journey through the night, in an ambulance, he lay under Ida's guarded eyes, once more on his own bed in Schloss Salvator.

Chapter 36

Mark woke in a room full of light. Since there was light, he could not be blind, though his eyes were bandaged. He could still feel their savage thrusts against his lids. A long shudder shook him, but pain warned him not to let himself shudder again. He could not move his head or his legs. Fever and thirst filled his consciousness. All his body was in a dull bruised state of massive pain. He could hear Ida's voice a long way off, saying over and over again, "Drink this! Drink this!" but he could not tell what she meant until at last his throat swallowed, and his thirst slackened. He felt the touch of her hands, and heard her say, "It is all right now, Mark! It is quite all right!" But afterwards nightmares, restless, endless nightmares came and went. Franz Josef the bull was kneading the life out of him. Interminable steps crept up interminable stairs hunting him. The reeds in the *Neusiedlersee*, sharp as thorns, were seizing hold of him while the mud sucked him down and the Bezzeghys safe on the bank were laughing at him. He wanted to reach them but at the same time he wanted to get away from them. Mark was not sure of himself or of anything. He could hear Ida speaking to him again, but her words beat against his head like the wings of frightened birds; they had no sense or meaning, only her voice reassured him. He knew he was alive now. It was a curious feeling to be himself again; and yet not to be sure what was left of himself. He was without wants. Nor was he afraid. He was too weak to be afraid. He was simply alive. "Mark," Ida said, "you can hear me now?" From an incredible distance, he heard a low, uncertain voice saying "Yes!" Ida leaned nearer him.

"You are quite safe now," Ida told him. "We are both quite safe. You must just sleep and eat. You must get strong." She seemed to want those things with a curious urgency. He was not sure how much time had passed or whether it was night or morning, when he first saw her face. He could even move his stiffened lips to say her name.

"Mark—mein lieber Mark!" Ida murmured. "You have come back very cleverly! But not too neatly you understand. Still there is nothing wrong with you that time will not mend. One leg and one arm are broken—two ribs cracked. There are sixteen stitches on the left side of your head and several teeth gone—but all your organs are intact—the eyes will heal—the other

troubles will mend! But do not expect rapture—either on my part or on yours, because, for the moment, you will not get it!”

“Yes, it is Ida!” Mark murmured trying to smile. “With a broken jaw one does not smile,” Ida reminded him sternly, “nor can you talk at present, but you can listen a little! Both of us are for the moment quite safe. You are in Felix’s old room—and far away from all ears and eyes but my own and Johann’s. Astonishing as it may sound it is true. Nothing could well have been better than that the Nazis themselves should have done me the service of bringing you back here. Dr. Lauterbach accompanied you from Innsbruck. You have had—you may like to know—simply a very severe skiing accident. A posse of young S.A. men found you and rescued you on the mountainside—fortunately you were immediately identified, and brought here by ambulance. Apparently we owe a great deal of our security to Pirschl for dying at an opportune moment—and of course to the Führer for having publicly shown a belated tenderness for his memory. Otherwise your skiing accident might have been fatal! I too am very secure. The story told by my father of the Spanish horses went down very well indeed with the Gestapo. I am still in disgrace but of a mild kind. It is not suspected that I am not a good German—but merely that I may be too good a horsewoman! Naturally Rennenkampf did all he could to ruin me—and indeed that was in their eyes a more serious business, for though they believe him to be insane, they do not altogether disbelieve his accusations against my faulty methods of control. He accused me of playing at my profession and of making everything too soft and comfortable all round. He has gone to his own country now and into a place of terrifying strictness run on lines that may very well suit him better than ours. But alas! some of this strictness, some of this German ‘terror’ method has crept into my Nervenheilstalt in spite of me. Even my father cannot help it—if he would. Dr. Lauterbach visits us oftener and the Gestapo have given me a colleague very appropriately called Dr. Wolf. It would be simpler if he fell in love with me, but unfortunately he likes his women tender and fat!” Ida’s eyes sparkled so brilliantly that Mark did not at once notice how thin her face was or how deep the hollows had grown beneath her temples. Her skin had an almost transparent whiteness against the red-brown of her hair. “Before I leave you,” Ida said after a pause, “you may tell me just three things. Are you in any danger that I do not know? Did you in spite of the Gestapo accomplish what you set out to do? and the third thing—I should hesitate perhaps to ask you since even in your delirium you have not mentioned it, do you feel for me still anything that you should not feel? If your jaw is too stiff for speech—it is enough that you nod or shake your head as I ask these questions. Well—you are *not* in

danger then? You fulfilled your mission? And you feel for me all that you should *not* feel? That is very satisfactory! Perhaps if I had any heart I should talk not of ourselves but of Pirschl, but to-day I do not want to talk of him. He is out of their hands at any rate and at peace. Let us talk of ourselves. You are *really* safe, Mark?"

"I am safe enough," Mark said stiffly and slowly with long pauses between his words. "I handed over my notes to a man I trust. I think they will get out. I saw a—lot of things in Berlin—and I travelled. The Reich—is very strong and bigger than I remembered. Almost everyone is for the Nazis! You can't help it somehow—it's like—like a fog pressing down—only here and there—an island—a man like an island—stands out—and then he—he sinks—they get him under!" his voice trailed off and Ida watched the terror growing in his eyes.

"Fever!" she said softly. "Fever, my dear fellow! Those things you saw, they are not so strong as you fancy. To be base is never quite strong enough!"

"Dreadful!" Mark persisted. "Pirschl—dreadful!"

"Pirschl was a very great artist," Ida said gently. "He saw too much. He saw what he could not control. Beyond what you and I can see—beyond anything perhaps there is to see—Pirschl saw! He did not die without telling what he saw in his pictures. No one can hurt him again; no one can deny the truth of his pictures!"

Mark's eyes, fixed on hers, tried still to read something he could only grope for. "Karl," he whispered at last. "Karl and Gerda—could we be together like them?"

Ida knitted her brows together. "You want us to be that?" she asked softly, for, as she did not know who Karl and Gerda were, she was anxious not to make a mistake about them. Her hand on Mark's wrist felt the fever rising and throbbing in his veins. Mark tried to move his head in assent, but found it too heavy. His lips were too stiff and broken for more speech, only his eyes entreated Ida. "Yes, I think so," Ida told him softly. "Yes, I think we could be like Karl and Gerda—only now you must sleep; and I must leave you till to-morrow! To-morrow! Think how lucky we are to have to-morrow!" His eyes still tried to follow Ida as she rose and slipped away; but her figure even before she had moved became a shadow. He was no longer sure that she had ever been there. He was sure only of heat and thirst, and a vast sense of power used against him, impossible to shift or move. The power had no face, it beat blows down upon him—it pressed against his

chest and made breathing difficult. It closed his eyes. He saw nothing under his shut lids but a cruel hard red light. The red light pursued him down a dark tunnel. He could not tell which was the more terrible, the intense darkness of the tunnel into which he ran, or the red light pursuing him.

At last the light went out suddenly, and the darkness swallowed him; swallowed him whole—so that he was no longer able to judge whether it was terrible or not.

Chapter 37

The days slipped past slowly into weeks before Mark realized that he was mending outwardly but not inwardly. His broken body had knit; his bruises had healed; physically he could be a man, though never a strong man again; but his heart would not heal. Every day when Ida came he locked her out of it. He did not want her to find the hollowness within. It was easy to shut her out, for she demanded nothing from him. She was his doctor, his friend, his fellow conspirator; and beyond these warm activities she waited. Perhaps Ida guessed what was holding back Mark's love; but Mark himself did not. He simply felt that he had nothing more to offer. The Gestapo had cleared him out. At the very core of his being there was nothing now but panic and emptiness. He was without courage, and without dignity. When he woke every morning it was to see with horror that he was not so much a physical cripple as a moral wreck—a man without faith in himself or life. He could not bear to tell Ida of this inner failure, instead he wanted to prove to her that it was she who had failed him. He found fault with all she did for him, and made difficulties, little silly difficulties to account for his displeasure, all day long.

Ida was patient with him, without being weak. One day she said to him, when he had been particularly antagonistic, "Come, you have a right to your complaints on a small scale. I have seldom seen a human being so knocked about as you have been by those friendly young thugs who 'rescued' you on the mountainside, but still it was those thugs, not I, who made your injuries! What is it that you have against me?"

Mark hesitated. "It is unbearable," he said at last bitterly, "how you never tell me anything! We are friends—we might be lovers—yet I know nothing of the past that belonged to you! I am haunted by that portrait in your room for instance and—the Bezzeghys' hints. I asked no questions but you must know they *would* drop hints, and that though I should not let them tell me anything, I might well expect *you* to tell me about your old lover! Lying here all day long I am as conscious of him as if he were in the next room."

Ida raised her eyebrows and looked quizzically at Mark, yet she drew a chair close to the open window, and sitting down shook a cigarette into the

palm of her hand. "He's not in the next room," she said quietly at last. "But he is not, as it happens, very far away from you. I suppose it was natural that you should have wondered over the Bezzeghys' hints though you had only to ask me. I have no secrets from you, Mark. But what is in the past is for me so utterly over, that I supposed it could hardly reach you. You are right, however, in what you have guessed—that Michel Salvator—the original of the portrait in my room—was once my lover. Do you wish to look at him again? I can do better than the portrait for you. To-night I will show you the original. We must wait till the house is quiet; and we are safely cut off from the activities of our Nazi friends. I will come for you then; and you shall see my Bluebeard's chamber before another night is past!" She rose, and left him quickly before he had time to ask her any more questions. Some of the wretchedness in his heart receded. Perhaps he had really been jealous all the time of this image in her mind of her dead love. If Michel Salvator were not dead, he must be mad and Mark could not feel jealousy of a madman. He could begin to pity her now and if he pitied her for her mistaken loving, she would not be so far away from him any more. Mark began for the first time to notice the world outside his window. He heard the incessant chuckling of fresh waterfalls, and watched the activities of the farm; and the slow movements of men at work over the sodden earth. The great thaw had begun—but although it was March, the snow still lay thick in the woods; and on the slopes of the hillside. It was four months since the Gestapo had caught him. Mark could walk now; but until to-day he had not wanted to walk. He had wanted to think himself worse than he was. Now he began to practise walking up and down his room with the help of the furniture, and without his crutches.

Lately Ida had spoken to him of trying to get him back to England; but Mark could not see his work in England any more. How could he go back to Eton and teach the boys what he had not learned? What was the use of saying to them, "All that we try to teach you here is true. You must learn how to wield power for your own sake and for others—you must learn how to be so strong—so self-contained, so completely in control of your every emotion that nothing can break you. When you have learned this you will be able to meet any emergency—neither death nor torture can shake you. Here—you learn all the answers!" When Mark knew that he himself had not learned them. He had been shaken once and for all out of his inner security. He had not had what he needed to face the Gestapo. His strength of body had answered his demands on it, better than his spirit. He had felt his spirit faint under their blows before his body had stopped fighting. Now Mark feared everything—he feared what might happen to him, before he could

escape; and every emotion that might be roused in him and might make him take, or want to take, a fresh risk. Above all he feared love. He would not let Ida pass the barriers of his injured vanity. The hours stood still till darkness. At last he heard Ida's brisk, short rap on the door. For a moment as she stood still looking at him, he hardly recognized her. She wore a close-fitting black velvet dress, high in the neck and flat across the shoulders. Large pearl earrings dangled from her ears, and a double string of luminous, delicately shaded pearls, hung about her slender throat. She had reddened her lips, darkened her arched eyebrows, and faintly coloured her pale cheeks. "You see," she said, smiling at Mark's astonished stare, "I can look like a lady quite easily, but please remember that I am *not* one; or at least only one by accident, not by choice! Come slowly after me, with your crutches. It does not matter how much noise you make for the doors are safely locked between us and the hospital. Nor will you have to walk very far since from my library there is a lift that takes us up to Michel Salvator's apartments."

When they entered the library, a pine fire blazed on the hearth, as it had done on the night of Mark's first arrival. The beauty and luxury of the past flowed through the room, as if a secret spring had been set free. Above the mantelpiece, the splendid figure of Michel Salvator in his hunting clothes gazed down at them arrogantly with vivid, enigmatic eyes. *They* were the intruders, his glance seemed to tell them, the Schloss and all that was in it still belonged to him. "I will make you some coffee, while I talk," Ida said to Mark. "Sit here and try to be comfortable—it is not *your* confession; but let me walk about partly because I am impatient by nature and partly because I cannot bear to think I had so little sense as to make such a foolish barrier between myself and you! We have wasted a great deal of time, Mark, because you as an Englishman have not learned how to speak what you feel—and because I—as an Austrian—did not believe a lost lover worth speaking about! Look well at Michel Salvator. He was exactly like his portrait when I first knew him. That is my excuse. You see—he was the best specimen our old aristocracy could make! But those eyes are not trustworthy, that mouth is cruel. I can see now in his whole figure the deadly lack there always was in him—the lack of ever having imagined that the wishes of others had the slightest importance, unless they helped to carry out his own. He took what he liked; and never paid for it. When I was sixteen I was what he liked. Perhaps I could have got over my hero-worship of him as a perfect sportsman if he had not been a prince. We had begun to think rather less of our archdukes by 1920 but the myth of their aristocracy was still in my blood. As for my father, he was brought up in it—made by it. He had been Michel's friend and doctor before I was born. Even as a child I was

always Michel's passionate plaything. Later I developed as he wished the passion of a girl for her lover. But I was of a younger generation than he, so I also developed a passion for my profession; and for the birth of our new Republic. Red—white—red—that meant something to me! I need not say that it meant less than nothing to Michel. Nevertheless he had a queer respect for me, and he believed that by not breaking my spirit he could control and keep my calf love—and up to a point he was right. I loved him; so he made concessions. I was allowed to study medicine. Nor did he care what I thought of politics. I shared everything in his physical life—riding, shooting, mountaineering, swimming, dancing—and nothing else. All these things he had taught me, and they were all things that the young love in each other; and respect in their elders. It was true Michel was twenty-four years older than I, but physically at forty, he had the strength and beauty of a young man. He could not marry me, because he was vowed to celibacy—a convention among the Habsburgs for one of their archdukes in each generation; but he settled this Schloss on me for life; and the farm upon my father. My mother had been, before her marriage to my father, the mistress of one of Michel's uncles—so the whole thing was, as you might say, a family affair! Michel Salvator was never faithful to me; but I was at first too innocent, and then too proud to make much of a fuss at having my heart broken by him. Nor do I think it hurt me so much as when he was unfaithful to Austria. You see I loved our young Republic. I was one of its children; and Michel betrayed it. He pitted his wits against it; and used his money and his position for its overthrow. He betrayed us to the Italians whom we despised. He backed Dollfuss and Schuschnigg in their crime against the work-people of Wien. He vowed to me that he had taken no part in the massacre of 1934; and I found out that he had taken a large part. Twice this Habsburg—this man whose family for hundreds of years had been served by Austria—visited that mountebank Mussolini at Riccione to sell him our country as if it were a cow or a dog! Later on he became Hitler's man and double-crossed Dollfuss who had been his faithful tool against our people. I tore myself away from him then—for in a sense I still loved him physically. I am—as well he knew I was—one of those unfortunate women who are faithful by nature as well as by expediency. I have never had another lover.

“What made it harder to let him go—though perhaps others might think it would have made it less hard—was that I had already discovered he had a disease of the mind. This discovery we hid for as long as we could—my father and I. It came on only occasionally and at first the attacks were short—but they grew more frequent and longer; and when we could hide it no longer—he disappeared.

“He disappeared you understand *here*—in the Schloss—where what is left of him now lives. I can do nothing for him; but I feel responsible for him still.”

Ida neither moved nor looked at Mark as she finished speaking. She seemed to have slipped so far away from him into the past, that he dared not touch her. It was strange that what Mark felt, looking from Ida to the portrait, was a queer pang of grief for the man who had lost her, rather than for Ida herself. Ida had lost nothing worth keeping, but those wild eyes in the portrait were looking for something that they had never found.

“He worshipped himself,” Ida said, with a little gesture of the hand, as if to push the man in the portrait further away from her, “that is why I learned to despise him.” She brought Mark his coffee, and drank her own, standing with her back to the portrait.

“You did not have to despise yourself,” Mark said at last after a long pause.

Ida shrugged her shoulders. “Oh yes,” she said, “I could easily despise myself. I was romantic. Yet what I had learned in 1920 was quite at variance with sentimentality. The old régime was utterly corrupt. Bertchhold had brought himself and his masters into ruin. Even as a child I tasted the result of their futile arrogance. Why should I have let myself be deceived by that beautiful tiger with his fantastic claims? I must myself have been a little like a tiger—I must myself have had some false claims to superiority! You see I have learned now that whatever we do—or whatever is done to us by others—in the end we damage only ourselves! We think ourselves of vast importance—and so we are to ourselves. What we do has certainly this much importance that it is a proof of what we are. I gave myself to Michel Salvator—and I cannot be surprised that his claims left their traces on me! Now let us come and have a look at him. Behind this tapestry is the door to the lift that takes us up into his apartments.”

The great room in which they found themselves was furnished as it had always been, in a sort of shabby grandeur, full of ornate and heavy pieces of furniture and endless trophies of the chase. Bear, lion and tiger skins stretched out over the parquet floor. Every size and kind of stag’s head decorated the walls. Cases of stuffed animals and birds grouped in a semblance of their old attitudes gazed uncannily out at them, from its vast sad emptiness. At the further end of the hall there was a gigantic cage and in this cage, Michel Salvator ran to and fro on all fours, very nimbly and tirelessly in spite of his age, as if he were the wolf he now thought that he

was. The further end of his cage was darkened and stuffed with straw; and as the lights of the big room went on, the great, shaggy, hair-grown figure shambled back swiftly into its dark security.

“He cannot hear or understand anything that we say,” Ida told Mark. “But he feels perhaps a little startled and interrupted by our presence. Still if we remain here for a time he will probably come out, to take a look at us. Wolfgang and Helmuth sleep within call, but we need not, I think, disturb them.”

“But what—does he think he is?” Mark stammered, horrified and almost uncertain what he had actually seen.

“He thinks himself a werewolf,” Ida explained. “It is a fancy some of his race have suffered from before. Perhaps it comes from his long, curious semi-fellowship with animals. He has all his life preferred them to human beings, though he loved killing them. I suppose to kill is really a form of intimacy if you have never been trained how to live.”

“For how long,” Mark asked, “has he been like this?”

“If you mean,” Ida said with dispassionate directness, “how long has he been mad, I think I should have to admit that Michel has probably never been sane. He was actually practising his werewolf fantasy long before I left him. He once killed a peasant’s child in the mountains. At least one was found dead—terribly torn and mangled—where it was known he had been hunting. But for many years he only had an occasional short attack; and fully realized that he had them. My father knew of this fancy before my relationship with Michel—but he thought it controllable and a mere outburst of disguised cruelty not uncommon in carefree princes. We did not have to lock him up, except at stated intervals, till the war began, when Hitler demanded it for security reasons. Hitler has a most sympathetic feeling for him. Michel was one of his earliest Austrian supporters; and this has granted us a great deal of protection and immunity. You can imagine how much I enjoy it! Still, it has made us useful to you, Mark, and I hope to England!”

“Yes! it has,” Mark answered, “and was there ever any chance—any hope of his recovery?”

“Never any,” Ida said. “You see he cannot listen. Nor does he wish to change. To change anything or everything else—for that he was always ready—and incapable of fear—but to change *himself*—that never! He was like Hitler, whom in his smaller fashion he greatly resembles, certain that what he wanted was right. Unconsciously Michel envied the beasts their

freedom from certain physical restraints. The range of their appetite—particularly that of murder—enchanted him. He was of course not always a werewolf—there is in reality no such thing—but he trained himself into becoming what he wanted to believe in, which was a werewolf! It is a considerably less harmful form of mania than Hitler’s—but both have the same origin—to rule omnipotently by getting rid of all moral restraints.”

“But, Ida—living with such a man—for ten years—what was it like—how did you survive it?” Mark cried incredulously.

Ida shrugged her shoulders. “Remember what he looked like!” she said dryly, “and also what his accomplishments were! Of course it was disconcerting to discover in intimacy that he very seldom took in anything that I said unless I agreed with him. Conversation with Michel was always composed of his own ideas; or of his orders, arising from his ideas. He never expected, and he was quite unprepared for anything, that he did not like. If I tried to present a new idea to him, he simply refused to listen, till a day came when his control shifted and he *could* not listen. He became then—and is now—completely inaccessible.”

“Doesn’t he know you?” Mark demanded.

“He never did know me,” Ida said with a twisted smile. “He sometimes has flashes of physical recognition; and at those moments he would of course pull me to pieces with his hands, as he likes to pull live rabbits—if he could get hold of me. But he is quite safe where he is and most of the time wholly indifferent to anything but his meals and his imaginings. He very seldom tries to attack Wolfgang and Helmuth; but they take every precaution of course; and are sincerely attached to him. My father also visits him weekly. There were until lately long periods during which Michel was well enough to go to the farm. He and my father lived, during those periods, their old hunting-lodge lives together. But sooner or later the sports he followed roused Michel to some terrible excess or outbreak, so in time my father had to give up the attempt. But we always keep everything in readiness for any momentary return to his old habits. His bedroom is made up for him to sleep in, his gun is always oiled, his dogs who are rightly terrified to go near him now, would leap to meet him, were he to make even a partial recovery. The way back is open—it is the wayfarer who is missing!”

Both were silent. Ida stood nearest the heavy bars of the cage; and as she looked towards it, very slowly, blinking his great dark eyes, and turning his head stiffly from side to side as if the light hurt him, the tall figure shambled out uncertainly from its hiding-place; and pulled itself erect against the bars.

Michel Salvator was incredibly tall; and he had kept much of his youthful slenderness. Standing against the bars, with his large claw-like hands fastened upon them, he looked as a beast might look, who stood on its hind legs and resembled a man; not like a man looks, who resembles a beast.

It was impossible to trace the extreme and lively beauty of the portrait in the thickened, blotched dullness of the face under its dishevelled thatch of hair. Nor was there any memory in the staring eyes. The wildness was there without the key to it. The creature he now was made uncouth and savage sounds, but they were not speech. He stared at Ida and Mark; but Mark doubted if he saw what he stared at. Whatever he saw was within his own darkened imagination.

“I think,” Ida said compassionately, “that he is always in the woods hunting! It is where he would like to be! I am always sorry that I cannot arrange a forest large enough—to hold him safely.”

As she turned away from the cage and its incredible occupant, the light fell on her hair. Perhaps Michel Salvator remembered the red gold tinge of it, for suddenly he gave a queer fierce cry, unlike any of the meaningless sounds he had made before. A cry that expressed both rage and longing. A door opened quietly and one of the keepers stood blinking sleepily at them. “It is only me,” Ida said quietly, “your master is as usual. I am sorry we should have disturbed you, Wolfgang!”

“It is of no consequence, Gnädigste,” the man said eagerly. “The Ertzherzog has been a little restless all day—because of the wind. But I had not thought there was any change in his condition or we would have telephoned you!”

“No, I think there is no change,” Ida said kindly. “I do not doubt your care of him. I only wanted this gentleman, who is one of my helpers, to see him; but Wolfgang, I am not allowed this gentleman’s help by those who now interfere with us—you understand, it is better that you should not have seen him!”

Wolfgang promptly answered, “I have not seen any gentleman, Gnädigste.”

Ida did not speak again until they were back in her room, nor could Mark break the silence between them. Ida gave a little bitter sigh, as she looked at Mark’s grave face. “Now,” she said, “you need not be jealous any more, need you?”

“Was I jealous?” Mark asked her. “If I was, Ida—it was because of what I have never had—not of any person who had had it! It was your dreams I wanted.”

“Ah!” said Ida, with a sharp nod of her head. “Well then, I hope you are cured of any tenderness for dreams! They are incurably dangerous. You see when I was young I thought I could have plain science and honest politics with romantic grandeur, and you see what I got for being so unreasonably greedy! Since I have grown up there is no room in my life for fairy princes and now I infinitely prefer men. But you can well understand that I have a special personal grudge against the Nazis. Poor Michel’s head—perhaps never very strong—was turned by too much power. No man *dare* wield power over another human being—why should he? He may have great powers put into his hands to keep order—for some common purpose—but what goes beyond this rots the brain! I keep this portrait of Michel Salvator not because I love to remember him as he was in all his terrible beauty—his beauty itself became hateful to me long before we parted, since it was an instrument of the power he used to subdue others—but because I wanted never to forget the *cheat* his beauty stood for!”

“You are hard on him,” murmured Mark. “You are hard on—on beauty, Ida!”

“Only if it exploits others am I hard on it,” Ida answered quickly. “I love innocent beauty—beauty that is unconscious of its own spell—and can be used at will to strengthen the heart of the beholder; but all these things, Mark, the jewels I am wearing to-night—the luxury of this room—the padded miserable boredom of privileged lives like ours together here—it is *this* that gave the Nazis their power—it is *this* they fight and dupe the world for—it is *their* logic that made Michel Salvator turn from a man into a beast!”

Mark’s eyes fell away from the fierce coldness of Ida’s. He did not want to believe that what she said was true. Some sympathy in him still ranged itself upon the side of Michel Salvator.

Ida waited for a moment as if she had expected something further from Mark; and then she shrugged her shoulders and turned away from him, as if she had ceased expecting it; but she spoke gently and without bitterness. “Go back to bed now,” she told him, “and do not torture yourself any more. I am too old to be in any hurry for your love—or for my own. It is hard for a man whose body has been broken to keep his spirit intact!”

Mark followed her in silence into the lift and down into the library. Once more he looked at the portrait of Michel Salvator as if to wring from it the secret of the cruel change he had witnessed. But there was no degradation in the portrait, nor was there any understanding of it. "I am glad I have seen him," Mark said at last groping for his crutches. Ida did not try to help him. She did not even look at Mark as if she wanted to help him.

He turned and went out of the library by himself, up the short staircase and along the corridor that separated his room from her own.

Chapter 38

It was not for Ida that Mark's thoughts and feelings were roused and tormented. He could not get the shambling figure of Michel Salvator out of his mind. How could it be possible to sink from such splendour into such pitiful bestiality? What rotten spot could spread so deep as to change the very stuff of pride and manhood into such a spectacle of degradation? Ida must have suffered, and suffered horribly, but she had escaped. Her sufferings had even been of value to her. Perhaps she could not have had so much courage nor seen so deeply into the human heart, nor have foiled with so much skill and courage the traps of the Gestapo, had she not already passed through years of fearful physical and spiritual self-discipline. But what had Michel Salvator created out of all his splendour and his skill, his pride and his beauty? Nothing but ugliness and cruelty. He had betrayed the woman he loved; and the country he might have saved; but worst of all because more irretrievably, he had betrayed himself. What was the secret of his giddy fall from such a height? From where had this hidden weakness sprung?

Mark threw open his window and looked out into the night. The motionless sharp air cleaned every breath he drew. The mountains were invisible, but Mark could feel their great presences gathered into a more solid darkness. Even the hidden pines were still. The splendid solitary stars were not more beautiful than Michel Salvator had been in his youth. What fault in him had killed his beauty? Is not every man a selective artist free to take life upon his own terms? Was it not right for a man to wish to be greater and stronger than other men? Must life be looked on as a low door, through which those who enter must always bow their heads? Had Mark himself not bowed his head low enough? He could say that he had not lived selfishly. He had wanted to share his knowledge—his specialized creed—with his pupils. Many teachers ignore the needs of the children they teach. They narrow their duties into building up the set examination pattern they are forced, for commercial reasons, to accept as each child's goal. But Mark had never belonged to the commercial or careerist type of teacher. He had honestly tried to bring out the best of every boy under his care. He himself had lived austere, abstemiously and intelligently, so that those keen-sighted eyes of youth should find nothing unhealthy or untrained in him to put them off their

course. Why then should he find himself moving under this cloud of self-depreciation? Why should he compare himself with a man who had sunk to the level of a beast and ran about on all fours? The bright distant stars and the lightly frozen air gave him no answer.

If he felt insecure and depressed, he told himself, it was a mere hang-over from convalescence—yet all night long he remained awake, tossing restlessly upon his bed, and asking himself questions. Why was this sense of guilt and insecurity in some men and not in others? Felix had not had it though he had every reason to feel baffled and insecure. Pirschl's Anna had gone unstumblingly to death without it. Karl and Gerda were curiously and vigilantly secure. Above all, in their strange simplicity Lisa and Father Martin, so unlike each other in every other way, had obviously shared this deep untroubled integrity. They could be destroyed but Mark knew that they could never be changed. He was not so sure about himself. In his own mind he wavered like a minnow in a stream carried here and there by fickle eddies he could not control. He loved—and felt without the power of loving. He had courage and yet he knew that he might lose his courage.

The darkness grew thinner as the hours passed. Through his window he could watch the great round head of the Hohe Mund lift itself out of the darkness. Slowly the shapes of the grey world slipped into his sight. Beneath the black shadow of the pines, the valley floor lay shrouded in a thick white mist. The air above the mist became gradually flushed with apricot from the still invisible sun. A star or two gleamed a clear primrose in the colourless sky. Little trees on the skyline sprang one by one into sudden flame. The whole outline of the Hohe Mund burned slowly into gold; one by one his sister peaks caught the first light, until the gorgeous empty day held itself out to man to fill with his poor dreams.

“To-day the Gestapo comes again to visit the hospital,” Johann told Mark when he brought him his early breakfast. “The Frau Doktor says, she's very sorry but she thinks it best for you to come down into your old ward. The Gestapo object to private rooms; and it is no good having their attention drawn to any particular patient. The Frau Doktor cannot come to see you this morning, but Father Martin, who turned up at an ungodly hour last night—I had to get a bed ready for him though I wasn't on night work—will come instead! These holy fathers do very well without sleep or food themselves, but they should sometimes remember that the less godly prefer their bodily comforts to anything they might get later on, in the Kingdom of Heaven. I don't know what is the matter with the Frau Doktor this morning—if she were a woman like other women one would say she had been crying

her eyes out. No one knows what for—but for certain something bad is about to happen! Perhaps those Nazi devils will stop us from keeping pigs although as it is—they get the best of the bacon! However whatever is to come about, just get up and get your clothes on, so as to be ready to come down when I'm sent to fetch you—and for God's sake don't sling any of *your* tantrums about—on the top of everything else! Steinbosch broke a chamber pot over Müller's head this morning!"

Mark had hardly finished his breakfast before there was a light tap on his door. Father Martin came in unhurriedly. He looked older, and was much thinner in the face, but he had the same expression, as if unlike everyone else in the prison of Austria, he was not threatened.

Before he sat down by Mark's bed, he glanced appreciatively out of the open window to the tops of the pines, spreading like a carpet beneath them. The hot March sun was pouring down upon their swaying floor. "I am glad to hear you are stronger now," Father Martin said after a moment's silence. "I could not come to see you before since I was away in Italy on a mission. You know we have a house in Venice. Ida told me also that for some months at least you would be unable to take messages. You feel yourself fit now?"

Mark, meeting his eyes, looked at him a little defiantly. "I can walk," he said grudgingly, "like a cripple. There is nothing else the matter with me. What is it you think I *should* do now—with what is left of me?"

"I think," Father Martin said reflectively, "that you should go back to England. You know now, what few if any agents know of what is going on inside Germany. Your life as a runner from Berlin was of great service, but it may be that your face became known. It is time to go back with your knowledge before you are prevented. Things are happening all the time which make it more difficult to keep any agent safe for any length of time, and I think as the war goes on, it will become more difficult. We shall have to send whatever messages we can get out through swiftly moving agents. Such agents can take what each one comes for—scraps of definite technical information, but they will not be able to give what you can now give to the authorities in England, a whole picture of the Reich. You have lived and travelled, and been yourself a part of this strange prison life we lead. Your country should learn not only what the Nazis can do, but what they are—and how people become Nazis! For a long while I did not know that you could teach them this—but now I think that you can!"

"That is funny," Mark said grimly. "It is precisely now, that I know I can't. Something happened to me when those brutes beat me up. It wasn't

physical—that wouldn't have mattered—they cleaned me out of my self-confidence! I can't explain—but I knew when I woke up here—and saw Ida looking down at me—that I hadn't got any self-respect left. If you've got to teach anybody anything you must have self-respect."

"Yes," agreed Father Martin. "One must have respect for all human beings—even oneself. It is this that the Nazis do not understand. It is what you can now, better than most men, explain to your people. Because in every country there are some—often in positions of authority—who forget this respect that is due to all other human beings."

"You say I can tell my people what the Nazis are like," objected Mark. "Well—I daresay you think that fairly easy—but what are they like? They are like men, who are no longer men—you can explain a man to a man, but not a man who isn't one!"

Father Martin was silent for a moment, then he said almost apologetically, "It is true what you say—or almost true—it was part of my mission lately to be in a concentration camp for some weeks as a prisoner; but it was easy for me since I knew I was to be released in a short time. I had to find out certain information I could get in no other way. But to me it seemed more as if those men who ran the camp, were still men, but men who had lost their way home. You know how savage a lost dog can get—well they were like that! You see a human being has no home but God. He must, if he is to keep sane, be always moving towards that Home; and there is only one path that reaches it—the love of his brother man. It is why I have never been able to disregard in what the Russians are doing, though I have greatly feared their false dictatorship methods—nor could I defend Franco, though many priests did. Always I saw that the path of Communism and of Republican Spain—was the one that led to God. The Democracies have still to learn this! They have not yet decided for one thing or the other—God or Mammon. The Nazis have lost *all* sense of direction, but the Democracies have not yet found the road to what they believe. You can do more—now that you understand this—to show your people the right way."

"That's not the kind of message you can give to the Foreign Office," Mark said ironically. "You believe in God and it makes you feel fixed and safe whatever happens to you. But I've never felt any real conviction as to religion. Yet I have believed in a world where common sense and decency could prevail, and in a sense I've tried to help them prevail. Well now I know, they simply *don't* any more! and I can't see any sense in going on living!"

“Evil is as individual as good,” Father Martin objected, “as long as there is a less bitter way can you not take it? It is a man’s choice that proves life good or evil. You must by now—even here in this country—have seen many people who have chosen *not* to be Nazis? What surprises me after living four years under their sway is to discover the Nazi limitations, so many such simple people get the better of them. Even in the camp—these same people created kindness. I know many are tortured and die in agony. The Nazis degrade women and darken children’s lives. Beyond all expression what they do is horrible. Such evil is still, for those in more fortunate lands, unimaginable. Yet even in days when there were no Nazis—such evils existed; and men would not believe it, because they did not care to alter what was evil. It cost too much. What we see now—because the Nazis have so plainly shown it to us on a large scale—is the cause of this evil. Evil is made out of the refusal to love our neighbour as ourselves. You have looked at the naked Face of Hate—for it is hate Hitler has taught the whole of the German nation; and it is not surprising that you are shaken by it. You would not be human if you had not been shaken. But the naked face of love is stronger. When we have learned how to drive emotion into the science of loving—even as Hitler has taught the Nazis how to drive emotion into the science of hate—then man will once more find himself on his way home.”

Mark made no answer, but he looked at Father Martin. He knew that he was a young man; and he saw that the concentration camp had broken his youth to pieces. Yet he sat, still as a tree on a windless day—grown in the cleft of a rock. Nothing that had happened to him had changed him. He looked unconcerned with the flight of time, or the threatening events of the day. He even seemed unconcerned as to whether Mark was impressed by what he had said or not. At last Mark spoke as if the words were dragged out of him. “Have you ever seen Michel Salvator?”

Father Martin’s eyes turned on Mark speculatively, but without surprise. “Oh, yes,” he said, “many times. But he is inaccessible. Man cannot reach him any more.”

“Well then,” Mark said triumphantly almost as if he had found an argument stronger than Father Martin’s, “you see what I mean. Something in him has died, and I believe he valued it—as I value what the Nazis beat out of me. I came here to do what I thought was my duty—I couldn’t, if you know what I mean, *not* come! Well, you look at his portrait, he had just the same special *sort* of self-respect in his face that I believe in! He had a right to be proud of something that he had! Can you tell me what happened to it—and why?”

Father Martin looked at Mark wonderingly. “Perhaps,” he said slowly, “Michel Salvator thought that he had a dignity belonging to himself alone. If he did—it was a mistake—dignity is common to all. There is no such special right. Perhaps too he counted upon a security that is no man’s property. I cannot tell you what he was like before he turned away from all communication with his brothers. But I have been told, and I can believe that he was always hunting and destroying life. So that we cannot be surprised if in the end life hunted and destroyed him. Ida tried hard to save him—but love is a task for two. She could not save him in spite of himself—only as it were *with* himself—for that he was too proud. There is no safety beyond the safety of loving. Such safe love I have often seen in mothers; sometimes in men of science; even in artists for what they make. These lovers die easily for what they love. Nor—if you beat them to death—would you be able to kill the thing for which they died. Knowing this—they would prefer death—to keeping alive without what they loved.”

“As Pirschl did,” Mark muttered.

“Yes, I think, as Pirschl did,” agreed Father Martin, “only he was afraid—he must have forgotten that the Nazis could not kill the vision that he could no longer paint.”

“I am afraid,” Mark said in a low voice, “that is what I cannot forgive myself. I *am* afraid.”

“But surely,” Father Martin urged, “even the best and strongest of us must fear sometimes? In fact not to be afraid when there is good reason for fear is foolishness. It is how we behave when we are afraid that proves whether a man is a hero or a coward. I have heard that when in danger—you were the very opposite of a coward.”

“It is not what I feel—not now,” Mark told him. “What *makes* a man a coward?”

“The coward,” Father Martin said consideringly, “is a man who feels only for himself—he lives for himself—he dies for himself—or for something that he believes expresses himself. The hero thinks only of others; and while he is afraid he still acts for others; and in this act may die for them. The Nazis have a strange willingness to face death, because on the whole they are more afraid of life—but I should not call this heroism. It is when you love life so much that you must risk everything you possess to save it for others—that you have a right to speak of courage! That is indeed the new kind of courage I once mentioned to you. You have sometimes to

sacrifice the life of those you love—for the sake of life itself. We must free life for loving; at any and every cost.”

“But to be *afraid*,” Mark said after a pause, “when you have believed in your power of always overcoming fear—how can you teach anything after that?”

“Fear is not final,” Father Martin said firmly. “What is final is always what we love.”

Mark was silent. Outside his window he could hear the life of the farmhouse begin, cocks crew, cow-bells rang, men shouted to each other. “What is happening to Ida?” he asked impatiently. “Why can’t I see her? I’ve been such a fool—and now it seems too late not to be! You don’t know what a man feels like, locked in a room all day long—while the woman he loves is exposed to any and every danger!”

Father Martin rose. “I am glad you have asked me about her,” he said with a friendly smile, “because it is part of what I came here to tell you, and to ask your help for her. She was very much concerned that she could not come to you herself. She wanted you to realize that she could not consult you as she would have wished. There was no time. I could not get here to give her warning as soon as I had hoped. She had to make her arrangements. The Gestapo will be here by eleven o’clock; and to-night you and I must leave. They come to make what they call a ‘mercy killing’. Not all of Ida’s patients must die—but many of them. You know that she has feared this for a long time. They have made concessions for her—and even to-day this last concession that she begged for—they will let her kill her patients herself. You, too, will receive an injection like the others—but yours will be harmless, and you will be carried to the Prince’s wing when it is over—where I shall await you. I have brought a habit with me and proper papers. When you leave here you must travel with me to Venice as a fellow monk. There is nothing for you to do but to lend yourself to what happens.”

“There always seems nothing for me to do but to be pushed about by others!” Mark said bitterly.

“You will have to make great efforts,” Father Martin assured him gently. “You are not yet strong. Much will be required of you before this journey is over. Ida needs your help. She is very unhappy that this has come—and so quickly!”

“All right,” Mark said, after a moment’s pause. “I’m ready.”

“Then I will leave you,” Father Martin said, turning to look back at Mark from the doorway. “You remember that when you first came to us I wondered how much you were going to give Austria. But now I know that you will give all.”

Chapter 39

The wind roared and rollicked about the sky, driving the fleecy shining clouds in flocks like sheep that a friendly shepherd dog chases in play from field to field.

The storm was over, and winter, reborn in deep and dazzling snow, shone under a sky of spring.

Inside the Schloss scared attendants and uneasy patients crept along the passage, as if the very ground might sink beneath their feet.

Everyone moved as if he were trying to avoid an enemy he could not see. Nobody had been told anything; but everyone, who had any outer consciousness at all, knew that evil was impending.

In the centre of the long entrance hall Ida stood in her long white coat surrounded by a group of men in uniform. She must have heard the tap of Mark's crutches, as he and Johann crossed the hall to reach the further wing; but she kept her head steadily turned away from them. Her lips were close shut and her eyes had an empty look like the eyes of a statue. In spite of the group surrounding her, her small erect figure made a space round itself, as if she were alone in a desert. A wave of passionate love and longing swept Mark's heart. It was as if all that he had loved in her country incarnated itself in Ida—the skill, the charm, the dauntless wit—and the helplessness. Mark could not reach her. If she were to be saved at all he knew that she must save herself. Johann opened the door, and helped Mark through it into the corridor. "There they all are," he said in a grumbling undertone, "but you don't want to go showing them who *you* are! That's not the way to treat the Gestapo! They'll find out soon enough for themselves—and make the worst of it! I tell you what it is, Herr Pirschl, the old doctor and even that crow Wolf, and that pig-dog Lauterbach from Innsbruck—by themselves they don't amount to much; and the Frau Doktor she can get the better of all of them put together; but when the Gestapo's behind them—well then Our Lady Herself couldn't turn *that* corner! *I* was ordered to wash out the hall at six o'clock this morning! *I*, who am supposed only to attend to persons like yourself—and if there is any washing to be done—see that they do it! But to-day everything has to be in exact order and can't be left to half-wits.

Germans think life depends upon everybody being made uncomfortable but themselves. Herr Müller has just had one of his worst fits; and this morning at breakfast Herr Steinbosch threw everything off the table, and stamped on the butter!

“If fractious patients have to be made uncomfortable that’s all that comes of it! But I warn you, Herr Pirschl, that the next patient who cuts up rough is to be taken out into the yard and beaten unconscious with a rubber truncheon—an order from the Gestapo that Fritz is pining to carry out! Why not play chess with the Herr General till dinner-time—it will keep you both quiet!”

Nothing had changed in the fractious ward since Mark last saw it, except that for the moment immaculate cleanliness and order had been forcibly thrust upon it by its caretakers. The general recognized Mark by a courteous nod, but none of the others seemed aware of him. They were absorbed by their inner turmoil, and each in turn contributed some ungovernable impulse to counteract the restraint placed on the inanimate objects surrounding them, by the new reign of order. Herr Putznagel took off all his clothes. Steinbosch tore his mattress, Herr Müller, just recovering from his prolonged fit, managed to upset a mug of boiling milk over Herr Winkel. An old man in the corner swiftly excelled himself in making everything as dirty as he could all round him.

It was a long and most disturbing morning and yet Mark found himself feeling curiously interested and even sorry for each of these piteous exhibitionists. The patients had become suddenly human to him now that he knew these were their last activities, and he found that he understood what it was that they were trying so awkwardly to achieve. Even the worst of them seemed to want to communicate something to the world around them; and it was this communication that the Gestapo was going finally to stop.

At last dinner was brought in and even the most roused and aggressive of the patients became soothed by its Sunday richness. They had roast pork, Sauerkraut and creamed potatoes followed by *Apfelstrudel*.

Shut away from the outer world as if it did not exist, they mercifully forgot for an hour at least, that it existed. They ate and drank with satisfaction, and took their accustomed after-dinner rest; and then Johann turned on the radio. The patients knew that music meant they were not to have any Sunday walk. The wind had risen to the force of a gale and howled and shrieked about the Schloss. But Beethoven’s Symphony rose above the sounds of the storm. The great chords swelled and thundered, while through

them beat the heart of a lonely desperate man, besieged by hopeless love; darkened by suspicion; isolated by deafness, but indomitably struggling on towards Light. Perhaps Beethoven too had felt the same trapped and agonized longing to help another soul, from whom he was locked away, as Mark felt now with Ida in the hands of the Gestapo. Perhaps nothing but this ultimate agony could carry the unwilling stubborn spirit out of his self-made rigidity into the changing sea. Now Beethoven's spirit, loosed from all its moorings, alone but at one with the elements, became part of the law that rules the Universe. In the trough of these tremendous waves of hope and fear, he was at last aware of the depth of his own love. Nothing else counted but the blinding certainty of his passion. The symphony swelled to its majestic height, the stubborn soul knew where it was moving at last. The violins poured their penetrating light into the last recesses of human darkness.

It was impossible to say how many of the patients listened or, if they listened, what the music meant to their disordered minds; but on the whole Mark noticed they were less mischievous and noisy with it than without it. The icy air, the remote unpleasantly orderly stars, the interminable song of the pines, the unknown forces of the storm, the fear that had walked the passages of the hospital all day long were shut away from them by the music; and forgotten.

The ward door opened from without at six o'clock. Ida came in, followed by two officers in black uniforms with silver badges. Behind them came old Dr. Eichhorn looking very majestic and fatherly, but a little severe since he was never certain that in the fractious ward, the inmates would take his dignity as seriously as he took it himself. Dr. Wolf and Dr. Lauterbach also looked aware that their self-valuation was threatened in rather an unpleasant manner. Still they were young and strong, and had taken the precaution of having two extra attendants brought in with them.

The patients stared suspiciously at this half strange, and half familiar procession. Were the strangers also doctors? They were not patients. They came from outside. All prisoners, sane or insane, know instinctively who is acting on his own initiative, or is, like themselves, controlled by locks and keys. Strangers rarely came into the fractious ward; and they were never welcome. The two men in uniform began at once barking out idiotic questions from their shut faces. "What is your occupation in this hospital?" they demanded from Herr Steinbosch who merely spat at them, by way of answer. "Are you feeling better or worse since you came here?" they asked Herr Winkel who immediately burst into tears. "Do you wish to become

well in order to go out into the good German world, and help your Führer?" they asked Herr Heinel the pervert, who grinned with wicked zest but preferred not otherwise to commit himself.

"How long do you—a pure Nordic—expect to stay here in safety while your Fatherland is in danger?" they finally put to Herr Müller, who was still in the lethargy caused by his fit, but who now roused out of it by the aggressive note of their voices, rapidly began preparing for another. Ida stood attentively and submissively beside the interlopers; but her eyes were more alive than they had been a few hours earlier. Some power had come back into her hands out of the surrounding emptiness.

Owing to the precautions taken by Fritz and Johann in pinioning the arms of Herr Steinbosch and Müller, before they had time to react to the bad impression made upon them by their visitors, the ordeal passed off quite pleasantly. Attention was only once drawn directly to Mark, by Dr. Lauterbach, who stood at a safe distance from him, and explained to the others rather like a showman exhibiting a trick lion, "That is the one I told you about—brother of Pirschl the artist—unfortunately very violent—but at present as you see crippled by an accident on the mountainside." Before any further comments could be made, Herr Müller, who had by now roused himself sufficiently to produce another fit, gave a loud premonitory yell. Dr. Lauterbach hastily clicked his heels, kissed Ida's hand, and led his colleagues from the ward just in time to avoid the worst of it. Ida stayed till Herr Müller's unearthly shrieks had died into uneasy mutterings and he was comfortably back in bed, then she gave low-voiced orders to Johann and Fritz; and, without looking again at Mark, joined her colleagues.

It was a restless evening. The patients were sent to bed earlier than usual and resented it. For some unexplained reason, screens were placed round some of the beds. Mark and the general shared this privilege; and fortunately for the peace of the ward, Steinbosch and Müller were also granted the same distinction.

No one knew what arrangements were being made in the other wards; but such arrangements, if there were any, couldn't, it was agreed, be bad, because there was no sound throughout the hospital of any protest. The whole Schloss was, if anything, quieter than usual; and enjoyed an extremely good and copious Sunday night's supper.

Mark and the general had been left in peace with their chess, while the others went to bed. "Let them finish their game," Johann had said to Fritz

with a wink. "It's always something even to a looney, to know whether he's lost or won!"

"You always pamper those two," Fritz replied, "but seeing how it is—all right! We won't hurry them! But get them in bed by nine o'clock, or you'll have the doctors back on us."

The two attendants went about their work; and left them undisturbed. The general leant forward, and said to Mark in an undertone, "I have a feeling that this game is meant to be our last; you understand that to be deprived of life by others is humiliating to a man in my position? What I wish is to deprive *myself* of life. Will you, my friend, assist me?"

Mark hesitated, he glanced at the general and then across the ward, to the screens around his bed. Why should he not help him towards his one desire? What might once have been a crime suddenly appeared to Mark more like a virtue. "How can I help you?" he asked guardedly. "You know that they leave us nothing we can use as a weapon?"

"We can use our wits," the general replied grimly. "To-day they have been careless—they have left the outer door into the yard unlocked. Create a diversion for me; and I will profit by it. Those new attendants have gone; and both the others will go to your assistance. I know very well how to do what I want. I owe God a life. But I wish to pay it myself. I do not wish to have the price extorted by others."

"I will do what I can to help you," Mark answered, "while I can. I too think as you do. We owe God a life—and I too wish to choose not to be chosen for."

"You think very reasonably," the general told him. "What did you do to bring yourself here? I killed my wife. I felt it necessary for my honour; but I have not been allowed to follow her. Now you will set me free; and I can go to her."

"I came here," Mark said half to himself and half to the general, "because I thought I was better than others. I see now that was a mistake."

"Than some we are better—than some less good," the general said consideringly. "But perhaps the real mistake is to think that it matters, since what really matters is, to give what we have."

Mark nodded. He saw that both Johann and Fritz had their backs turned to the corner near the outer door by which they sat. "Ready?" he murmured.

“Ready!” the general answered. Mark swung himself onto his crutches, upsetting the table with a crash.

The chessmen rolled about the floor. The two attendants turned and rushed towards Mark. He stood swaying backwards and forwards, shouting loudly, till they reached him, then he staggered into their arms, gasping, a dead weight between them, while his crutches slipped to the floor.

It was some minutes before they were free to discover that the yard door was unlocked, and the general gone.

The storm had swallowed him. The wind and the dark were his willing accomplices. They did not even find his body till the morning. The general had hanged himself from a pinetree that he had long ago decided on for that purpose. Nothing much was made of the affair. The general had only antedated by an hour or so the end destined for him, and no-one suspected Mark of having intentionally aided him. The news of his suicide was carefully concealed from the Gestapo agents, who left before he was found next morning, since they would not have liked to hear that their orders had been carried out in such an irregular manner.

At ten o'clock Ida entered on her night round accompanied by Dr. Wolf. She spoke first to the screened patients, looking down at each in turn, with her slightly mocking and yet somehow deeply reassuring eyes. “Perhaps,” she said, “you would like to sleep a little sounder to-night than usual after your good supper? If I didn't give you something special to help you—you might sleep less well—or have bad dreams. Now I promise you a long sleep—and no dreams at all!”

To each of the screen patients, she gave an injection, while Dr. Wolf rather ostentatiously stood over her. Mark watched how neatly and with what steady hands Ida carried out this final office. It was obvious that even Herr Steinbosch was pleased by the extra attention, although he had been very shaken by having both his arms pinioned behind him during the visit of the strangers, when he had wanted to use them like flails; he even responded to Ida's good night, without trying to hit her.

She patted his shoulder very kindly after she had given him his injection and said, “*Angenehme Ruhe*, Herr Steinbosch!” before she left him.

Mark's was the last of the screened beds. Perhaps Ida was a little tired by the time she came to him, for she dropped her last ampoule on the floor and had to ask Dr. Wolf to fetch her another one. The moment he was gone she bent over Mark. “Mark!” she murmured, “Mein Lieber! You see I am a

murderess again in spite of myself! But this way it is easier for them. They feel no fear and die easily. It was a great concession the Gestapo granted me, that I might kill my own patients!”

“You are all right?” Mark whispered. “Ida, they won’t do anything to you?”

“To me—nothing,” said Ida soothingly. “This little affair of yours goes smoothly—only sleep deeply now. This I give you will help you—and you will wake among friends! Ah! Dr. Wolf how prompt and kind you are! After all I found I had one undamaged ampoule left so I have given it to Herr Pirschl. You will now sleep well, I trust! Pleasant dreams, Herr Pirschl—if dream you must!”

Mark shut his eyes so that Herr Wolf might not see the look he could not keep out of them.

Sleep came more quickly than usual to the fractious ward. Herr Steinbosch muttered and shouted a little at first; and Herr Heinel gave a loud silly laugh before he slipped into the last of his vicious dreams. One by one their sleep grew deeper and more silent, until at last the only sound that Mark could hear was his own unquiet breathing.

Two hours later, Herr Wolf came in like a frightened thief. He crept from bed to bed, bending double, to listen to each silent chest in turn. He muttered uneasily over Mark; but in the end he decided that there was nothing to be done about this obstinate heart, except to take Mark last. Even if his heart still beat by then, it would not be for long. A few minutes later the stretcher-bearers came in, and took away, very quietly and methodically, what lay behind the screens.

As soon as they had gone, Johann and Fritz removed the screens; and made up the beds as if no one had slept in them.

Time seemed endless in the lonely ward, before the stretcher-bearers returned for Mark.

It was almost a relief to feel their rough warm hands on his body. They swung him swiftly through the long hygienic passage under a dim blue light; and after a time Mark recognized that they were taking him upstairs not down. They reached the loggia at last, and put him down gently on the parquet floor. “*Es geht, mein Herr! Stehen sie auf!*” Wolfgang’s friendly voice rang in his ears. Steady hands helped Mark up, and he stood blinking in the immense lighted loggia without his crutches.

Chapter 40

“Now I see that you can walk without a crutch,” Ida’s voice said laughingly behind Mark. “But do not turn round suddenly, even to look at me, for that you will find still doesn’t work! Helmuth, please go and prepare food for the *Herrschaften*, and you, Wolfgang, tell Father Martin to join us when the meal is ready.

“Mark, when that great door closed behind you and Wolfgang bolted it, we were safe! Behind these thick walls we can even speak aloud. This part of the Schloss is very old and secret. We have ways in and out that no one knows but ourselves.”

As soon as they were alone, Ida cried, “Oh, my dear! My dear!” and with a swift movement she knelt beside him, burying her face against his breast. Mark felt her trembling in his arms. “Now I *can* tremble,” Ida whispered. “What a relief to be able to tremble; and to know that what I am trembling for—is safe! Mark! Mark! They made me kill all my dear idiots—I am now seventy times a murderer! But every one! and they had become so friendly and so gentle, they did no harm at all, not even to themselves!”

Mark held her close, and she clung to him as if she would never let him go. “It is so silly of me!” she murmured through her tears. “I wanted to be so grand and brave! I wanted to let you go as if I did not care! But I cannot! I cannot! I do care!”

Mark gazed down at her white strained face into her sleepless eyes; and knew that there was no beauty in all the world that could ever be half so dear to him. “Why do you try to save me?” he asked fiercely. “Don’t you know that I would rather take whatever chance there is—or none at all—with you?”

“Yes! I suppose it!” Ida agreed gravely. “But I also suppose that you are sensible and realize that there is no way of saving either of us together. You can leave here to-night with Father Martin, and no one will try to trace you. Why should they—you are but one of the seventy dead awaiting the army lorries so mercifully provided to put them away to-morrow. But me they would miss, and trace. I save us both by staying here—but not more than you save us—by leaving me! Since the war is not yet lost do you not believe

that we shall win? Even I begin now to believe this, from the moment they have this war on two fronts—Europe is saved. So if we hope—we win—and then you will come back!”

“I will come back,” Mark said, “but knowing the risks you take do I dare believe that I shall find you?”

“Ah! But you do not yet know what the Gestapo have promised me,” Ida said laughing again, “instead of my dead patients? They will send me Austrian pilots who have had nervous breakdowns. I am to retrain them in courage. It seems Rennekampf persuaded them I had a value for the Fatherland in spite of my lack of rules; and indeed I will retrain these Austrian pilots, and when they are healthy again they will know that they are Austrians—and for what Fatherland they must now fight! In order to do this—I shall become more outwardly Nazi than ever—I shall take no risks!”

“But you will be betrayed,” Mark urged anxiously. “They will find out what you are doing to these men! How can I leave you alone in all this danger?”

Ida drew his head against her heart. “But now I shall be careful as never before,” she whispered. “Now I have always two lives to save instead of one. And I am not alone—all on this hillside are my friends. I am a good skater, Mark. I know where human ice is thin. I shall not put my weight where there is nothing under me.”

“Before I go,” Mark said, suddenly raising his head and holding her eyes with his own, “you must marry me, Ida! If you are my wife I shall go more willingly. I have the right then to come back and fetch you, and whatever privileges are mine as a British subject you share with me!”

“Marry you!” gasped Ida, then she threw back her head, and laughed as if she could not stop laughing. “How funny you are, you English!” she cried. “To waste our time to-night in being married when we are in love! Still, I will refuse you nothing that you wish; it shall be as you say! I have never yet been married. And it is true—whenever Europe is free, I shall be the more free for being your wife.”

“How I have wasted all these weeks,” Mark said bitterly. “What can you have thought of me?”

“You were tortured,” Ida said quietly, “by other men. How can a man love when he has been brutalized by his brothers? For a time at any rate he can trust no man; and to be without trust is not to be alive! But when I came in and saw you standing without your crutches, which I knew you might,

from your injuries, have done weeks ago, why then I knew you were alive again!”

“Yes, I am alive again!” Mark murmured. “How small and thin you are, Ida—but not hard!”

“Ah no!” Ida said laughing softly. “Indeed I am not hard! It is a pity that just when you are learning how to be a lover you should have to turn into a monk. Now I am in your arms. Now I am yours and you are mine! How little it takes to make a man and woman happy when they are in love!”

The door from Michel Salvator’s great room opened, and Father Martin came in. “I am glad to see you safely here,” he said to Mark with shining eyes. “It is a great thing that we three have accomplished together.” His grave joy met theirs and became part of it.

“This mad Englishman,” Ida said laughing, “will not be content to go, unless he marries me before we part. Is such a thing even possible?”

“It is possible,” Father Martin said gravely, “since I am a priest and can give you the Sacrament of marriage. In the eyes of God you would be man and wife, but I doubt if in a civil sense such a marriage would count as legal. Still I could write you a certificate to say that the ceremony had taken place; and we have two witnesses. Have you a ring?”

“I have my mother’s wedding ring on my finger,” Ida said. She looked from one to the other of the two men, before she gave Mark the ring, as if she were perhaps for the first time in her life really afraid.

Mark, holding the ring in his hand, thought that he had never seen anything so light and fine as the thin circle of gold, and yet so indestructible. Everything about the short, simple ceremony reassured him; and made this parting seem more significant and less final. The words of the marriage service spoken in Father Martin’s voice sounded like living things. The two foresters, recalled from their duties to act as witnesses, looked on with awed and friendly eyes. The wind had fallen, and no sound came from the room in which Michel Salvator lived his solitary mad life. All that Mark had received had once been his; and had been useless to him. But what Mark possessed Michel Salvator had never known—the splendid obligation of a vow that he would never break.

Father Martin laid down his missal and turned away from them in a silence that for a time none of them interrupted.

“Now,” Ida said at last with her usual lightness, “before you turn my new husband into a monk, Father Martin, we will eat our wedding breakfast.

Helmuth was not prepared for quite such a function but he has always managed to provide me with a *Natur-Schnitzel* in every crisis of my life; and he will not fail me now! Wolfgang, please bring us in two bottles of the best Vöslauer to drink together. You shall share one bottle and as I know the dreadful abstemiousness of Father Martin—we three can make shift with the other. There is only one toast I am content to drink on my wedding night—‘May all men win who fight the Nazis!’”

The two foresters waited on them, and drank with them; but towards the end of their last meal together, they stopped talking.

“We must go now,” Father Martin said at last. “Ida, you do not come with us?”

“As far as the pines,” Ida answered. “I have my cloak with me. Helmuth will stay here. The road beyond the pines is rough but passable. The Gestapo men have already driven down into the valley without mishap. Wolfgang will drag Mark on a sled till we reach the pines. No one is about at this hour.”

The whole of Mark’s strength came back to him as he felt the crisp snow under his feet and glanced up to take the edge of the wind against his cheek.

The silent world lay on the edge of visibility beneath the steady stars.

There was no sound but the shifting of the snow under the runners of the sled. They knew that they had reached the pines, because the darkness suddenly grew thicker.

“The road is now only two steps away,” Wolfgang said in a low voice, “your sleigh is there with your driver in it, Father Martin, you have your torch so you cannot miss it.”

Ida’s hands groped their way to Mark’s shoulders. He felt her lips hard against his lips. “My blood goes with you!” she whispered; then he held nothing; and the icy air against his cheeks froze her last tears.

They drove in silence down the mountainside, into the colder valley, where the damp penetrated even the heavy furs they were wrapped in; but Mark did not feel the cold of the valley; he felt only the deeper cold of his own loneliness. His heart went back with Ida into the great walls of the Schloss; and passed through the long dim passages, into the empty wards.

Everything about her was more real to him than what was happening to himself. Slowly the shapes of the mountains rose out of the sky and threw back the darkness, revealing the city of Innsbruck at their feet. Never had

any city looked to Mark more beautiful or more fugitive. The tower of the Hofkirche and the yellow walls of the Hofburg were roofed with shining snow. No footstep had yet broken the flawless purity of the white streets. The ice-green river alone moved through the sleeping town. Time was no longer pressing upon its citizens. If someone had slipped back from those lost centuries in which the old houses were new, they would have met no surprises.

“Mark,” Father Martin said quietly, “I think if this war, as we are forced to hope, still goes on, that you may not see the city of Innsbruck like this again. From this bright air death and destruction will rain down on it. It is my little city. I was born here; and it is strange to me to think of losing it. Yet one by one the great jewels that Europe has sheltered under for all these centuries—it is old palaces and towers—man will wipe out with his new weapons.”

“Can you speak calmly of such sacrilege?” Mark asked him fiercely. “What will be left of Europe if these things perish?”

“Man himself,” Father Martin said quietly. “These cities with their old names will be rebuilt by man—not for the few next time but for the many—and I think that those who build the new cities will be better men.”

“I cannot think lightly of losing what so many have loved—and for so long!” Mark objected. “And what better man can you suppose will come out of all this wanton destruction?”

“Yet I do suppose it,” Father Martin said reflectively. “There is an old saying ‘The Perishable must perish; so that the Imperishable may remain.’ I was thinking as we came along this valley how many better men I have known than ever before, you among them, Mark, in the last three tragic years of my life; under the Nazis I have moved from country to country on a lifeline of such men; some of them have been tortured for my sake—some of them shot—none have betrayed me. Such men risk their lives to-day and often the lives of those dearest to them, to give a piece of bread to help a fleeing Jew! You too must know this—for you have moved for this last year as I have by the hearts’ blood of your brothers!”

“That is the worst of all my nightmares,” Mark admitted. “There was a girl—I never told you about her—her name was Lisa—and she died to save me.”

“It is also what is best,” Father Martin said gently. “Best even for that girl. It is by such people Europe will be rebuilt. You must tell them that in

England. Tell them whom it is that they must trust! Let them make no mistake about it! When their armies enter—these are the builders! These men have destroyed the spirit of their conquerors with their own blood. Safe people have not learned how to trust others. They are seldom themselves trustworthy. They still fight for what they can gain—not for what they can give! But here under the Nazis—in these cities that will be destroyed—men fight for what they can give. They know that there is nothing else worth fighting for!”

“Why did this have to come?” Mark burst out still angrily, “why cannot men have happiness? It seems so simple, what we really want; and never let ourselves have!”

“And so it is simple,” Father Martin answered. “But men are too clever to believe the simple Words of God. Two thousand years ago we were told that man must love his brother as himself. We had witnesses for the truth of this saying, for it was in our own hearts. But we built up a lie; instead we treated our brothers as slaves and enemies; and none of us—or far too few—tried to obey the law that was in our hearts. We had looked so long at the lie we had built up instead, that we no longer saw it was a lie. Now Hitler has put his searchlight of evil on it, and once again it becomes visible; and when a lie is visible it breaks down; and from under it spring up fresh words of God—new virtues—a new kind of courage! This lie, that Hitler both typifies and exposes, is not yet quite broken down—but the cracks appear! Perhaps this second chance will be enough—perhaps there may have to be a third chance. It could even be that we deny God a third time; but what we cannot do is to change Him; or any of His laws.”

They had reached the outskirts of the city. Innsbruck still slept—a sparkling, frozen dream. The sleigh stopped in an empty street behind the monastery.

“What a miracle!” exclaimed the monk who was preparing breakfast in the kitchen, as they entered. “It is Father Martin home again and with a friend!”

Quick hands helped Mark as he stumbled forward into the warmth and brightness. No one seemed surprised to see a strange lame brother; he was asked no questions; and Father Martin gave no explanations.

“It is also a miracle,” Brother Christopher continued when they had made Mark comfortable by the fireside, “that it is still within the octave of Easter, so that we can give you coffee! Otherwise a great rarity and likely to become more so! And an egg! We have saved some the peasants brought us

on Easter Day for the hospital. But these I shall prepare now for you and Father Martin; I shall not need to ask the Father superintendent since it is well understood that all those who have run special dangers shall be allowed special privileges. Father Martin here—has been allowed many such extras!”

“Hush! Hush! What do you know of dangers—except the one you face every day that your tongue may run away with you!” Father Martin said with a friendly chuckle. “Have you a room warmed and well prepared for a visitor? Good! Mark, you can sleep now for seven hours—and then we must make ready for a longer journey, but this will be an easier one—by train—and one of those extra privileges Brother Christopher rubs into me—is that even sleepers have been reserved for us!”

As soon as Mark had finished eating, Father Martin took him into a little spotless cell full of sunshine.

“From your window,” Father Martin said with a deeper friendliness than he had ever shown Mark, “you can see your old friend the Habig. Tomorrow it opens—the gateway to the Brenner, and we shall go through it! Now you must sleep.”

He passed so quickly and quietly out of the room that Mark hardly knew that he was gone.

Mark’s eyes still rested on the golden sides of the Habig, but he saw instead a procession of the friends who had helped him on his way. Lisa with her laughing eyes, Andreas daring death with him through the mountain storm; the whole Planer family working together for his escape; the Bavarian peasant guard, who had let him go safely on his way; Felix and Pirschl; Hermann and the Spanish horses; the fishermen who had taken them safely across the *Neusiedlersee* and back again at dawn; the boy and girl at the Senner hut who had given them shelter; Karl and Gerda; and all the nameless faces of those who had provided Mark with food or a roof while he was a Runner in an enemy land.

When he had drawn the curtains and lain down to sleep, a fresh crowd of images pushed their way into his mind. He saw a crowd of boys with short archaic jackets filling narrow crowded streets under old mossy walls. He saw green velvety fields with the sun playing on white figures in a rhythmic dance. The chief’s face came back to him in the old shining friendly room against a background of books. Suddenly Mark knew that he would find his life work again, and yet that it would be wholly different, because the pattern had been broken up. It was no longer rigid. Beneath it a new stream

ran. But he was still greatly troubled that he could not see Ida's face. Suddenly he thought to himself, "But I can't see my own!" and then Mark felt her fingers pressing lightly on his wrist and heard her voice murmuring as she bent over him: "Sleep deeply! You will wake among friends!"

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.

[The end of *The Lifeline* by Phyllis Bottome]