# *Continental Revue*

## Winifred Bambrick

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# CONTINENTAL REVUE

by

WINIFRED BAMBRICK

'*Some there be that shadows kiss*
*Such have but a shadow's bliss*'
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

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# Continental Revue

## Chapter One

In the darkening afternoon of a cold grey January day a convoy of buses was speeding on the road to Rotterdam. Herr Keller's Continental Revue was rushing through the fading daylight to catch a boat that had been scheduled to sail several hours earlier. There had been passport trouble. There was always passport trouble with three hundred troupers of every nationality of the world.

But the boat would wait.

The road ahead stretched straight as far as the eye could see, a broad highway splendidly built, and elevated thirty feet above the surrounding fields.

It was a military road. There was no other traffic in sight. To each side were tulip fields with miles and miles of low glass-houses in every direction.

Scattered across the landscape were a few big windmills, their great vanes turning slowly as if with effort. The silver-grey of canals cut the distant flatness which dissolved into mist. Over all there was an enormous sweep of grey sky.

There was complete darkness inside the buses save for the glow of cigarette points. The baggage racks overhead and the aisles were filled with travelling cases plastered with the labels of every country.

The soft drizzle was turning into mist, with the darkness closing about the buses as even then, in that winter of 1938, the powers of darkness were closing on the world. In those buses were the people of the world, in all their rich variety, a great family conscious of belonging to the famous Continental

Revue that had played in every important city of Europe and Asia, and was now on its way to London.

In the last bus, Mundi, the Javanese guitar player, was sitting in the aisle strumming his guitar, and from all sides came voices of others singing softly to his music. Mario, an Italian, and Zira, a Persian girl, were not singing. They were sitting in close embrace, kissing. Nobody commented on their bliss and they did not tire of it.

Immediately behind them sat Tania and Kathi, a contrast in types. Tania was dark with blue-black hair unruly with the curls of youth. Her dark eyes were constantly alive and alert. She was sixteen and without any particular talent save a young and lovely body in the nude tableaux. Tania was a gypsy from the plains of Hungary. Kathi was from the mountains of Tyrol, a ballet dancer a year older than Tania, flaxen-haired, fragile and lovely. She stared out of the window and her blue eyes were dreaming.

Suddenly someone said, "Look, there are lights!"

Everyone sat up and stared along the broad road ahead.

"Rotterdam!"

"Where is Pappy Newman?" This came from Jimmy Nichols. "He must be having trouble with the visas."

His brother Harry turned to look back along the dark road. The Nichols were tumblers, part of a family that had been troupers for generations.

"He went to the British Consul to have the papers stamped."

"Was there anything wrong?" Lubichov, the musical director, asked the question. "I thought you went to London to arrange everything with the Home Office."

"Yes," replied Harry. "But they must be stamped again by the Consul here before we leave the country."

"Listen, Harry," a girl's voice cut through the darkness. "Is anything wrong with the papers?"

There was no answer from Harry.

A swift suspicion disturbed Mario's bliss. Perhaps he had been too proud of his conquest of Zira in competition with Harry.

A taxi horn sounded behind the bus.

Several voices cried at once: "Driver, stop, stop! It's Pappy Newman."

Herr Newman climbed from the taxi as it drew up; then he climbed into the bus, his face wreathed with smiles.

"Hello, everyone."

He spoke English but, even in those two words, there was a strong American accent. He was a big man, tall and stout. He had white hair, a round face with rosy cheeks and grey eyes. His ten-gallon hat and loud tweeds made him look like an American circus manager.

A babble of questions greeted him.

He was in good spirits. Everyone in the company was glad to get out of Germany, pleased to be going to England. Pappy Newman was as happy as any. He had lived for many years in California. His English was full of American slang. He was going back to America to retire some day; but he had one secret fear; he had not taken out his papers while he was there; if he had not been ruined so quickly in 1929, he would most certainly have taken his papers out before leaving for China.

Pappy Newman was the company manager. He attended to all business affairs with a methodical thoroughness and a fatherly concern for each individual member of the company that made him very popular.

He was a heavy eater and could pour gallons of beer down his throat with no more effect than water. Nearly always in a good humour, he would raise his voice and shout angrily at the slightest excuse. A moment later he would be smiling as if he had never shouted at all.

Every night after the show he would give a party in some café, paying for all the drinks. He seldom went to bed before daylight and then only for a few hours. His memory was infallible and his capacity for work enormous.

He passed down the bus, stepping over bags and holding on to his case. In his leather case were all the passports, all the papers, all the permits, all the tickets for three hundred irresponsible people.

In the darkness he passed Sophie his mistress, one of the chorus girls. Her hand reached up to him and he bent down to kiss her affectionately. Then he patted her hand and passed on.

"What kept you so long, Pappy?" said Gretchen. She sat with her husband Kaspar, two dwarf figures out of proportion on the fat upholstery of the bus seat.

"Is there anything wrong?" asked Kaspar.

"Yes, there is," said Dorothy. Dorothy was an English girl so strikingly beautiful that she was in nearly every act of the show, draped languidly where she would be most seen.

"Yes, there is," said Nancy. "Because you said you would join us in a few minutes." Nancy was another of the girls chosen for beauty alone, an Irish girl with a milk complexion, black hair and dark blue eyes that were always ready to smile.

"Bitte, bitte, Kinder. Please! Children."

"Something is wrong," said Rita, an Italian girl.

Pappy lost patience. "Will you keep quiet? You drive me mad."

He turned and leaned over the driver. He whispered to him to hurry. Then he opened his leather case with its innumerable compartments. He used the light from the clock on the dashboard to find what he wanted and he drew out two passports and pushed to the back of the bus again.

"Here, you fellows on the back seat move out. Mario and Herr Muller, I want to talk to you."

Settling himself in the back with the two men. Pappy carried on a long conversation in Italian and German. Muller was one of the assistant managers, a Bavarian. The three men spoke in low voices. Everyone watched Mario. Everyone in the company liked Mario. Mario was compounded of good humour and charm. He was the only son of a famous Milanese physician. He had been surrounded with everything that money could buy, with private tutors to teach him every subject and a dozen languages. He had taken medicine at the university and after the second year had been regarded as a most promising pupil. Then one night in a cabaret he had met a troupe of travelling players who played through the cafés of Europe for what tips they could collect from the patrons. He ran away with the troupe.

That had been twenty years ago. There was no city of Europe that Mario did not know. He had lived all those years with little money and yet he had never wanted for wine, women or intelligent interests. There was no good museum or art gallery which he did not know intimately; no famous painting in Europe which he did not visit again and again as an old friend, taking with him a dozen members of the caste to show them its beauties.

Mario loved life and filled every minute of it with idleness. He sat in the little coffee shops and wine cellars, and wherever he went he was welcomed; he made friends with strangers, dropping into the dialects of his new

acquaintances without effort. In spite of his forty years he was still young in appearance.

He avoided only one country, his own. He would never go back to Italy, he said, until the Fascist Government had been ousted. He hated the fascists. It was his only hate, the one foil to his enveloping love of all people and things, particularly young and beautiful girls and old and beautiful things.

So, as Pappy talked to Herr Muller and Mario, none in the bus looked at Herr Muller. He was merely one of the work-horses of the company, for ever involved in the intricate detail of packing, unpacking, sorting, organizing, moving a hundred animals, several thousand costumes, acres of scenery and hundreds of trunks and cases of properties.

Suddenly Mario jumped up from the seat, rolled his large eyes and threw his hands up in tragic despair.

"Ah! Mon Dieu!" He threw himself into the seat where Zira sat in a baby-lamb coat, her dark striking face framed in the cerise chiffon scarf she always wore around her head when travelling.

"What is it, Mario?"

"Ah!" A deep groan wrenched itself from Mario's throat. His shoulders huddled as his head sank lower and lower into his coat collar. "Ah!"

"Mario, Mario," called Herr Newman.

Agitated voices called, "What is it, Pappy?"

"Mario, what is wrong?"

A clamour of voices in a dozen languages started an uproar in the bus.

Pappy Newman jumped up. "Now Kinder . . . children, listen!" His hands spread to quell the clamour. "Listen Kinder, please. I know Mario is one of the most popular artistes of this company; he has been with Herr Direktor many years. Herr Muller has only recently joined the company but he is also very popular.

"Now something sad has happened. We have many nationalities in this company and there is always difficulty to get foreign artistes to enter England to work. They have very strong unions there and unions do not always understand.

"Three days ago I sent Harry to the Home Office and, after all else had failed, Harry got the permits."

"Well, what is wrong then!"

"Moment, bitte! Allow me to finish. Unfortunately they felt, when they examined the passports, that Herr Muller could be replaced. It was not necessary, they said, to bring a German manager to England. And also they felt that Mario could be replaced by an English artiste; his services were not absolutely necessary. . . ."

"Harry Nichols! You swine. . . ."

Pappy Newman's arms waved. "Ruhe. . . . Quiet! Allow me to finish. Harry did all he could. . . ."

"He is a swine," said someone. "He never showed their passports in the Home Office. He kept them hidden."

"I tried my best." This was from Harry. "You were lucky to get permits."

"You lie," someone answered. "We know you. We know why this happened. Someone ought to push you into the canal before the boat sails."

"*Quiet!*" shouted Pappy Newman. "No more can be done. Mario will rejoin the company when we return to the Continent."

The accusations grew more violent. Herr Newman pretended not to hear and Harry stared out of the window.

Then, as suddenly as it blew, the storm was over.

"Mario, have you any money?" Elsa Henn of the rope act spoke.

"Money?" vaguely from Mario. "Money? How could I have money? I always spend my money."

Pappy Newman sighed. "Mario, I gave you your salary only this morning. Surely you have some money."

"I bought a new suit. It took all my money."

"Mario, you must have saved a little money, just a little."

"Save, save?" Mario spoke as if such an idea were of another world. "Pappy, you know we never save . . . do you save?"

Pappy sighed again. "No, Mario . . . you are right . . . we are fools."

"True, how true!" Mario was dramatic. "But, Pappy, I have not only no money for to-morrow; I have no money for to-night."

"Well, we shall do something for you. We shall take a collection for you before the ship sails."

Zira was violently sobbing by the window, but Mario was too worried by the sudden blow of fate to offer any comfort. Herr Muller took his fate, solidly glum.

Then the bus swerved and all was forgotten in the excitement of arrival. Everybody rubbed the bus windows to gaze through. Drifting swirls of thick fog cut off the street lights, alternating misty glows with sudden clear flashes. The bus stopped in front of a long low shed. The door of the bus was flung open and the warm air inside was assailed with the cold, salty tang of the sea.

"All out, children, quick, schnell! We have delayed the boat so long. Get your bags. Pass through the immigration as quickly as possible."

A struggle followed as everybody tried to disentangle bags and scramble out at once. The air was bitterly cold and the damp chill of the fog penetrated to the blood. The quay was wet and slippery. Only a faint trace of light from the immigration shed penetrated the fog. Once in the bleak shed the motley crowd of people dumped bags and sat on them waiting patiently for Herr Newman to come with the passports.

"Now we can start the collection for Mario," said Ronnie, the English tap dancer. He took his hat. "Here you are, everybody. Hand over your spare cash. Mario needs it more than you do." He climbed through the huddled crowd, up and down over the piles of cases. Someone else began to help. All emptied the last of their Dutch guilders into the hats, and Mario, with wide eyes, stuffed the massed collection into his pockets. For one evening at least he was going to be unbelievably rich. Already his mind was planning how for one evening he would live like a true aristocrat.

Pappy Newman hurried from an office and called to the company. "Come on, hurry! Your passports are all in order. Pass around Indian file, take your cases with you as you go out of the other door. Call out your names at the wicket and you will receive your passports and tickets from the officials."

So again began the dragging of bags down one aisle and up another.

"Name, please."

"Hass, Friedl."

"Nationality?"

"German."

“Passport, ticket, pass on. Next.” So on until some three hundred passports and tickets had been handed out. Then, dragging heavy cases through the fog, the procession went out to the slippery quay and up a wet gangway to the deck of the ship. Foghorns from the harbour moaned unceasingly. The line of varied types and nationalities, made uniform by the fog, struggled across the deck, finding the door of the saloon and diving through into the warmth and light.

Once inside they disentangled into variety again but all had one thought. “Come on, let’s eat.”

Always, everywhere, the first sign of arrival was that same cry, “Come on, let’s eat.”

There was a scramble for seats which were filled before a fraction of the company could be seated.

The steward came in calling out in Dutch: “All members come and get their cabin numbers at once.”

Nobody paid the slightest attention.

Then somebody shouted: “Mario, where is he? We must say good-bye.”

There was a rush to the door.

Mario and Zira stood by the rail, Zira weeping wildly. Mario threw his arms dramatically into the air, flung them down again around Zira, clasped her to his heart with a passionate embrace, kissed her once, twice, a dozen times. Then he drew his hand across his brow and rushed down the gang plank into the fog without looking around.

“Mario, Mario!” A dozen voices followed him, but then as suddenly stopped, for something else had caught their attention and Mario was immediately forgotten.

Swinging out of the fog along the quay came a long gleamingly cream Hispano-Suiza. Like an elaborate gesture it swung, reckless of the fog, right to the foot of the gangway; a clamour of voices shouted from the rail.

“Herr Direktor! Anna!”

Two smiling faces turned up. The monocled beaming face of Herr Direktor bowed to the homage of his family. From her leopard skin coat, the smiling face of Anna looked up, genuinely delighted to be with the company again.

# Chapter Two

Herr Direktor stepped out of his car ignoring the chill fog that obscured all except the dim lines of the ship and the row of faces along the rail.

He saw only a stage setting arranged by nature to shut off everything except his dramatic entrance.

Herr Direktor (he loved the title and everyone used it in place of his name) looked up at the few dozen of his company that crowded the rails. They were a symbol of the whole. He loved his company with a vast embracing sentimentality that he never troubled to hide.

Herr Keller was a Brazilian, born of a Bavarian father and a Brazilian mother, with a Scottish grandfather on his mother's side. He was a big man in every way. He was tall and heavy, with broad shoulders and a substantial girth. Yet he gave no impression of fatness. Although he was nearly fifty his hair was black, and, looking at him, one did not think of age. He was well groomed. His clothes were tailored in Bond Street, and his favourite pose on the Continent was a version of the English country squire, tweed jacket, yellow waistcoat, whipcord riding breeches and highly polished riding boots, all a little too new.

He was vain, immensely vain, but he used his vanity as a business asset, particularly on the Continent or in Asia. He had once been a professor of languages. He spoke twelve perfectly and never knew quite when he had first realized that the knowledge of languages which confined him to the classroom was a secret to the freedom of the world. He had begun the show in Prague twenty years before with a couple of acts and a few trunks. He still had with him some of the artistes who had been in his first show. All through the years he had added new scenes and new people and had travelled back and forth across the Continent and Asia until now his company was unique in its size and variety. It had the high speed of America and all the colour of Europe and Asia.

At the quayside on that cold January evening in Rotterdam, he stood by his car and lifted his hand to accept the welcome of the company. As if that wave of the hand were tribute enough to a dramatic entrance, he shouted to Pappy Newman to have his car put on board and he grabbed his two pigskin bags from the back of the car. He started up the gangway followed by Anna

huddled in her leopard coat and overwhelmed by three other fur coats that she carried over her arms. He strode down to the saloon to join the others and Anna followed behind him. He set his bags down, calling loudly to nobody in particular to have them taken to his stateroom. Then, with a sudden smile, he sat down and called Anna to join him in a drink.

Zira, weeping, heartbroken, was led to her cabin by Liette, the harpist.

"Please, Zira," said Liette. "I can't bear to see you so heartbroken."

"You can never know how much I loved Mario," sobbed Zira.

"But you will see him again."

Zira shook her head. "How do I know, something always happens when one separates."

Liette soothed Zira and dabbed her fawn-like eyes with a handkerchief. Liette looked at the pretty oval face, dominated by the velvety black eyes and the luscious lips. She always wore a Persian sari because people noticed her that way and she could not bear to be unnoticed. She lived for the bright lights of cabarets, good food and wine and flattery.

Liette left her in the cabin.

Outside the steward was still calling: "Come at once for the numbers of your cabins. Where is the manager of this company? Get the manager at once."

Nobody took any notice of him.

The dining-room was the centre of interest. Every seat was filled, and two or three of the company behind each chair waiting to fill it, exchanging between themselves an outspoken interest in every mouthful of food that was consumed.

Herr Direktor was bellowing for Pappy Newman.

"Herr Newman, did they load the meat for the leopards? The ice too, was it put on ice?"

"Ja, ja," answered Newman with his mouth full.

"Listen to that," said one of the standing members, waiting to eat. "As long as the animals are fed we do not matter. And their meat is on ice."

"And Yogi, is Yogi all right?" bellowed Herr Direktor. "He is warm and comfortable?"

"Ja, ja," said Pappy Newman. "I put him into his cabin myself."

"Good."

Herr Direktor was satisfied. His first question was always about the leopards and his second about Yogi. He was devoted to the leopards, and for Yogi he had an almost mystic reverence. He had picked him up in India years before, on his first tour of the East.

Herr Direktor sat at a small table and ordered a drink. He opened his brief-case, put his monocle in his eye, spread out his papers and began to work. Anna, who had grown up with the company, beginning in the chorus, slipped over to the table to join the others. She was the star of the company, but loved the camaraderie of the crowd rather than the exclusiveness of stardom.

Laughter and repartee passed around the table. On its way to England was the greatest conglomeration of foreign artistes ever collected in one show, of every colour and of every size from midgets to giants, wearing continental clothing of every variety.

The oddest contrast sat at the end of the table, Long Tom, the giant, with his best friends in the company, the Wagners, German midgets; there was Kaspar with Gretchen, his wife, and Emil, his brother. The three of them were well informed and intelligent. Long Tom, a graduate of a Scottish university, liked the midgets for their conversation which never flagged. The Wagners had travelled widely in the United States and spoke English with a strong American accent. Gretchen herself was one of the best-dressed women in the company, neat, precise and fashionable. She was only three feet high but her tiny doll-like shoes had extravagantly high heels to make her as tall as her husband. Long Tom was the tallest man in the British Isles. He had little to do on the stage except walk across when the midgets were in their act and he seldom had enough energy to do more. In a normal size he would have been handsome but his great size stamped him with freakishness.

Gretchen had a mother complex and was for ever fussing about the company.

"Look!" she said. "Look at that Rastella family. Rita with her head tied up looks as if she had the mumps. The English will think we are a lot of gypsies. Why, if I had a daughter with a face like a Madonna I would see that she dressed to it. Look at Madame Rastella. That damn Russian cross-stitch. She has been working on those tablecloths ever since she came in the company."

"She's happy," said Tom lazily.

In a corner of the saloon Madame Rastella sat hunched over her embroidery under a light. Her massive figure bulged in great billows.

Gretchen stared. “She must have pleasant memories of Russia, the way she sticks to her embroidery.”

Lubichov, the musical director, leaned across. “She loved Russia. She had great success there. She sang with Caruso.”

“That was before she went to New York,” said Gretchen. “Rita was born in Russia. I wonder where Madame collected Rastella.”

Rastella sat with his family smiling at Rita. He was handsome in the Italian tradition with a face that had never been troubled with thought. He had a magnificent voice and when he was not singing to others he was singing to himself.

“Wasn’t he in Russia with her?”

“Of course not,” said Gretchen. “I wonder who was Rita’s father.”

“Rastella, of course,” said Long Tom.

“He is not. She is much too intelligent and beautiful. I’ll bet it was some Grand Duke. But look at that rag around her head. Chut, chut!” Gretchen was angry at their clothes. “Look at Rastella, that old leather coat. Everyone should have bought new clothes for London. It is all right to travel like gypsies on the Continent but in London they are not used to this kind of thing.”

Lubichov chided her. “Would you talk about the Continent that way, Gretchen? You, a German?”

“I am from the Free State of Danzig. You do not know the English. They are not like others. They do not care that we are clever or that we have talent. It is more important that we should be correct in our clothes, then they will come to see us.”

Ronnie Wall, the tap dancer, joined in. “Herr Direktor has a monocle. That will satisfy London. But wait till they see our show. Didn’t you know Frau Schiller and I are going to do an adagio dance together, nicht war, Frau Schiller?”

Frau Schiller was the stoutest woman in the company, heavier even than Madame Rastella.

“Mein Gott, mein Gott.” She quivered with laughter. “That would be gut.”

Frau Schiller with her husband travelled a dog act. Her husband, a very old man, appeared on the stage while she attended to everything behind the scenes. Their dogs were with the animals and the baggage on the other ship under the care of the animal trainers. Frau Schiller was celebrated for her appetite and she sat now munching from a paper package because she could not squeeze between the table and the fixed chairs.

"This adagio dance, Ronnie, what are we going to do? We rehearse?"

"Oh yes, Probe, lots of probe (rehearsal period.)"

"That is about the only word we know in this company," said someone. "If ever any company lived in a theatre it is this one."

"Well," said Ronnie, "it's this way. First I lift Frau Schiller on to my shoulders."

There was a shout of laughter. Ronnie was tall and very slim.

"Then I throw her around, round and round with one hand."

"I see," said Frau Schiller with her mouth full. "This is a very special kind of adagio dance we do."

"Oh yes. Everything in this company is very special."

"So!" Frau Schiller took another bite. "And when we start this throwing around how do you think we get stopped again?"

"That is easy, Frau Schiller. In London we have Stop and Go signs, red and green."

"That is good, Ronnie, so when I see red light I stop. We will have great London success. Who gets the money?"

"Always thinking of money. You can have the money, Frau Schiller. I will have the success."

"Then I suppose we go to America like all great artistes."

"No, nothing like that," said Ronnie seriously. "I am tired of working. You are rich. I saw those diamonds that you keep hidden in your petticoat."

"Ronnie!" cried Auguste, a German accordion player, shocked at his indiscretion.

"Frau Schiller will get a divorce. I shall do no more work but live happily ever afterwards on her diamonds."

"Ha, Ronnie," sighed Frau Schiller. "Ronnie, mein liebling, dass ist love."

"Sure it is, while the diamonds last."

"Show us the diamonds," cried some of the chorus girls. "Show us the diamonds, Frau Schiller."

Frau Schiller, nothing loath, lifted her skirt and several petticoats, and from a deep pocket from the last one drew out a leather wallet and opened it. There was a gasp of surprise from the crowded table as she opened and showed it full of diamonds of varying sizes.

"Where did you get them?"

"Everywhere. I began to collect them years and years ago for my old age."

"But you might be robbed."

"I only show them to my friends."

"But the customs will say you are a smuggler."

"I travel everywhere but none has searched me. If a war comes, I have no money in the bank for the government to steal. Whatever country I am in, diamonds are money and my man and I will not starve."

She packed them carefully and tucked them back into the pocket in which they had travelled with her for many years.

Herr Direktor stood up and clapped his hands for silence.

"All British artistes," he called. "I want every one of you."

They gathered round him.

"Now, quiet please, and listen to me. In the morning when we arrive in London you must all go at once to the theatre." He clapped his hands once more. "All foreigners, you will follow the British wherever you see them going."

"My mother is coming to meet me," said a chorus girl. "I'm sending her a telegram from Harwich."

"Keep quiet," he shouted. "You will send no telegrams. You will go to the theatre. Then you will go out and look for rooms for the foreign artistes. They do not know where to go. On the Continent they do that for you. Now you must do the same for them. English landladies do not like foreigners they cannot speak to, so you must engage the rooms, then you can come

back to the theatre and take the foreign artistes to their rooms. . . . They are your friends, are they not?"

He looked around at the nodding heads.

"It is understood! When everything is settled, you can go home. But remember, rehearsal to-morrow at nine."

He sat down and the others drifted back to their seats.

"No danger of him forgetting nine o'clock rehearsal," said one of the girls.

# Chapter Three

Herr Direktor gathered up his papers and locked his leather case. He had finished work.

"Ha Wong," he called. Ha Wong looked up from his chair. Ha Wong was in the Chinese hair-swinging act. "Ha Wong, you speak good English. I entrust you with the care of Yogi while we are in England."

"Yes, Herr Direktor."

"You must find him good clean rooms. He is an old man and very particular. He eats only certain things and you must see that he gets them."

"Yes, Herr Direktor."

"You will get him everything he wants and give me the bill."

"Yes, Herr Direktor."

"Now, what time is it?"

"Two a.m."

"Ha, good, it is early. . . . Come we shall dance." He clapped his hands. "The Tyrolean boys, where are they? Get Hans and Auguste and the accordions; we shall dance and sing . . . I will buy you beer and coffee and cake . . . Kellner . . . Kellner . . . waiters, where are those waiters?" he shouted. "Surely they have not gone to bed. Waiters!"

The waiters appeared, yawning and suspicious.

"Come, come! Coffee and cake for everyone . . . beer and wine!" Suddenly his abruptness melted. "If you work overtime it is all right. I will arrange that with you." He smiled with a stock charm and the waiters, satisfied by his reference to money, smiled back. "Come," he said. "We must celebrate. It is not every day that we open at the Alhambra. Berlin, Paris, Singapore, Shanghai, that is one thing, but London that is different!"

Hans appeared with his Bavarian accordion; Auguste brought her Italian accordion. The Tyroleans, twenty in number, were in their national dress with knee-length shorts of grey chamois leather attached to Tyrolean braces heavily embroidered. Over their shorts they had grey flannel coats with

green lapels and pockets decorated with oak leaves of felt. They wore Tyrolean hats with plucks and silver pins.

"What shall we have?" asked Hans.

"A waltz, a waltz!" A dozen voices spoke in chorus.

The accordion struck the first chords of the *Blue Danube*. Everything that could move was pushed out of the way and Herr Direktor caught Anna in his arms and waltzed down the saloon. All who could crowd on the floor followed and the others packed around the walls watching the dancers.

Hans played as though he had lived for this moment. He and his Tyrolean folk-dancers were young, blond and husky, all ardent Nazis. None seemed to question why it was so easy for them to obtain permits to enter England when Mario and Herr Muller could not.

The swinging music of the waltz filled the saloon and the dancers held the floor, some always falling out to give others room to dance so that the floor was never too crowded. Looking around the saloon it was apparent that youth was not the dominating quality. Herr Direktor was shrewd. Youth and beauty were abundant in his company. He chose them for decoration. But, for talent, age did not matter. Nor did appearance matter in the women if they had talent. How they looked, or what they were outside the theatre, was nothing to him. The only thing that mattered was ability on the stage. Beauty and youth were in every market-place, but for talent one had to search.

Herr Direktor smiled down at Anna. His face was beginning to shine with perspiration. He was very happy. He was always happiest when he was in the midst of his company, never happier than when he could give them a party, spending freely. No matter how much he found fault with his people on the stage or at rehearsals, in private life he was one of them. They played their parts in the theatre, he played this part outside, striding monocled and flashy through hotels, haranguing managements, and living in the grand manner befitting the greatest impresario in Europe.

The waltz ended; it was followed by another. Herr Direktor sat down in a chair. There was only one chair and he lifted Anna to his knee.

Anna was his star and he was very fond of her. That was why his wife had left him. He was divorced but he had not married Anna. Anna was a brilliant artiste. She could sing, dance, play several instruments; she was daring with her leopards. Her body was as lithe and supple as that of Rex, her pet leopard.

Herr Direktor did not care for stars. He preferred a show that was built up solidly from the chorus, with every act the best of its kind. Stars grew temperamental and wanted other artistes subdued to give more emphasis to their acts. Then, when a show had been built around them, they would go away and let the show down.

But with Anna it was different. Anna had grown up from the chorus by sheer ability. She had never lost touch with the chorus and she was never temperamental, because she never thought of herself, only of her acts and, of course, of her lovers.

She had a warm impulsive nature. She had been with Herr Direktor from the age of fifteen, seven years. Few in the company envied her. Her privileges meant only hard work and constant attendance on Herr Direktor. As she sat on Herr Direktor's knee, she wore a red Hungarian frock thickly embroidered with gay flowers, and over her frock one of the popular German sweaters trimmed with green and red, buttoned with small brass buttons.

The waltz ended and someone shouted: "Let us sing folk songs, Auguste, where is Auguste?"

Auguste was half hidden behind a stein of beer. She set it down and wiped her mouth before she hitched her accordion into place again. The waiters were loading food and drinks on to the tables but someone was always shouting: "Kellner; Kellner; waiter, waiter." The Tyroleans gathered with steins at the end of the long table.

"What will it be?" asked Auguste.

Herr Direktor clapped his hands. "Der Mai ist gekommen," he called.

So Auguste, laughing, a typical German blonde, struck loudly into the old German waltz song. Chorus girls joined arms and, breaking into two rows singing in harmony, they advanced and retreated across the floor. Herr Direktor beamed with delight. Extravagant applause broke out when the song finished. The company loved applause and gave it in the measure they liked to hear it given.

"Another, Auguste, another."

"What now?"

Hans called out from the midst of his Tyroleans.

"Wenn die Soldaten durch. . . ."

"No, no!" There was a surprising volume in that rejection. Then someone added: "We have had enough soldier songs. We are going to England to-night. Now we do not have to think any more about soldiers. We have all seen enough of that. . . ."

Herr Direktor clapped his hands. "Shush, ruhe, children. Something pleasant, Auguste."

"Lustig ist das Zigeunerleben?"

"Ach, gut, gut. . . . Merry is the gypsy love . . . that is better than soldiers."

Auguste's hands moved over the keys. The music began low. Then suddenly from the crowd a husky voice began to sing. The voice had no quality, it was the voice of the people, a gypsy voice.

The singer was pushed forward.

Tania had not been long in the company. Herr Direktor had picked her up, an orphan at fifteen, to pose in the nude for the great organ scene. Her body had the beauty of a bud opening to flower. She came forward, unabashed, singing Hungarian gypsy words to the tune. Dark and vivacious, she was a gamin. Her voice, not used on the stage, held the crowded saloon with its insinuation and insolent challenge. Herr Direktor nodded. He had begun to notice Tania. She would learn quickly. Few had noticed how much and how quickly Tania was learning; how, with her gamin vivacity, she watched every girl in the company, picking up in a few short months an education she had missed until she had joined the company.

Herr Direktor nodded. One never knew where some talent would blossom in these young ones. Hans came forward and his accordion caught the tune. Then everyone joined in the chorus and Tania was forgotten again. Tania smiled as she watched Herr Direktor. He had at last noticed her. Some day, she would be the star of this show, but there was plenty of time and one must not make mistakes.

"Kathi," called Herr Direktor. "You are not eating, you are not drinking."

Kathi, a ballerina, seemed to wake from a trance which wrapped her separate from the others and she smiled at him. Kathi never seemed to eat and drink like the others. Kathi was different in so many ways. If others had beauty, Kathi had the elusive quality of loveliness, fine porcelain among earthenware.

Herr Direktor called her to him and she crossed the floor. She was wearing a dark brown short sweater trimmed with gold, and brown flannel slacks. Her figure was slim and boyish.

Herr Direktor had just had an idea. Kathi was the ever-virginal, ever-romantic of Princesses in old fairy-tales, perfect of her kind, even to the virginity. He could build a scene beginning with the Sleeping Beauty; Kathi lying on a silken bed. There would be steps, the leopards lying at the foot of the bed . . . he forgot about the party.

The night was wearing on but none seemed to think about bed. From outside, the continuous moan of the foghorns drifted down, muted by doors and decks.

Sarah, the little English dancer, edged past the troupe of Russian dancers to the midgets. The Russians in dark Cossack costumes were huddled in a group humming Cossack songs to themselves in solemn harmonies.

Sarah took Emil, the midget, by the lapel of his beautifully pressed jacket. "Emil," she said. "Where is the change from those guilders I gave you?"

Emil looked like a guilty boy. "I spent it, Sarah."

"Spent it. You couldn't have spent it all. Give it to me."

Emil could not keep money. The condition was so chronic that he had made a permanent arrangement with Sarah that he would give her his pay immediately he received it and she would give him spending money as she thought fit.

"But, Emil, I told you to give me back the change."

"But, Sarah, I did not have much and it went, I do not know where."

"Well, I'll take it from your spending money next week. How can I save for you if you don't help me?"

Emil wriggled with guilt. "All right, Sarah, you fix it your way."

"Sarah," said Luiza, her girl friend, a Bavarian dancer, "you are crazy. You save all his money and you spend your own. Are you going to marry him?"

"Emil? No, I wouldn't marry him."

"Why not? You love him. He is a nice fellow even if he is a midget."

"Yes, I love him but I wouldn't marry him. I don't think it is right. Are you going to marry Friedrich?"

"Some day maybe. But now I do not want to marry anyone."

"No wonder." Gretchen's sharp voice cut in. "You were a fine-looking girl, Luiza, before you mixed up with that fellow. You are so thin now. If you don't get some weight on you will develop T.B." Gretchen never minced words. What she had to say she said directly and with complete frankness.

Herr Direktor patted Kathi affectionately and then stood looking around for Pappy Newman. Pappy was in the midst of a group of Irishmen. There was Rob, the scene shifter, Mike and Bert, property men. They had Yasmini and Lotus, the two Indian sisters from Calcutta, with them, and Pappy was telling them about Los Angeles.

"Pappy," called Herr Direktor.

Pappy looked up. "Excuse me, boys." He rose to follow Herr Direktor.

On deck the fog was so thick that nothing could be seen more than a yard away. The door leading to the saloon opened and there was a brief smudge of yellow light against the blanket of fog. Herr Direktor and Pappy Newman fumbled their way to the rail. Everything dripped water. Above them the foghorn droned eerily. From somewhere too near in the fog another foghorn bellowed. The gentle throb of dead engines was the only other sound in the night.

The two men leaned over the rail looking down in the sea but unable to see it.

"You had no trouble?"

Pappy Newman shook his head at the fog. "Only Mario and Muller."

"No trouble with Hans and his Tyroleans?"

"None."

Herr Direktor shook his head at the fog. "They do not let men of military age out of Germany easily and yet the English do not object to letting them into England."

"That is not for us to worry about."

"No . . . no! We are of the theatre only. If I could be sure Hans was also, I would be happier. I do not want trouble."

“We have enough of that in Germany,” said Pappy.

Herr Direktor stared into the fog. “We manage very well. For two months now we have only to think of our own people and not of those we must bribe.”

“It is better so,” said Pappy.

“But Mario. It is better for Mario to be with us.”

“But how?”

“There is always a way. I will see to it myself when we are in London.”

The fog took on a tinge of greyness as the dawn began to sort out darkness from the enclosing murk.

Herr Direktor shivered. “Come, let us go in.”

# Chapter Four

Bells were clanging. A steward was banging on cabin doors but there was no response to his call.

"Ten o'clock," he called. "Everyone up. We'll be in Gravesend in two hours."

Behind the doors everyone was sound asleep.

"Where is the manager?" The steward came into the saloon. Already the table accommodation was full of the mothers and fathers of the company and the young children. They filled all the tables except the one at which Herr Direktor sat, immaculate, clean-shaven, and fresh.

None took any notice of the steward.

"Where is the manager?" asked the steward.

Olivia, the Hawaiian singer, turned from her boy Jackie aged five, and laughed. "Asleep, of course. What would he be doing up at ten o'clock when there is no rehearsal?"

Herr Direktor took no notice of the steward, and the monocle in his eye deterred the steward from assuming that he would be bothered with such a detail as getting the major portion of the company out of bed.

The steward went out of the saloon again, banging harder than ever on doors.

Herr Direktor sat at his table surrounded by most of the children of the company; Ching Ching, a little Chinese boy; Jackie, a five-year-old Hawaiian; Myrtle, aged three, and her brother Robin, aged six, both English; Biji, aged seven, Baba eight, and other Arab children of various ages; Snowball, a jet-black little boy, an orphan but the favourite child of the company. The children of the company were all very happy and they were good little performers on the stage.

"To-day we shall be in England and that is different from the Continent. There you could do what you pleased but in England they are strict about children. To-morrow you will start to go to school. You will like that will you not?"

The children nodded dutifully, except Ching Ching.

Herr Direktor screwed his monocle in tighter. "You Ching Ching, you will like school, nicht wahr?"

Ching Ching avoided Herr Direktor's monocled eye.

"My father says I do not need to go to school."

"Ach!" Herr Direktor shrugged his shoulders. "That is on the Continent and in China; in England it is different. You must go to school, every day, otherwise you cannot have a permit to work in the theatre. Every morning you must be at school at nine, and at night the school inspector can come to see that you have left the theatre by ten p.m."

He looked around the young faces. "You Biji, you like to go to school?"

"Oh, yes." Biji's English was perfect.

"Good. Where did you learn English, Biji?"

"In the circus."

"You are very clever, my child, at seven to speak so many languages."

Biji was unimpressed by praise. She was a wild-looking child, a pure Arab with brown skin, black eyes, black curly hair like a wire brush. She did a tumbling act, spinning across the stage in a series of frantic cartwheels as though she were made of springs. It never failed to bring the house to cheers but, as soon as the spotlight was off her, she was utterly relaxed and unconcerned with anything.

Suddenly Herr Direktor remembered something. "Harry, Harry," he called.

"Yes, here I am," answered Harry. He appeared as if by magic, ready to go ashore while most of the others were still asleep.

"Harry, I forgot. The school for the children. You must see about it."

"I have already done that, Herr Direktor. I did that when I went to London for the permits."

"Ach!" Herr Direktor was astonished. He beamed on Harry. "Harry, my boy, you are a great help to me."

Harry tried to hide his pleasure at this praise. Harry intended to learn all he could about the business end of the company. Some day he might have his own company.

Into the saloon came Pappy Newman, leather bag under one arm, greatcoat over the other, hat on his head.

He gazed around the saloon in astonishment.

"Where is everybody?"

Harry laughed. "In bed!"

"What? We shall be in Gravesend in fifteen minutes. I have to give them all their passports."

He dumped his leather case and coat, and went out banging and kicking doors. "All ashore, all ashore. Up on deck!"

Inside every cabin there was a sound of frantic hurry as sleepy girls and men tumbled out of their bunks. Pappy Newman stamped back into the saloon, red-faced and wiping his brow.

"Waiter, beer, beer quickly."

"Sorry sir, the bar is closed. We are ready to land."

By a miracle of quick change members of the company began to straggle in. Frank Sumner, assistant conductor, one of the Nichols family, came in. "Hello, Pappy, what's the rush? I thought you said we were in."

"Here, take your passport. Come on everybody. Get a move on. You British get to the train and wait."

Frank's wife, Francine, the ballet mistress, came in the saloon.

"Here, Frank, take the baby." She passed him a red-headed baby of six months. Frank took the baby and tossed it up. Some of the chorus girls, coming in, crowded around the baby and its father.

"Please, please," cried Pappy, but the girls took no notice. The baby was a favourite in the company. She had been born in Germany and was making her first appearance in England.

Girls began to flood in, but all went to the baby.

"Please, please," said Pappy Newman. Then suddenly he rose and bellowed. "Get your damn passports."

There was a gentle bump. Someone cried: "The boat has stopped."

Pappy Newman jumped to his feet and bellowed: "Hurry up everybody, landing cards and passports, have them with you."

There was a wild scramble after him, some went one way to get their passports and some another way to get their bags. In the end everyone was waiting on the deck, patient and in good humour. The fog was still thick and the shore could be seen but dimly.

The gangways were lowered. A voice called from the dockside. "British subjects to the left. Foreign passports on the right. British passports come first, please. This way. British subjects first."

"This is where we get a break," said Dick, one of the Nichols tumblers. "After standing all those months behind the foreigners, we come first for a change."

One after another they trailed past the officers . . . a quick look at the passport. "British? Pass on." . . . Into the customs shed, bags on the table, unlocking and opening them.

"Anything dutiable?"

"No." A quick chalk mark.

"Anything dutiable?"

"A camera." This was from Roger, who had a conscience.

"Let me see it. Zeiss Ikon. Where did you buy it and how much did it cost?"

"One hundred and eighty marks in Germany."

"Sorry, old chap. This will cost you quite a bit."

"He is crazy," muttered Hugo, the strong man. "And in his own country too. Look what he is paying!"

"Ja," said Max Van Huten, juggler. "And they do not even go through the bags if you say no."

"He is crazy," muttered Hugo. He pushed his bag along.

"Anything dutiable?"

"No."

The customs officer glanced at Hugo's bulk and ran his fingers through his bag expertly bringing up two boxes of Dutch cigars.

"Sorry, old chap. I think you've forgotten something."

"Ach!" said the flustered Hugo. "I did not understand."

# Chapter Five

There was a mad scramble for the train.

Through all the windows, girls and men, young and old, leaned to intercept the refreshment wagon as it passed.

Inside the corridor of the train, little Kaspar dragged his heavy bag followed by the trim Gretchen.

Jimmy Nichols, Harry's brother, jumped to help him.

"Welcome to England, all you Germans. Here you are, Gretchen. Sit here."

He took her bag and hoisted it to the rack.

"Goodness," said Gretchen, breathless. "Thank God for a soft seat." She relaxed with a sigh. "A train with cushions. Well, all I can say is that the Germans must have pretty hard bottoms, the way they ride on wooden seats all the time."

Throughout all the carriages, for an hour of waiting, there was laughter and chatting among the members of the company. They were in England. There would be no more endless regulations. There would be nice clothes to buy and lots of food. There would be no taxes taken off salaries, no shows on Sunday and no daily matinées. There was apparently a King in England who told Herr Direktor what he could and what he could not do to his people, whether they were foreign or not. In other countries there were always deductions from salaries for something or other, and nobody cared how much artistes were paid or how long they worked.

Finally Pappy Newman and Herr Direktor came to the train. They were laughing. Herr Newman was relieved. Passing through the immigration formalities was always a worry with such a feckless crowd. Now it was over and he was happy.

Herr Direktor was happy, very happy. He would make a lot of money in London. Everybody was happy.

Pappy and Herr Direktor walked the length of the train.

As the two walked along, the windows suddenly blossomed with heads, all smiling as the news passed down the train that Pappy and Herr Direktor were coming along.

Herr Direktor beamed happiness at every face he saw and every face beamed happiness back.

A damp unhappy porter, carrying Herr Direktor's pigskin bags, followed and looked upon it all with doubting eyes.

Tania leaned through an open window and Herr Direktor paused a moment as its vitality separated her face from the mass. He saw Kathi behind and his hand went up to touch her affectionately. Then he passed on.

Herr Newman followed, calling to each compartment: "Everyone go directly to the theatre. Watch out for the foreigners, you British members. See that nobody gets lost."

Herr Direktor paused before another compartment. "Ha, Harry, my boy. There is something I want you to be sure to do as soon as you have taken the artistes to the theatre. I want you to find a nice room for Kathi, a very nice room. Do not mind the expense. This is her first trip to England and she does not know where to go. I place her in your care, my boy. See that she has a very nice room. She is so fragile, little Kathi."

"Yes, Herr Direktor." Harry was pleased. He was always pleased to do anything for Herr Direktor. "Kathi shall have the best room that I can find."

Herr Direktor passed on into the fog.

In her compartment Tania settled down from the window with a sigh. She settled down next to Kathi, who sat in a corner seat gazing out the window.

"Did you see, Kathi?" said Tania. "Herr Direktor likes you."

"He likes everyone."

"But he likes you specially. Maybe he will make you a star."

Kathi drew back slightly into her corner. "I do not want to be a star."

Tania laughed. In the ballet numbers Kathi had a fluid grace that made others clumsy in comparison. But she did not want to be a star. Tania, on the other hand, neither could dance nor sing, but she wanted to be a star.

There was a sudden chatter from the length of the train. Everyone looked out. There in the fringe of the fog was the big cream Hispano-Suiza, with

Herr Direktor, monocled and muffled, at the wheel. By his side Anna was deep in her leopard coat. She, like everyone else, was excited and gay; she blew kisses to the faces at the train windows.

Then, in a dramatic exit, Herr Direktor accelerated with a roar and the car sped out of sight.

The train began to move slowly. The excitement, the chatter died away; everyone settled down to sleep.

# Chapter Six

The arrival in London, in the great station full of staring people, should have been exciting but it was the reverse. The Keller company became a sleepy, patient mass again, laden with suit cases. The mass oozed into a file flowing slowly behind Harry into the tube. The straggling crowd alighted at Trafalgar Square, filed up Charing Cross Road and turned into the alley leading to the Alhambra. Inside the theatre the artistes set down their bags on the empty stage and sat on them prepared to wait for hours while the English members found rooms.

Harry planned the search and the British members set off, each to a different street, Gerrard, Old Compton, Frith Street and Greek Street. It was a weary job. The January streets were wet and the air was dank and cold. Slowly they straggled back. Harry began to co-ordinate the results and parcel out the foreigners. They gripped bags again and a procession dragged out of the theatre, little groups following tired British artistes. Harry watched the last group straggle off and then turned to the remaining few with a smile. He had a boy with him and he went to Kathi.

"Kathi, this boy will take you. You have a very nice room, very nice."

Tania appeared by her side as if by magic.

"I go with Kathi."

Harry frowned.

"Kathi cannot go alone," said Tania. "Herr Direktor not like that. Kathi is so . . ."

"Fragile." Harry let the word slip with impatience. "Go on, then."

But when he crossed to Zira he was smiling again.

"Zira, I have found you a very nice room."

"Is it far away?" she asked without smiling.

"Almost ten minutes."

"I cannot walk so far. Is it with the rest of the company?"

"No," said Harry. "It is by yourself but you need not worry about walking, Zira. We shall go by taxi."

He picked up her cases and started across the stage.

Zira was pleased but did not show it.

"Look at that pansy," said Zira as she passed Yasmini. "He is actually carrying my bags." Zira winked at Yasmini. "See you later, dear," she called.

Yasmini picked up her bags. "After weeping all night about Mario!"

Tired groups were trouping around Soho, complaining. Rooms were too drab; they were too cold; the tiny fireplaces threw no heat and the water was too far away; there was no place to wash clothes; the landladies were too grim; everything was wrong.

The Rastella family were placed in a family hotel by Jimmy Nichols. The proprietor was Italian and the Rastellas were Italian.

"Bah!" said Madame with disgust. "It is terrible. So cold, so cold."

The proprietor came along the hall rubbing his hands with pleasure.

"Bouna sera! Madame, bouna sera. Come in, come in the kitchen and sit by the fire."

"Ha!" Madame rolled her expressive eyes. This was a pleasure she had not expected. He spoke her own language.

"Ah! Bona, bona."

They filed into the kitchen at the back of the hotel and sat around the big scrubbed table. The proprietor's wife stood over the stove. Dinner was already being prepared. The proprietor was a former chef. He lifted the lids of pots and pans, sniffed appreciatively and turned to catch the beam of approval in the Rastella eyes. The aroma of Italian cooking filled the kitchen and the Rastellas relaxed with pleasure.

Soon the table was spread with heavy crockery on white oil-cloth. Generous helpings were piled on plates and the kitchen filled with lively chatter and laughter. Other artistes at the hotel were called in to join the family and soon the kitchen was crowded; food was consumed in quantity, and gaiety quickly turned the gathering into a party.

Papa Badoni's hotel was known all over the Continent as the 'Artiste's Hotel'. His wife, who had been a chambermaid in an Ostend Hotel, was a hard worker. She did all the work while he gave the instructions. He spent most of his time talking to his guests in half a dozen languages. He collected his rents when he could get them. He had never been known to turn anyone out of his hotel merely because the rent could not be paid. Yet he prospered,

and the word of his goodness spread all over the Continent wherever artistes gathered.

As he took the Rastella family to their room on the second floor back, Madame began to complain of the stairs and her heart, but he waved a finger at her and whispered that he was taking her to the best suite he had. He always took everyone to the best suite and whispered the information confidentially.

Madame shook her head in doubt but when she entered the room and saw a gas stove she changed her mind.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Bona, bona."

Madame Rastella loved cooking. She began immediately to unpack her cases. Papa Badoni beamed. "It is good?"

Madame Rastella, short of breath over her cases, straightened up. "Bona, bona."

"Ah! But wait!" Papa Badoni rushed down the stairs and came hurrying back loaded with pots and pans, including a tureen for soup and a coffee pot. Madame Rastella arose with a gasp of delight and took the utensils from him, carefully inspecting each in turn.

Rita shared her mother's pleasure. The three always occupied one room, although Rita was twenty. It was easier that way and she had shared her parents' room since she was a baby. She was still the baby of the family, adoring and adored, with a beautiful figure that her mother's food had not begun to affect, and an exquisite pale, oval face.

Rita studied hard. She had one ambition, to work in an office. Wherever she travelled she envied the girls she saw going to work every morning and leaving at a fixed hour every night. The inside of a great office was more beautiful to Rita than any other place. She would stare fascinated at the long rows of desks and files and typewriters, all so neat, so orderly, so precise, so different from the stage. When her mother retired from the stage then she would go in such an office and she would not have to tour the Continent any more.

Madame Rastella raised her head from her unpacking. Her handsome husband was decorating the one comfortable chair and her beautiful daughter was lying on the bed. She pointed at the pots and pans and spoke rapidly in Italian. Then she packed them off like a pair of children to do the shopping.

The proprietor, hovering around, accompanied them as far as the door and pointed in the direction of the Berwick Market, behind Piccadilly Circus and only five minutes away. There everything could be bought that an Italian appetite could desire.

Walking down Dean Street and across Old Compton, Rita became sad. The sight of Italian shops with their little windows filled with spaghetti, ravioli, strings of peppers, onions and bottles of Italian wine filled her with thoughts of happier countries where the sun shone and one did not shiver with the cold. London was so very disappointing. The fog, the chill that bit into one's bones, the cold people and the strange language, all those made her feel depressed and lonely.

Rastella was not so easily depressed. He loved new places and he loved shopping for food. He filled two penny carriers with Italian food. Each purchase, no matter how small, was a social event, the exchange of goods and money was accompanied by the exchange of conversation, family affairs, weather, news from the Continent, stories accompanied with gusts of laughter. The food purchased, Rastella entered an Italian wine shop to purchase the two bottles of wine which the Rastella family drank every day. In a few moments the wine vendor and Rastella were talking like old friends. In a few days Rastella would be a friend of every Italian merchant in Soho.

They returned to the hotel loaded with supplies and Madame Rastella cooked the evening meal. After the meal they drank the strong black coffee for which Madame was celebrated throughout the company. Then, not knowing where to find the rest of the company, nor how to find their way about London, they were compelled for the first time in years to retire to bed before midnight.

# Chapter Seven

The Continental Revue had been rehearsing day and night for five days. Herr Direktor worked the company unmercifully. The London opening meant much to him.

This morning the customs had finally released the more than one thousand pieces of baggage, trunks, scenery, props and gimcracks of every kind collected from all parts of the world to create illusion on the stage. All the members of the company stood or sat around the theatre and the stage door waiting for the procession of lorries that would bring the baggage. English companies would not touch their baggage, but in foreign companies everyone helped with the loading and the unloading of all baggage and scenery, the men doing the heavy work and the women taking care of the costumes.

The lorries began to draw up and, with speed and order, the loads were emptied on to the stage and rushed to their allotted places. Each member knew what to do. The place became a seeming chaos of people rushing to and fro, upstairs and down; the ever-piling mass of material on the stage melted away as quickly as it accumulated.

Girls unpacked the costumes rapidly and others raced with them up the long narrow stairs of the Alhambra to hang them in proper dressing-rooms. The dressing-rooms had been allotted and a list of the names of the occupants hung by the stage doorman's office. Five days before, the chairs had been drawn up in front of the make-up shelves. The names of the artistes to occupy the chairs had been scribbled on bits of paper and stuck in the mirrors. The tables stood yawning for grease paint and powder. They would have their fill in the days to come because Keller's Revue was heavy on make-up. Herr Direktor did not care how anyone looked off the stage, but, on the stage, all his geese had to be swans.

The men of the company sorted out the private trunks and pushed them to the back of the stage.

"Privat, privat Gepäck, schnell."

Private luggage had to be moved quickly or it would be whisked away down into the storage cellars. Nothing was allowed to lie around. The artistes dropped their work and raced to the pile of bags and trunks; girls,

boys, men and women all dragged their own trunks up the stairs and away, young and old, fat and thin, all laughed and shouted in a babble of tongues. They were caught in the excitement of action, puppets animated by the strings of their craft, happy to be moving as the strings pulled. The men who pulled the strings, who had arranged where everything would go, the men who organized every detail of this complicated show went quickly about their business seeing that the happy puppets made no mistakes.

Herr Direktor stood in the middle of the stage in his shirt sleeves. During the past five days he had been at the theatre all the time. He was large, tolerant, and completely in command. His stage managers and property men knew where everything should go and what everyone must do. As the private baggage littered the stage, the organization scattered, everyone became individual and personal for a few moments. Herr Direktor watched it all with monocled eye. He would travel anything for anyone; there was no limit to what his people could take with them provided they could fulfil one condition, get it off the stage before the next load was dumped.

In contrast to Herr Direktor's impassive alertness, Pappy Newman was rushing from one place to another, streaming with perspiration, hustling each and all.

"Come you, Dick, Harry, Henn. Get a move on. Quick, get these big koffers over there. They aren't heavy."

The big wardrobe trunks were dragged into place at the back of the stage where the chorus made their quick changes. In this show there was very little time to use dressing-rooms. As fast as one number came off the stage, the girls changed and rushed back on with a new costume and a new smile.

"Come on, you guys," shouted Pappy Newman, driving the men hard. "The Loop-the-Loop; Anna is using the big one in London, make a place for it. Push that end in there, Jimmy. Get the ladder and fix the trap door at the top. Come on there, get a move on, don't die over it."

"O.K. Pappy."

"Hurry up, there, here comes the organ."

All hands turned to the organ, the heaviest property in the show. Then came the rostrums and more scenery, the wind machine for the Typhoon scene, more trunks of costumes, Friedl's life-sized dancing puppets. The English stage hands moved among the motley array, wondering whether they were in a museum or a madhouse.

Then came the animals, enough for a Zoo.

"Come on, boys. Here come Charlie's snakes. Have you the lights and heaters ready, Pat?"

Pat was the Irish animal trainer. He was responsible for the welfare of the animals. He was only twenty-four, thin but strong as a horse. Easy-going, humorous, spendthrift, he lived for his animals and spent most of his spare time with them. Only one other member of the company understood animals as he did and that was Anna, who was so much of a simple animal herself. That was why the relationship between him and Anna had so much of the direct simplicity of animals.

When she was nervously overwrought after her acts, or with the flamboyance of Herr Direktor, she would slip away and stay with Pat and his animals.

"Pat! Pat! Are the lights and heaters ready for the snakes?"

"Been ready for five days. Here are your snakes, Charlie."

Charlie smiled although he did not understand English. He stood, tall, thin, and jet black, his head crowned with a high red turban. His loud tweed coat and his black-and-white check shirt were extravagant. In contrast to his clothes he was a quiet man, a close friend of Yogi. For generations, his family had been snake charmers. He loved his snakes.

A bigger lorry drew up to the theatre.

"Come on," shouted Pappy. "Here are the leopards."

This time Herr Direktor left the centre of the stage for the first time. "Careful, gentlemen, please. Vorsichtig, Max!"

One after another the five heavy cages in which the leopards travelled were lowered to the stage. The cages were carried to a far corner back-stage where a place had been reserved for them. Then the cages were uncovered.

Tania ran across the stage. She stooped down to talk to the biggest leopard, but Rex drew back and hissed through his bared teeth.

"Vorsichtig!" shouted Herr Direktor. "He does not know you. Keep away from him."

Tania drew back; her eyes met those of Rex. It was only a second's by-play but the antagonism between the two was evident. Tania had no natural sympathy with animals.

"Vorsichtig!" cried Herr Direktor with sudden anger as Tania stared into Rex's snarling mask.

Tania turned with a quick innocent smile, looking young and naïve. Once again she had been noticed.

Pat shouted to one of the girls: "Tell Anna Rex is here."

A moment later Anna ran across the stage. She slipped down on her knees in front of the cage and talked baby talk to the big leopard. Herr Direktor stood by laughing. Pappy smiled. Pat slipped a couple of the cage bars up while Anna put her head inside the cage and tickled Rex's head.

"Did you miss me, Rex? Did you miss me? One week I have not seen you. My darling, you lovely Rex."

Rex rolled over on his back, purring. He drew in his claws and stroked back at her with his pads like a playful kitten. He was one of the biggest leopards in captivity and a magnificent animal. Then Pat pushed his head into the cage and put his mouth to Rex's mouth and kissed him.

"Hey, Pat," said Pappy Newman. "One day you will have your face taken right off. Don't forget, he is a wild animal."

"Naw, he wouldn't hurt me, would you Rex?" He shook hands with the leopard and pulled his head out of the cage.

"Look out!" yelled Herr Direktor. At the same moment his foot pushed Pat's head down to the floor. The little leopard in the cage above had lashed a paw out to whip Pat's scalp. Vixen was jealous of Rex.

Herr Direktor wiped his brow. "I told you before, Pat, to watch for that little one."

Pat pulled the bars down as he rolled away on the floor out of reach of Vixen. He clambered to his feet and went to the hyena's cage. He gave the hyena a nuzzle and then turned back to the other animals. Herr Direktor followed Pat with his eyes. Pat amused him and he had a particular affection for anyone who understood animals. Anna too had an affection for Pat for the same reason and Herr Direktor was only just beginning to suspect that Anna was as pliant in Pat's hands as were the other animals.

Maria, Anna's dresser, came across the stage. Maria was no favourite of Herr Direktor for several reasons. Maria carried tales. Also Maria was about to have a child. Herr Direktor had wanted to leave her in Germany but Anna had pleaded with him. Maria was her constant companion and kept her up to date in the gossip about everything that went on while Anna was away from the company with Herr Direktor.

Maria had been crying. She whispered something to Pappy Newman but Herr Direktor heard it and gave a shout of anger. Maria who had the brains of a rabbit had lost the key ring and could not open any of the trunks containing Anna's costumes. Herr Direktor called the doorman to find a locksmith to make a new set of keys. Pappy Newman was told to take the cost from Maria's salary.

Herr Direktor stamped off and more trouble descended on Pappy Newman. Sophie told him they could not find their red orchestra sashes, sashes that wrapped around their waists over black silk slacks and white silk shirts. The girls were looking everywhere for the sashes. Sophie was responsible for them and someone remembered having seen them lying on the stage of the last theatre the show played. Sophie had lost the sashes and new ones must be made. But none knew where they could find the proper shade of red. The others were made of Italian silk. At all costs Herr Direktor must not know. Pappy Newman was at the end of his patience. He began to shout at Sophie. Sophie was his mistress. Her eyes had a definite slant from some Oriental ancestor, and, with her flaxen hair, gave her face an intriguing prettiness. She did not care in the least how much Pappy shouted, but she was very worried about those sashes. She had no idea where she had put them and now Hanna, the wardrobe mistress, would have to make a hundred and fifty new ones in a couple of hours.

Frau Schiller heaved her bulk around from her beloved dogs. "A nice way Pappy shouts at his love. I wonder she stands for it."

Sophie ran up the stairs with tears in her eyes, not because of the shouting, but because of Hanna and all the extra work she would have. Hanna was worried. She would never get everything done in time for the evening rehearsal. Everyone offered to help.

Little Connie, an English chorus girl, hurried out of the stage door with Friedl the puppeteer and Elsa Henn, of the rope-throwing act, to buy new material. Little Connie was an outspoken girl from the north of England. She thought Herr Direktor was daft wanting her to smile all the time on the stage when she didn't feel like smiling. Connie believed in showing her true feelings and in saying what she liked on every subject, including politics on the Continent.

Before they could be missed they were back with a big parcel. The girls, over a hundred of them, gathered in the huge wardrobe-room. They spread the material on the big tables, cut, basted and sewed, everyone turning a willing hand to help Hanna. They had been running up and down stairs since

morning, but they were all good natured, forgetting their own weariness to help one of their number in trouble.

The big fireplace reaching half-way to the ceiling, threw its flames high in the chimney, and the glow flickered to the farthest corners of the room. The English girls had set a full kettle on the iron crane and the steam from the spout rattled the lid impatiently. The room, with its soft-red brick walls, looked like a corner of a mediæval castle.

"I wonder when Herr Direktor intends to release us," asked Evelyn. "We have been here since eight this morning and dress rehearsal is at eight o'clock. I suppose we shall be here all night and he will be in one of his usual tantrums."

"All night?" replied Sally, the little English dancer. "You're an optimist. We won't leave this theatre again until midnight after the first performance to-morrow night."

Then a voice was shouting. "All down on the stage." The call boy was running up the long stairs. "All down on the stage." His voice was already past the wardrobe-room and echoed down from the floor above.

Now Pappy Newman was bawling up from below. "Will you girls hurry up. Herr Direktor is waiting for you."

In a few minutes the entire company was gathered on the big stage. Herr Direktor stood in the centre with Francine, the ballet mistress.

"Ladies and gentlemen. It is now three o'clock. In two hours you must be back in the theatre, so you will have plenty of time to rest. I shall release you now for two hours, but first I will tell you what you must do. I have given Francine money for you.

"Every one of the ladies must go to the hairdresser at my expense. You must have your hair done for the rehearsal to-night. Sir Osborn Droll and his staff will be here and I do not want him to think my ladies do not look nice. Sometimes on the Continent you do not bother very much to comb your hair, so to-night someone else will do it for you at my expense. Then I shall know for sure that it is done. Otherwise perhaps you would go back to the dressing-rooms and sleep. After that, you must have a good meal, as I do not know when you will get the next one. The bar on the balcony will be open all night and I have arranged that you can have sandwiches, cakes, tea and coffee. But you must be back here promptly at five o'clock. I have engaged a special make-up man. He will give each one of you a chart and you must

make up exactly as he says. Also you must use the wet white on your legs to-night." There was a murmur of dismay from the girls.

"Not that dirty stuff!"

"It soils all our clothing."

He held up his hand. "Quiet! Yes, the wet white. Get it from Francine. Now go . . . and hurry up. Five sharp, remember!"

The group on the stage began to split and scatter. The girls gathered around Francine.

"Can you tell us, Francine," asked Evelyn, "where a hundred and fifty girls can get their hair dressed around Charing Cross Road inside an hour."

"God only knows," said Francine. "That's your look-out. Here's your money. Come and get it everyone."

"Yes," grumbled Nancy. "And then we have to eat, all in two hours."

"And have a rest as well," added Dorothy.

"He'll spoil us, giving us so much time to loaf around."

But they gathered their money, collected their coats and hurried out of the stage door.

When they returned, everything on the stage was ready for the opening scene. The stage had been swept, and now there was only the stare from one solitary bulb on an iron rod in the centre of the stage. The fireproof curtain had been lowered to keep the draught away from Lubichov, the musical director, who was still working hard with the orchestra in the pit. Since eight in the morning he had been rehearsing with the orchestra.

Herr Direktor came through a door at the side of the stage and sat in the off-stage box. He sat by himself, watching Lubichov and listening to the orchestra. He knew the scores by heart and could spot a false note almost before Lubichov himself. He stayed listening until a few minutes before the dress rehearsal was due to begin. He did not care what it cost him in time, the important thing was that the show should be perfect.

# Chapter Eight

The dressing-rooms were crowded. No matter how large the theatre there never seemed to be enough dressing-rooms for this company. In the dancers' rooms, girls dressed hurriedly.

"Five minutes," shouted the call boy.

Every room began to spill people down the stairs, glamour girls, tumblers in tights, dark-skinned girls and men in costumes of the East, all carrying shoes, hats, instruments, props, and changes of costumes to be made back-stage. They were going down for the night.

Soon the entire company stood behind the curtain. Everyone was in costume, and ready to start.

"What has happened to Looby?" asked Sally.

"He is not here," said Dorothy. "Herr Holz is taking the dress rehearsal. Looby is making a new orchestration."

"In that case we are waiting for Holz to come from his club, the nearest pub."

Everyone laughed at Sally's remark. Sally with her pink and white skin and chestnut curls was very popular. She had big blue eyes and a baby face, a sweet innocent face, all completely deceptive.

The laughter was cut short as the orchestra burst into the overture. The curtain rose and as by magic the stage was filled with whirling figures, in a lively Spanish dance.

The theatre was empty except for Herr Direktor and the management. Herr Direktor sat half-way back in the stalls with his secretary beside him, notebook in hand, ready to take notes. In front sat Sir Osborn Droll, his staff, waiting for they knew not what, sitting like men who have backed an outsider in a race and wait for those first few moments which will decide the fate of their money.

The dance worked up a wild pace as Jimmy Nichols swung Tania over his head, landing her on her feet behind him.

She gasped as he tore past her in a toreador costume.

"Look out for my back, Jimmy. Do you want to break it?"

"Can't help it, Tania. He takes the music so fast."

Herr Direktor leapt from his seat, almost knocking his secretary off her seat.

"Halt! Arrêt! Stop!" he shouted.

The music went faster and faster. Chaos smote the dance as some stopped and some didn't.

"Stop, stop, *stop*!" Herr Direktor split the air with his roar. This time the music died down.

"So!" Herr Direktor took a dramatic pose in the aisle. "So! You, Herr Holz, you think it is a funeral, the opening number. You, on the stage everybody! You dance like a lot of corpses. Smile, *smile*! What is wrong with you?"

He turned and settled down into his seat.

Everyone waited. Herr Direktor waited, then jumped up.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Do you think we have all night?"

The music burst forth, the dance began at a frantic pace. The Continental Revue was a non-stop performance, the curtain only frisked back and forth after each scene. The dance ended, the curtain dropped, paused, and then was up again on a scene of Grand Opera. Rastella, in Italian costume, stepped into the limelight and raised his voice with an exultant swing into his aria. Girls, quick-changed into Italian costumes after their Spanish dance, sauntered back and forth behind him in a flow of colour. Herr Direktor sat back in his seat, smiling. He liked Rastella. Rita smiled from the side of the stage; there was nobody like her father. As the scene finished Herr Direktor jumped up.

"Stop, halt! Rastella."

Rastella stepped to the front of the stage. Herr Direktor began talking rapidly in Italian. Rastella smiled. Herr Direktor clapped. "Music, Holz, that scene once more." He raced to the back of the theatre to get the full effect. Rastella finished his aria again and then dropped heavily to the stage, rolling over in a dying pose.

"Good! Good!" shouted Herr Direktor from the back of the theatre. "Continue."

But Rita with furious eyes, her mop of black hair disarrayed from pulling off her costume for the next change, rushed to the centre of the stage in panties and brassiere. She shook her fist at Herr Direktor.

"My papa will not do that!" she shouted, stamping her foot in temper. "My papa kill himself if he do that, I will not allow that!" The English management watched this beautiful vixen in underwear stamp with rage. Rastella tried to pacify her.

"*No, no, no!*" she screamed. "*No, no, no!*"

Everyone stopped and looked at Herr Direktor. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Continue the old way, scene as before."

He sat down again. Perhaps she was right. Rastella was no athlete. He was getting fat from Madame's cooking.

He clapped his hands. The curtain fell with a swing. It went up again without pausing and the stage was full of dancing marionettes, life-sized waiters walking across the stage on their heads, nursemaids without heads pushing baby carriages upside down, life-sized Hungarians in a gypsy dance. It was impossible to tell which were puppets and which were live performers. Herr Direktor sat back, watching the English management. He did not think much of this act, but managers did; he had to humour them.

Next came the Typhoon scene. Nearly every one in the company worked in it and he liked nothing better than a stage teeming with life and change and colour. There were many reasons why he liked this scene. There was the big wind machine which had been so much trouble to get; the big baboon costume so hard to achieve. Herr Direktor liked anything that was difficult to accomplish, particularly if he had picked up the idea, as he usually did, from the latest films.

But the curtain was up; the company working hard. The scene centred around a great fire. The firelight did not look quite natural enough and his secretary made a note. Fiji Islanders in black woollen wigs and black cotton tights covering even their faces, except for eye-slits, danced and sang around the fire.

But they looked lifeless and there was not enough action for Herr Direktor. He rushed down the aisle to the stage. There was no life in their work, there was no action, he was sick and tired of talking.

"Lower the curtain, begin again."

Down swept the curtain, up it went.

Then the storm began. The savages fled across the stage. But the wind machine did not work. The sound was there but the fury was missing. No leaves or trees flew by.

Herr Direktor bellowed and rushed around the house once more. Reaching the stage he could find no one to blame. Someone was repairing the wind machine. Everyone sat down and waited. The curtain fell and swept up again. The wind machine was ready and the scene began once more. This time the wind machine worked; it worked so well that it blew everything and everybody out into the wings. It blew Anna's tree-top house on to the footlights and tumbled Anna head first on the hard stage. It blew the only two stuffed forms on the stage into the faces of the English management and flattened all the scenery on the stage. Pappy Newman, struggling against flying properties, yelled for the curtain and it swept down over the scene just as the mechanics managed to stop the wind machine.

The English management was thrilled.

"Wonderful! Splendid! Almost too realistic."

Herr Direktor rushed on to the stage to pick Anna up.

"Anna, Anna," he cried. "My poor Anna."

Anna rubbed her bruised head and smiled. She felt her ribs to see that none were broken and smiled again.

Herr Direktor shouted to everyone to clear the debris and get on with the next act.

The rehearsal dragged its weary length into the night.

# Chapter Nine

Earlier in the evening Yogi stood outside the stage door in the dark alley. The night was chilly and he drew his heavy shawl around him. He did not appear on the stage until late in the evening and he had time to meditate, but this English dampness seemed to penetrate into his bones. His white beard, carefully combed, fell over his muffler. Under a broad clear brow and level eyebrows his eyes dominated his face.

Looking at them one waited, expecting his mouth to utter words of profound wisdom. But he seldom spoke.

Pappy Newman said he was ninety years old but Yogi himself did not know. It was such a long time since the first German circus had asked him to leave India. The manager had seen him working on his rug on the street. His body, which he twisted like rubber, into extraordinary positions, appeared to have no bones. He could still twist it just the same but now the effort made him tired.

Yogi liked Herr Direktor. He had been with him many years now. It did not matter that Herr Direktor gave him very little money. He did not want money. Everybody in the company was good to him.

The stage door opened and Kathi came out. Yogi smiled gently. There was a link of spirit between these two, the one dark and so very old, the other so very young and fair. Always picturesque, Kathi was dressed for her next scene, black velvet bodice laced across her bosom, transparent white lawn waist, lace at the fringe of her short sleeves and a short gathered skirt. Kathi with her flaxen hair and china-blue eyes, gave an impression of delicate loveliness. There was an air of quality in her loveliness as there was in her dancing.

The alley was a backwater of stillness. The hum of buses rushing up and down Charing Cross Road floated into the alley. At the street end a charcoal burner glowed and the scent of roasting chestnuts drifted through the air.

From somewhere came the strains of a queue entertainer's violin. He was playing Madrigale by Simonetti; the soft sweet notes came through the other muted sounds of London. Madrigale, that lovely tune . . . a smile crossed Kathi's face; she was seeing Vienna again.

The alley was damp, the single gaslight flickered. From the back door of the night club in Leicester Square the musicians came out, taking their fifteen minute rest period to smoke in the cool air. Immaculate in black and white, they stared at the strange pair near the stage door. These two were so obviously foreign.

"He must be very old, that man. What do you suppose he does?"

"Look at that girl, look at that hair. Only foreigners could look like that. Looks as though she'd been picked right out of a kid's book of fairy-tales."

"They say he has every nationality here. Where do you suppose he collected them all?"

"Did you see them coming in, like a crowd of kids?"

"Funny people, foreigners."

They turned to go into the night club and the alley was empty again save for Yogi and Kathi. The gaslight flickered. High on its green iron post, it was the only street light in the alley. It had looked down on many generations of troupers but never on any so varied as those it had seen pass through the alley that night.

Kathi turned to go. She liked to be with Yogi, but inside the theatre it was warm and bright with light.

She paused once more to listen to the Madrigale.

Then a strange thing happened.

Into the alley there strode an angry young man. A solitary garbage can stood outside the back door of the night club and as he passed it he paused, took a portfolio from under his arm, lifted it up and crashed it down into the can.

He hurried towards the gaslight, towards Kathi and Yogi, towards the dead end of the alley.

For a moment the gaslight showed dark tousled hair tumbling from a bare head over an angry brow. It showed dark eyebrows strong-lined over angry brown eyes. Then suddenly the young man stopped.

"Where the devil am I going?"

At the same moment he turned and his angry question shot at the two figures who were watching him both with such steady eyes.

He stared at Kathi unable to believe his eyes and she stared back at this angry young man in worn tweed jacket, old grey flannel trousers and dark woollen shirt.

He glanced from Kathi to Yogi and then back again and quoted the first line of Heine's poem.

"Du bist wie eine Blume!" He spoke in German, then back in English. "Thou art so like a flower."

He looked again from one to the other and Yogi's eyes held him. As he looked his brows disentangled, the furrows smoothed, his eyes became still.

"Yes, you're right. I'm a fool."

He turned away and walked back to the garbage can and lifted his portfolio from it. He came back to Yogi and Kathi. He stared again at Kathi. These were two of the Continental Revue. Likely as not they could not speak English and did not understand a word he was saying.

"But you are beautiful."

He stared at her face and muttered half to himself: "That's what I was trying to sell them."

Then he pulled himself together, lifted his dirty portfolio and slapped it with his hand.

"They don't know what beauty is. What do they want? Sweet, sweet sugary stuff."

Neither of the two foreigners moved. They both gazed at him with steady unwinking eyes. The boy laughed cynically.

"Look at that." He held out his portfolio. "I hooked the best advertising contract of the year and then, if you please, Mr. Peter Kyrle had to go temperamental and tell them if they didn't like his sketches they could go to hell. Here they are, all of them, rescued from a garbage can. Why, God only knows."

His eyes were staring at Kathi and hers met his steadily. Yogi looked from one to the other and saw what was happening. The Madrigale was still playing, the gaslight still flickering, and the smell of roast chestnuts still filling the air. Two were young and one was old and at peace. Two were young and there was no longer either peace in one of them or anger in the other, only the quickened pulses and the pounding blood of new love.

Suddenly Kathi turned and ran through the stage door. Yogi turned quietly and walked back to the stage door and Peter's eyes followed him. Peter Kyrle braced himself and then marched to the stage door and through.

A voice stopped him. " 'Ere, 'ere, where do you think you are going?"

Peter turned to see the doorman, a string of a man knotted with rheumatism into his chair. He sat under his rows of keys in his cubby-hole of an office looking over his spectacles and his paper, not quite certain whether this was a new face or not.

Without hesitating Peter replied: "Where the devil do you think I'm going? What do you think this is?"

He waved his portfolio and went on.

The doorman returned to his paper muttering: "They're mad. All of 'em, from the boss down."

Peter Kyrle turned towards the light and music and stopped short at the end of the narrow passage as he found himself opposite a flurry of sixty girls frantically tearing off costumes to make a quick change for their next number. He saw a whirling of dresses, a forest of limbs and bodies, and then a long line of bathing beauties in line for their precision entrance. He recovered from the surprise and slipped along the wall to the back of the stage where, in contrast to the wings, it was dark. He paused in the shadow to take breath and watch, and leapt with shock as a claw from the darkness above slashed and ripped open the shoulder of his jacket.

This corner nearest the door was where Pat kept his heavy cages. Peter, shaken badly, sat down on a basket case as he realized what a narrow escape he had just had. He set his portfolio down on the case and fingered the ripped shoulder of his jacket. He felt movement underneath him. The big python, mistaking the weight for Pat's familiar hand, was pushing his head against the trap door trying to get out. The padlock was loosely hooked in the catch, ready for Pat to release the python for the next act. Peter, at the first push underneath him, jumped up and the spring of the basket shook the padlock free. He looked down in the shadows, saw the trap door lift and the head of the python begin to weave out. He ran. He ran around an enormous wardrobe trunk and fell over three white Borzoi hounds that leapt to the ends of their leashes with a startled yelping.

Pat came running. "Hello, my beauties. Hullo, what's this?"

Peter scrambled to his feet. "Quick, a snake."

Pat was gone with a string of curses and, before the python could weave the whole length of his ten feet into freedom, Pat had tackled him and was pushing him back to safety.

But the yelping had come at a quiet moment on the stage and Pappy Newman came rushing back to blast Pat. His eyes caught the sketches tumbled from the portfolio on the floor around the python's box. He sighed with the despair of getting any order into this crazy company.

"Pick these up," he said to Pat. "Give them to Kasha and tell him I'll burn the damned stuff if he leaves it all over the place."

Peter had slipped behind a stack of flats towards the other side of the stage. The back-stage was crowded with performers, ballet dancers, tumblers, Hawaiian guitarists and hula dancers. Peter moved out of his shelter cautiously and stopped short. Facing him with her back to the crowd was a girl, nude under her dressing-gown which flowed open. She was drawn up to her full height, her dark curls falling about her head as she looked down, absorbed in her task. She was limning with lipstick the nipples of her young breasts. Tania was adding the final touches for her nude tableau.

She looked up as Peter emerged, and smiled a quick flashing smile, conscious of a man but quite unconscious of her own exposure.

Suddenly the voice of Herr Direktor was roaring from the stage calling all members. There was a rush. Tania whipped her dressing-gown around her and in a moment the back-stage was deserted. Peter made a quick bee-line for the passage to the stage door. The doorman didn't look up as he passed out into the alley. The alley was dark, dirty and familiar. It was London. Peter Kyrle felt like Alice returning through the looking-glass.

# Chapter Ten

The dress rehearsal sweated through the night. For a show that had been travelling for twenty years, a show in which all parts had long been polished to perfection, everything seemed to go wrong. The curtain rushed down and stayed down as the spectacle for the Javanese scene was set.

Pappy Newman waved his arms from the centre of the stage. "Now listen, everybody. God knows what the management out front think of you, you're like a crowd of amateurs. Keep your wits about you."

"Wits, did you say?" answered Dick Nichols. "We've got none left."

"If you ever had any, you'd have more sense than to join this outfit. Come on now, it is only 7 a.m.; that is early for us. Show some sign of life. Come on, you troupers, wake up!"

"Good old Pappy," someone said, and the rest began to laugh.

"All right. Come on now, we are going to start." He turned to Ronnie, dressed as an Egyptian dragoman. "Have you got Charlie's snake there, Ronnie?"

"Sure I have. He is wriggling around in his basket like a kitten." The basket in Ronnie's hand was the size of a needlework basket.

"Well, be careful. That is a cobra. No fooling around. Kahn! Where is Kahn?" shouted Pappy Newman.

"Coming in the door now with the elephants, Pappy. Better hurry, the big fellow is getting restive. He's been waiting out there since midnight."

"Well, tell Kahn to watch him. We've had enough trouble for one night. Juanita, where are you, Juanita?"

"Here." Juanita, a striking Brazilian girl with dark skin and sleek hair, came forward in her adagio costume.

"The Arabs ready, Roger?"

"Yes, all here."

"Pat, have you the big pythons?"

"Sure, I'm sitting over in the corner petting their dear little heads."

"You'll do that once too often. You ready, Roger?"

Roger, stage manager, looked around quickly.

"Yes, all set."

"Ready then, Roger. Watch out! I am flashing for the orchestra. Hold everything."

Oriental music struck from the pit below.

"Curtain, go!"

The curtain swung up.

Festival in Java, the most spectacular scene in the show, brought forth the artistry and colourful variety of all the Orientals in the company. This was the scene in which the Arabs, Yogi, the Indian girls, and the Hawaiians worked.

Anna rode across the stage in a palanquin on the big elephant followed by the little elephant led by Kahn, the Indian elephant boy.

"Ha, beautiful!" said the English management in front.

Herr Direktor was alert, watching for mistakes. Very little went wrong. Little Biji, the Arab child, fell asleep in the middle of the scene. Herr Direktor smiled. Let her sleep.

Yasmini, the slender Indian girl, carried the great python on the stage. The python began to wind himself around Yasmini.

"Get off me," shouted Yasmini angrily. She struggled with it and threw it on the floor. The English management jumped out of their seats as the python wriggled towards the footlights. But the German trainer dashed out on the stage and grabbed it as it was rearing over the footlights.

Herr Direktor rushed down the aisle.

"Yasmini, don't throw the snake around like that. You might hurt him."

Yasmini addressed the snake. "I hate you." She grabbed the python again. "You wind yourself around me again and you see what I do."

The snake struck his fangs at her.

"Take that away," she said, dodging its head. "Don't get fresh with me."

She made her entrance again and gave the snake to Anna who began her celebrated snake dance. Anna did not care how much the snake wound around her. She wrapped it around her neck like a fox scarf. The snake

swayed its head and flashed its fangs at her in rhythm with the dance, but there was no anger now in its movements. Herr Direktor watched admiringly from the back.

The curtain dropped. Everyone on the stage stood still. The curtain rose again and Herr Direktor stood beside the orchestra pit.

"Now you will all change your costumes quickly. It is eight o'clock and your breakfast is waiting for you in the bar on the balcony. Put something on, anything, and eat quickly. The stage crew will set for the second half and we shall continue the show. I ask the gentlemen of the orchestra to join you all at breakfast."

The company raced to the dressing-rooms, everyone chattering and laughing like children let out of school.

"My God!" said the English concert master. "They laugh." He wiped his face with his handkerchief and slumped into his chair. "What are they made of?" He addressed his question to Herr Holz. "They have been going twenty-four hours and they run up stairs laughing." He turned to the other musicians. "I wonder if he knows we have a Union? We can't play here all day and all night too. We'd better go down in the orchestra room and talk things over. This fellow is a slave-driver."

One by one the musicians disappeared through the pit door to have a meeting.

All the company gathered in the bar at the back of the first balcony. The sun shone through the windows on to the counter covered with toast and steaming coffee cups. Morning had come and, outside, the streets of London were full of people working and hurrying to work.

The troupers crowded into the bar in a mixture of dress, some in dressing gowns, some completely changed for the next scene. Breakfast was quickly eaten. The girls combed their hair in front of the long mirrors and fell fast asleep. As though a spell had fallen on everyone, the bar was like a scene from the Sleeping Beauty without any beauty. Everyone was asleep and the counter was littered with dirty cups and plates and remnants of food.

On the stage below, the stage crew worked hard pushing and pulling silver rostrums and chairs, a great organ and instruments of every kind; microphones were placed at various points, lights appeared at the sides of the stage. Herr Direktor stood in the theatre just as he had been doing for the past twelve hours. Pappy Newman was with him. The stage finally grew in tiers until it reached the top of the scenery, a vision of silver steps topped by

the pipes of the great organ; the entrance to the Pearly Gates, all ready for the Heavenly Choir.

But the Heavenly Choir was sodden with sleep, grotesque children daubed with grease paint. Herr Direktor called for his company, but his company slept on. It took more than the voice of the call boy to stir them.

Finally they were ready for the orchestra scene which featured more than a hundred instruments on the stage. It was Herr Direktor's big moment. He conducted the orchestra himself.

All who opened the scene were in their places, a pyramid of legs and arms and smiles built around the lifting ranks of organ pipes. The other members of the company, who would flash across the stage in character bits, or break the scene with solos, stood in the wings in full costume. Now that the artistes were awake again after an hour of sleep they were gay and full of life once more.

It was different with the men of the English orchestra. They weren't used to this kind of thing. They sat in a long row across the stage at the foot of the pyramid with their music stands in front of them and their instruments on their knees. They were uncomfortable, dressed up like toreadors with new red sashes around their waists. They felt that someone was making monkeys out of them.

Herr Direktor surveyed the scene. So far, for him, the past twenty-four hours had been exhilarating.

All was ready for his favourite scene.

Suddenly Rosana, the Spanish vocal and dancing star, rushed up to him in her Spanish costume and threw her arms around his neck. She began kissing him all over the face, breaking it only to whisper passionate words rapidly in Spanish.

He nodded and tried to evade her kisses. "Ja, ja," he said. "Ja, ja."

The dour English orchestra sat up and stared. They were not quite sure whether this was a part of the show or not. The whole company had watched the scene in silent awe.

"Ha," said Yasmini, the Indian girl. "I have always thought there was something between those two. She was his leading lady when I joined in Shanghai. She is very beautiful."

"Yes," everyone agreed. She was still beautiful. She stood at the side of the stage with her high Spanish head-dress and big amber comb, quite

unconcerned. Rosana could dance and sing and she was beautiful. Her daughter Chiquita was now fourteen and had been with the company since her birth. Chiquita was as tall as her mother, equally beautiful. Nothing had ever been heard about her father, but Herr Direktor had never been known to refuse any request from either of them.

The curtain went up; the company, reacting to the unexpected flurry of passion that had preceded the scene, was in a good mood. Keller's own musicians carried the English orchestra. Herr Direktor stood at the back of the theatre, smiling. He had forgotten Rosana now. Nobody else was in the theatre. The English management had left to go to bed, worn out.

Anna sang into the microphone at the side of the stage, but no sound came out. Herr Direktor ran down the aisle.

"Stop!" he roared. "Willie, Willie! The microphone, it does not work."

Willie began to work on the microphone while everybody stood around and the English orchestra drooped. Suddenly Willie spoke into the microphone and his voice boomed through the silent theatre. The scene began again. Anna went back to the microphone. Herr Direktor lost his smile. He began to find fault with Anna; he said she was singing off key. Everything she did was wrong. His voice rose and finally he told her she could get out as soon as she liked, she was useless. Anna stared at him across the footlights. Then she ran off the stage.

Gretchen the midget spoke. "It's a shame, abusing her that way in front of everybody. I wouldn't stand for it. She's clever and she has a name now. If I were she I'd get out and have my own act. I wouldn't work for him the way she does, without a cent of salary, rehearsing all day and every day."

"Perhaps she loves him," said a voice.

"That's the trouble. But he'd better watch out."

The rehearsal continued. Kathi's scene came on, a serene and lovely ballet number to soft music. Herr Direktor shook his head. He started down the aisle and then stopped. The fault was not Kathi's. She looked too ethereal and made the ballet chorus clumsy in contrast. He must do something about it, but not now.

# Chapter Eleven

The rehearsal continued to one of the mass spectacles in which individual acts were spotted. The electricians high up in the galleries had their printed cue slips, but someone had mixed the cue slips. During the violin solo, the organ was spotted. When the organ played, a dancer waiting in the dark was embarrassed with light.

There was a twitter around the company, but Herr Direktor snapped his watch and turned to the company.

"So!" he said. "So, it is a clever company I engage. To-night no one has done anything right, not one single thing. Now my electrician is so stupid he cannot read his cues."

The English management filed in to seats in the front of the house, well rested and well fed. Herr Direktor bowed and turned again to the stage.

"Before we can go any further we shall run through the organ scene again. We must see whether the lights for that are right. Tell the girls to change as quickly as possible."

He sat impatiently waiting for the changes to be made. The girls began to file on the stage.

"Come, come, hurry," he said. "We have wasted enough time already."

"Tania!" called Pappy Newman. "Are you there?"

"Yes," called Tania, from below the stage.

The music on the organ began to play "Meditation from Thaïs". Ballet dancers floated in and out. The lighting was soft and beautiful and nothing went wrong. Suddenly a rostrum carrying Tania rose from below-stage; dimmed spotlights from the wings limned her nude form with subtle emphasis.

Sir Osborn Droll sat up with a jerk. "What!"

Herr Direktor jumped out of his seat. "Nein, nein, Herr Newman. That we cannot have in England. That must be taken out." This was Tania's one big moment in the show, the moment when she electrified the whole audience with nothing but herself.

"No," said Herr Direktor. He had deliberately left Tania's nude pose in for the rehearsal to impress the management, but he did not give himself away. "No, no. We cannot have that. The London County Council would not allow it."

Tania with tears in her eyes jumped off the rostrum to the stage. She snatched up a black net scarf from one of the girls and with a sudden whirl draped herself and leapt back to the rostrum. The dark transparency of the scarf, that covered yet revealed, transformed her in the dim light into a more subtle loveliness than the nude.

"Good, good," cried the English management with enthusiasm. "That is all right now."

Herr Direktor smiled his approval. "Very well," he said. Tania had solved the problem for him. That pleased him. He would tell Tania that she was a clever little girl. Tania knew it already.

It was now two o'clock in the afternoon and there were many more scenes to go through. The curtain had to ring up at eight for the evening performance. Trouble began in earnest. One of the men from the orchestra got up from his seat and walked over to Herr Direktor. He talked with earnestness. An expression of great surprise came over Herr Direktor's face. He began to argue, but the man was stubborn. Herr Direktor climbed to the stage, and stood indecisively for a moment. Several moods crossed his face, indignation, sulkiness; then, suddenly, he was gentle and sad. This was a mood that never failed to win over his own people, especially when he wanted them to take a cut in salary or to do more work than contracted for.

He turned to the English orchestra. "But, gentlemen," he said quietly. "I ask you now to help me. This is our first appearance in London, we have many scenes yet to go through . . . still, I will make a concession." He took out his watch and studied it. "Now, gentlemen, it is only two o'clock. The curtain does not rise until eight o'clock. I promise you, even if you are not finished, you, the orchestra, will leave the pit at five o'clock . . . you will have three full hours to rest. Nobody could want more rest on an opening night. You shall have time to eat and wash and have a good sleep."

His voice ended on a note of tenderness.

The man from the orchestra was equally quiet. "We have been playing since eight o'clock last night. No human being can stand more and follow it with this long show to-night. I have told you we are leaving now. We will be back at seven forty-five. We will not let you down, but we can stand no more. I am sorry." Returned to the orchestra. "Gentlemen, pack up. Seven

forty-five sharp." The orchestra rose as one man and disappeared through the pit door with amazing speed.

Herr Direktor did not speak for a moment. Then he turned to the company.

"You see? They want us to fail. That is what will happen. No one does what I want. Since last night everyone has done everything wrong. I am sorry for the day I ever started this company. I am sorry for the day I met any of you . . . you do not co-operate with me in any way. No one tries to help. I am the only person who works, I am the only one who tries to make a success, I am leaving you now.

"I will go away to another country and start another show with people who like me . . . you do not like me.

"Herr Newman, you take the show. I give it to you."

He made a grand gesture. "If you and the artistes can make a success, I give it to you. Now I go. I do not wish to see any of you ever again."

There was complete silence as he left the stage.

In the alley Peter Kyrle hesitated outside the stage door. There was a rush that almost overwhelmed him as two dozen or more musicians poured out as though the devil were behind them. Peter grabbed one by the sleeve.

"Is the manager in there?"

The man looked at him strangely, snatched his arm away and rushed on.

Peter looked after him disconcerted. Then he pulled himself together and marched in. The doorman was buried behind the early edition of the evening paper. He did not even look up.

"Did anyone leave a portfolio of sketches here for me?" asked Peter.

The doorman laughed in his face, a dry cynical laugh. Peter did not wait. He went down the little passage to the stage. As he emerged on the side of the stage he met a big man with a monocle screwed fiercely in his eye striding towards him.

"Pardon me," said Peter. "I left some sketches here last night. . . ."

Herr Direktor stared straight through him. "Sketches?" he said. "I do not know what sketches are."

Peter stared after him. He turned to go, but then he stopped short. A flash of light had come from the stage lighting up half a dozen koffers back-stage.

In that one flash he saw Kathi. Her fair hair was spangled with stars. She was dressed in a gleaming silver skin-tight bodice and about her thighs was a froth of white from her brief ballet skirt. She was fast asleep.

He caught his breath and then, unable to resist the impulse, he stole across to her. Someone on-stage was haranguing the company.

He came up to Kathi in the shadows. In her sleep she was so young and so still. It seemed to him that he had never seen anything so beautiful. A flurry of movement on-stage startled him and he turned. Madame Rastella, huge and splendid in Italian silk, had her fingers to her lips shushing Tania as they watched Peter. At his movement Madame rolled her eyes, then she and Tania burst into laughter. Peter blushed furiously and retreated ingloriously and hastily through the door from which he had come. He walked slowly into the dead end of the alley before he noticed he was going the wrong way.

When Herr Direktor left the stage even Herr Newman was a little stunned.

"Now what are we going to do?" asked Roger.

"We must go through to the end, so that the electricians and stage crew will know how the show runs. Even if he does leave England the curtain must go up at eight."

"Who will go out front?" said Roger. "I can't leave my side of the stage, and you can't leave yours."

"Francine," shouted Pappy. "Get out there in front and tell us what is happening. Auguste, go down in the pit. You know all this stuff on the piano. Come on, everyone."

So the tired company continued to work. Fortunately the stage crew hung on. In a few moments everything went from bad to worse. All the chorus girls became hopelessly entangled.

Pappy yelled to Francine. "Gehen Sie hinter. See what is wrong." In his weariness Pappy reverted to German.

Francine came around and disentangled the girls.

"It is Eleanor. She wasn't on in time and threw everybody out."

"I couldn't get on," said Eleanor. "There are too many people in the wings for the next act."

"You English," snorted Pappy, "You wait for everybody to get out of your way."

"Come in the German way," said Anna. "Push everybody over."

Everyone laughed and suddenly there was good humour again. Scene after scene ran through with no pause for corrections. Finally Pappy Newman stopped.

"Everyone on-stage, please!"

When the company was assembled he began to speak. "Children," he said. "Go up into the bar everyone. I have ordered your dinners, everything is ready. Eat at once. The house opens in an hour. Then go to the dressing-rooms, get your make-up on and then you can sleep. Be sure to make-up while you are still awake. I know you will give a splendid performance. I shall look around to see if Herr Direktor is still in England."

"Come and eat with us, Pappy," someone called.

"All right," he said with a smile. He dragged his heavy body up the stairs. But he finished eating before anyone else and disappeared.

Downstairs Pat was arranging his props for the first show. Whatever else happened Pat arranged his hours to suit his animals. They had to be as regular in their habits as children, and his life was a continual juggling between the needs of the show and his animals.

Pappy came upon Pat near the animal cages.

"Say, Pat, you were here when Herr Direktor walked out. Have you any idea which direction he took?"

"Certainly have," said Pat.

"Well, where did he go?"

"Where did he go?" Pat, used to dealing with animals, was irritatingly slow.

"Yes. If you know, say so. The show's on in an hour."

"Go?" said Pat, without hurry. "He went to bed on the straw beside Rex, and he had a damned good sleep while you crazy fools kept up that rehearsal. They looked just like brothers sleeping together."

"You mean he was on the stage all the time?"

"All the time, but he didn't hear a word. He and Rex were fast asleep in one another's arms."

Pappy's face went white. "He slept with a leopard?"

"Don't worry," said Pat. "He is still alive. When he woke up he went to the barber and right now he is stuffing a huge dinner down his throat, across the street."

# Chapter Twelve

At seven-thirty the queues for the opening of Keller's celebrated revue surrounded the theatre on all sides. They were long queues because the fame of the Continental Revue had travelled far and wide. Advance publicity had dwelt upon the unique collection of talent culled from all parts of the world, and upon the exotic beauty of the girls.

In the top gallery queue Peter Kyrle waited with his shoulders hunched and his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He resented the other patient and cheerful Londoners who made the queues. They were there for pleasure, but he was there because the whole course of his life had been shattered during the last twenty-four hours, and he was tangled up with this revue whether he liked it or not.

He had stood in the queue, an attractive boy, bareheaded, his dark waving hair falling over his scowling brow.

Herr Direktor crossed Charing Cross Road. His face beamed as he noted the close-packed queues. He was in a good mood, shaved and bathed. His step was light as he walked down the alley to the stage door.

"Good evening," he called to the doorman. He passed through the little hall. He nodded and smiled, he greeted everyone near by.

"Good evening. We shall have a big success to-night. One can easily see that."

He disappeared into his little office which he reserved for himself alone. A few minutes later he emerged again in full evening dress, white tie and tails, with sleek hair and monocled eye.

"Good evening," he said to the English orchestra, as the men began filing into the theatre. "Now I must go up to the dressing-rooms and see my big 'familie'. They are making-up I expect."

He climbed the stairs in a happy mood.

He strolled past the dressing-rooms, smiling. His "familie", as he called it, was already singing and chattering in several different languages. The doors were all open to the passage-ways as though none of the company could bear to be shut off from the rest. It was a motley scene . . . the smells

of grease paint, powder, and hot mascara . . . the rustle of taffeta costumes . . . the reflection of powerful dressing-table lights . . . voices chattering everywhere . . . and laughter.

The bubbles were already rising in the champagne. Some intoxication was creeping through those halls and up the stairs and through all the dressing-rooms; the intoxication of a first night.

Outside the room for the German girls, Herr Direktor paused. Fragments of conversation became clear.

"Is my pot of scarlet lip rouge finished, Gretel? . . . the new silver slippers, I cannot find them, Sophie, they were under your table. . . . Helga, stop, Helga. Your white frill on the panties, it shows. . . . Tania, the swansdown on that blue silk costume is coming off. . . . Pin it quickly, there will be no time later . . . look at Kathi, how beautiful she is in that new costume."

Kathi sat unconcerned. She was ready now to visit Yogi. She never failed to visit him before the curtain went up.

Herr Direktor stood in the hall looking at her. That costume, he had given particular instructions about that costume, it was beautiful indeed. . . . Kathi, too, was beautiful, the most beautiful girl in his company . . . off-stage as well as on-stage. She was a strange child, so positive on-stage and yet so negative off-stage, so passive, so virginal; yes, Mario was right, she was a sleeping beauty waiting to be waked. It was unusual . . . intriguing.

He passed on to the dressing-room of the English dancers. Glancing in at the door his eyes met a tableau that was for one moment flawless. Directly facing him was a great fireplace with a leaping fire. By the fireplace, tall, elegant and blonde, stood Dorothy and Eileen, dressed for the opening number. They were first to appear on the stage after the overture started. They wore new page-boy costumes of royal blue satin bound with silver. Eleanor, one of the ballet dancers, slender and graceful, sat, stooped towards the fire. Her enormous white tulle ballet skirts were thrown in billows over the back of the chair on which she sat, partly over her soft baby-like hair to keep them from crushing. Her satin-clad feet rested on the floor before the fire. The reflection of the fire danced across her.

Behind her stood Nancy, the Irish girl, in nile-green satin, her dark hair falling in soft waves to her shoulders, her blue eyes glinting with laughter. The dressing-tables beyond were littered with make-up and props of every kind; the floor was covered with changes of slippers; costumes of every

colour hung from every available projection. There were rows of smiling girls at the tables, soft English voices in a murmur of sound.

Herr Direktor stood for a while. Down to the last detail he photographed the scene in his memory . . . some day it would be a scene in his revue. He moved down the hall.

On the next floor above he came to little Ching Ching standing on his head on a chair in the hall. Herr Direktor smiled.

"You make probe (rehearsal), Ching Ching? Do not forget, you are on early to-night, number four."

Ching Ching dropped on to his feet. Clad in a new Chinese costume in brilliant colours, embroidered in gold thread, he was picturesque. He smiled at Herr Direktor, an open childlike smile.

The Oriental dressing-room opened into the hall. Mundi was tuning his guitar, Ching Chong was arranging his flying knives, the Chinese jugglers were arranging their plates, knives, and fans. Ha Wong, the hair-swinging boy, was braiding and pinning his long pigtail on top of his head.

Herr Direktor passed to the next door where a jumbled chatter of Arabic filled the air. Thirty Arabs of every shade of brown were fully clad in turquoise blue military uniforms. Soft scarlet kid boots met their breeches below the knees and, over all, they wore blue satin capes that swept to the floor. Baba and Biji, the children, were twirling around the dressing-room, practising their cartwheel spin. Biji stood up wild eyed, her mop of fantastic brown wire-like hair fuzzing in all directions, her little brown body strong as a steel spring.

Little Snowball, black as stove polish, stood beside them admiringly. Some day he hoped also to spin like that. It was what every good Arab should be able to do, to spin, leap, and climb.

Herr Direktor passed on to the midget's dressing-room. He must warn Gretchen about the width of the stage when she did her ballroom waltz. She was so tiny. She sat on a high stool in front of the make-up table. Herr Direktor had had this stool made for her since there was never anything in any theatre high enough for her to see herself in the mirror. Gretchen's tiny husband, Kaspar, strolled up and down the floor bursting his new dress suit. He was getting fat from drinking too much cognac on the Continent. Little Emil, her equally small brother-in-law, was in the midst of a mock grand opera scene with Auguste, the German accordion player. His voice warbled in an operatic tenor.

Herr Direktor passed on, smiling broadly. On the next floor he glanced into the Hawaiian dressing-room. There, in a row, sat Olivia, the brown beauty of the show, with her husband, Hula, and child, Jackie, aged five, between them. In the same room were Yasmini and Lotus, the Indian girls, and Zira, the Persian girl. This was the only room which a man shared with girls in England. At any time Pappy Newman expected that the London County Council would step in and stop it. One could get away with that sort of thing anywhere in Europe, but not in England, he said. In England there were innumerable regulations, all of which seemed designed to protect the artistes of the company from physical and moral dangers. There were no regulations to protect the management from losing money. On the Continent things were different, and yet, in the end, one made more money in England. That was illogical.

But Pappy Newman had had no choice in this one case. Olivia was so jealous of Hula that she had to have him in sight every minute. The two of them were braiding their straw skirts for the Typhoon scene.

The Indian girls languished in front of the mirrors trying different coloured flowers in their hair. Their fingernails were long and vermilion, their eyes extravagantly made up, their faces covered by a much lighter shade of powder than used by the other girls. The effect was exotic and beautiful in a way no others in the show could achieve. Nobody in the show spent more time in making-up than the girls in this room. Nobody in the show had more vanity and more skill than they. They studied themselves every minute, and, when finished, they attracted more attention than the others.

Herr Direktor visited Kasha, the Russian dancer. Kasha's smile always seemed to rise up from a deep sadness. He was an aristocrat who had escaped through Turkey to Arabia and had lived among the Arabs for many years. He was tall, slim, and dark. His ambition to be a scientist had been shattered by the revolution. The disappointment had been profound, but he had no self-pity. The children of the show loved him. He was also a clever artist and designed scenes with a flair for colour.

To-night Kasha was reviewing his dagger dance, which had been suppressed in Germany. His young wife, Olga, a German girl, was down on her heels, limbering up, her legs flicking back and forth in the difficult Kamarinsky dance as Kasha beat time with his hands.

Herr Direktor passed on. His itinerary had taken fifteen minutes and now he made a last visit to the wardrobe-room to speak to Hanna. The chiffon

drapes for the organ scene were being pressed; Friedl and Elsa, the ever-faithful but coarse companions, ready to go on the stage, were giving their last moments to help Hanna with her work. Chiffon of every shade was spread across the room, lemon, magenta, violet, green.

Coming down the stairs he met Rani, the little Chinese girl. Rani was practising in the hall, swinging her water jugs which she juggled on the stage. She raised her head with a happy smile. Herr Direktor screwed in his monocle and eyed her intently.

"The artificial eyelashes, they look right now. Before they were so heavy; they looked as if your eyes were closed from the back of the house."

He descended to the stage.

"Herr Newman," he called. "All the company on the stage at once. I wish to speak to them before I go to the back of the house."

Pappy sent the call boy up. A minute later the stage was filled with artistes, every age, every nationality, every type.

Herr Direktor stood in the centre as they surrounded him.

"My children," he began. There was a sentimental note in his voice, a wistful look on his face. His monocle had dropped. "My children, I am very fond of you all. To me you are my children. You are the children of the Keller Revue. She is your mother. To-night you must make the mother very proud. You are truly splendid artistes, all of you, the best in the world. To-night we have a London opening. For us that is something new.

"We are the children of the Continent, of the far corners of the world. London has never seen a company like ours, will never see another, since there is no other, nor ever shall be. We have had openings in all the great capitals of the world. We have never had an opening night in London. This is a theatre with old traditions. It has had many glamorous openings, and openings that have made theatrical history. I want you to make this the greatest opening night the Alhambra has ever seen. You can do it. I know you well. You can make them, the audience, remember this night long years from now, when we are all very old.

"When it is all over, I am taking you far away. We are going to the Far East again, but I want the audience to remember you always as I know you, happy, singing, lighthearted, with gay, smiling faces everywhere.

"When I am standing at the back of the theatre, you will know that I am with you in your acts every minute. I want you to have a great success.

Good luck, everyone.”

# Chapter Thirteen

The intoxication of a first night was at full tide in the company.

"PLACES," called Pappy Newman. "On your toes everyone . . . look-out . . . I'm flashing the orchestra. Here we go, one, two, three. . . . Go!"

The curtain shot up . . . strains of the overture finishing. . . . Dorothy and Eileen making the opening announcement . . . two page-boy girls drawing the heavy curtains to the side of the stage . . . a sea of faces, tiers and tiers of faces circling the stage . . . a wave of tingling anticipation sweeping over the footlights to the stage from the packed house.

Lubichov in a scarlet Russian smock was leading the orchestra, raising his baton with a flourish as a hundred voices rang through the house in the opening number . . . Argentina.

The show was off to the opening night in London.

Argentina . . . flashes of scarlet and gold, whirling dancers, scarves and fans, sombreros and jingling bells. The music grew in speed and volume, there was a clatter as three white Arab steeds dashed on the stage, scattering the crowd. Seagull, the pride of the company, caught by the excitement of the scene, reared high in the air, snorting as Albert Henn leapt from his back before the animal dashed into the wings. The spirit of the old Alhambra was already coursing through the veins of every member of the company, even the animals.

Albert and Elsa in their rope-throwing act sprang to the centre of the stage in snow-white cowboy costume, picked out by the spotlights. The music rose higher and faster as they flung their lariats over the heads of the audience, reaching half-way through the house. Rastella's voice soared to the topmost balcony. The dancing swirled to a mad tempo, and before its crescendo palled, the curtains swept down and opened quietly again on a soft Hawaiian scene in moonlight with Mundi and Hula strumming their guitars while Olivia sang old songs of the islands.

The curtain closed slowly. Before the audience could draw breath, Long Tom, the tallest man in Great Britain, was walking across the stage in evening dress, arguing with Kaspar, three feet high.

"Ready, Auguste and Frank," shouted Pappy.

Auguste with her new fifty pound Italian accordion strapped over her shoulders was in the limelight, carrying her instrument as if it were a feather cushion. She broke into the "Poet and Peasant", with Frank and his accordion matching her on the other side of the stage.

"Ready, there," cried Roger. "Harry, Dick, Jimmy. Got your table and springboard? Go."

Before the accordions had finished their last note, the Nichols opened up the scene behind them with a comedy tumbling act. They fooled over the stage, tumbling, clowning, rousing the audience to peals of laughter.

Just as they finished the act, Harry fell on his ankle and writhed with pain. The curtain closed without hesitation and was up again on Ching Chong balancing his tiny son Ching Ching head down on the palm of one hand while Ching Chong in this weird position balanced spinning plates on bamboo rods.

"Hurt yourself badly, Harry?" asked Jimmy. "Better get a taxi and go right to the hospital."

Harry was helped to the alley and a taxi rushed him to Charing Cross Hospital.

"First accident of the evening," said the doorman to his crony. "I'm not surprised. Mark my word there will be more before this evening is finished."

Kaspar and Gretchen, in front of a drop, floated through a golden light in their Blue Danube waltz, like two little figures taken from the top of a wedding cake. Behind the drop the leopards were being brought on, five magnificent animals attached to long leads, each held by an animal trainer.

"Look out, you girls," yelled Pappy Newman. "Look out there, Tania!" Tania who was arranging her change of costume for the next act felt the hot breath of Rex and leapt for the corner of the stage while Rex snarled at the end of his lead.

"How many times have I told you not to come on the stage half-naked when they are bringing the leopards on," shouted Pappy above the applause that filled the house beyond the drop. "These are wild animals."

The leopards, stirred by the excitement, strained at the ends of their leashes. They were five superb beasts, but Rex was the king of them all, a powerful animal owned and petted by Anna from the age of three months. Anna raced on the stage among the leopards, herself dressed in leopard costume complete from head to tail.

"Here, Rex," she said. "Roll over, I want to brush you." She began to brush him down with a hard-bristled brush. "Get over, I tell you." Rex wanted to play. "Get up now, your back is all dust." But Rex would not budge. He lay on his side, pawing at Anna with his big pads, claws drawn in. Anna went to the other side and started to push him.

"Look here, Anna," called Pappy. "Leave the dust, it doesn't matter. Here we go. Ready, quick."

Anna sprang into a crouching position as the curtain opened. Rex, still playful, placed his big paw on top of her head and held her down.

"Get off, Rex," called Anna in a stage whisper. "Get off!" The trainer pulled the lead with a slight jerk, unbalancing Rex so that Anna could free herself.

There was a gasp from the audience as the curtain opened on what looked like six uncaged leopards. Then Anna rose and began her act, running from one restive animal to the other, petting each in turn to the rhythm of the music. Rex did not like this, he was jealous, and tried to head her off from the others, jumping around like a kitten, his great weight shaking the stage.

Lubichov from the pit saw the by-play and laughed out loudly. The sound startled Rex; he whirled around and leapt for the pit.

"Help, help!" called the trainer, as he was dragged on the lead. Every man back-stage leapt to the leash to haul Rex back, Anna crouched on the floor holding her hand out to Rex.

"Rex," she whispered. "Rex, come here!"

Her voice was soft and wooing. Rex rolled over and started to play with her, leaving just enough room for Pappy to call for the curtain.

Pappy wiped his brow. "Whatever got into him? One more pull and he would have been in the audience."

Kathi and Ronnie were on the stage in a whirlwind adagio dance.

Roger called for the next act. "The harp, are you ready there, Bert? The chairs, the dogs, where are the girls?"

The adagio dance in front came to a climax and an abrupt finish as Ronnie swept the fragile Kathi into his arms and lifted her high.

There was a gasp and a moan of pain. The curtain fell. Ronnie reached the side with Kathi in his arms.

"What is it?" he asked. "Kathi, are you hurt?"

Kathi's face writhed with pain. "It was when you caught me," she moaned.

"What's this?" called Pappy Newman. "Here, quick, give me that bathrobe, Mundi." He grabbed the bathrobe from Mundi, wrapped it around Kathi, costume and all, and made for the alley.

"Taxi, quick," he called to the doorman. He lifted her through the taxi door, set her gently and pushed one of the girls in after her. "Charing Cross Hospital," he shouted.

Herr Direktor, watching from the back of the house, saw the curtains part without pause on the next act. This was the Vauxhall Gardens scene. He saw in the dim light the flash of the golden harp, the three white borzoi hounds at the foot of the harp, beautifully groomed and motionless. Then he heard the roar of applause as gradually the lights rose and the audience saw the three hounds in one of the loveliest scenes of the show. Herr Direktor smiled. How like the English to applaud the dogs and ignore the act. But then the applause died and the voices of the girls took hold of the audience as they sang a German folk song to a harp accompaniment. Gold light gradually flooded the scene and the girls in their hoop skirts of pink and pale blue taffeta with sun bonnets.

Lubichov smiled up from the pit below. The girls were singing his new harmonies very well to-night. They were perfect, and the three hounds lay so still. It was a lovely scene. The artist had created the new scene like an old English water-colour.

The light was fading again. Applause rang through the curtain as it closed. The big hounds stood up and shook themselves the moment the curtain closed.

Herr Direktor nodded to himself at the back of the house. It was good.

Once more Long Tom and little Kaspar walked across the stage in their unresolved argument.

A Chinese rushed across the stage wrestling furiously with an enemy. He straightened himself as he reached the side of the stage, and it could be seen that he was fighting a dummy attached to his feet and wrists.

The curtain was up on the full stage again with sixty girls flinging an Irish reel in red and green costumes. Up and down, around they went, tap and kick, shake the fist, swing your partner, away we go. Down came the

curtain and they dashed for the big koffers back-stage to make their change for the ladder act.

No acts waited for applause. Nobody knew if the applause that rang out all evening was for the act finishing or the one beginning. No one cared. The fever of the show was in everyone, and the pace was furious.

"Are you ready there, Ha Wong?" called Roger.

"Are you ready, Rani?" called Pappy Newman. "Here we go."

"All ready, Pappy," shouted Ha Wong, the Chinese hair swinger, standing on a table in the wings. "Give me a good push, Rani, the stage is wide."

Rani gave him a mighty push and Ha Wong, with his long black pigtail attached to a rope above the stage, swung the full length of the stage by the hair of his head. Back he came, and back again he went gaining momentum by swinging his feet. He sang and laughed, ripped off his heavily embroidered coat and tossed it to Rani.

A voice clear from the audience was heard.

"That's a fake. If it was real his scalp would come off."

Pushing the table into full view Rani climbed up and grabbed his feet and the two of them swung back and forth held only by the hair of Ha Wong. Before they had made their final swing the curtain opened on the full stage with all the girls on ladders in white bathing suits. They swung by their hands, they swung by their feet and, not to be outdone, one girl on a rope swung right into the flies, hanging only by her teeth.

The applause rang in waves through the house as the curtains behind opened and Anna, in a black-and-white satin suit, dashed to the front past the big Loop-the-Loop. She pushed her cycle in front of her, waved to the audience, turned and raced back to the Loop. The piling zest of the swinging scene with the roars of applause had caught her and she was crazy with excitement, lost to everything except the thrill of her act which was the climax of the scene.

An attendant grabbed her cycle and hoisted it into the frame and Anna jumped on.

"Watch yourself there, Anna," called Pappy, as Anna rolled back and forth starting her cycle with the movement and gaining in speed.

"Look out, Anna. It's the big Loop to-night."

The drums began to roll, the house hushed.

"Watch the trap door," cried Pappy, but Anna was away. Around and around she went, five, ten, fifteen, twenty times she circled the Loop. The girls in their white bathing suits stood in long lines on each side of the stage, counting each turn, everyone smiling, but, underneath, tense with excitement. Anna went round at reckless speed. She had no sense of danger when she was in this mood. Slowly her speed began to die down; the attendant ran back and forth across the Loop trying to catch her. Applause burst through the house as he caught her and swung her down to the stage. He stood her on her feet to steady her, but she broke from his grasp, ran to the front of the stage, waved to the audience, smiled a dazzling smile and ran off as the curtain swept down.

There was a scramble as the girls rushed to the koffers back-stage to change.

The Italian Perch act took the stage, a father, mother, and two daughters, aged twelve and fourteen. Across the stage the children leapt back and forth in a series of somersaults at eye-dazzling speed. The father walked on the stage balancing a white iron perch some twenty feet high on his shoulders. The smaller girl ran to the wings and just as he reached centre-stage she crouched low like an animal and made a spring. She cleared his shoulders with one leap and skimmed up the pole. She balanced on her head on top of the pole, waving her feet in the air, then twisted and stood balanced on the toes of one foot on the pole, breaking into a broad smile, her shining eyes and white teeth lighting her pretty dark face. Next the older sister was on the perch in a more difficult set of whirls. Then both of them were up, watched by their anxious parents from below. Up and down they went in turn to wild applause and cheers from the gallery. Then, as quickly, all four were gone and Celia, a blonde English dancer, was into her bending act, doubling and twisting to music, holding the audience long enough for the organ to be rushed into place behind the drop scene.

# Chapter Fourteen

Herr Direktor stood alone in the darkness at the back of the theatre as the orchestra went softly into the Angel's Serenade. Slowly the heavy curtains parted and drew to the sides, opening to a background of tall silver curtains circling the entire stage. The faint strains of Schubert's Ave Maria began from harp and organ. The great ivory organ filled the centre of the stage. The organist was in white, the harpist in gold, gold sandals, gold metal Grecian dress, gold band on her hair. Louder and louder the harmony swelled with deep rich organ chords and flowing harp cadenzas. A voice came from the wings and a white sister moved slowly on the stage. It was Rosana in the robes of a white nun with the starched white headpiece across her brow. Her lovely voice floated through the house singing Ave Maria. She sang with folded hands and upturned face, her voice rising serene and pure, till it seemed utterly alone in that crowded house now hushed to silence. Rosana was inspired to-night. Emotion surged from the tense house as the organ played and her voice floated over its notes, clear and limpid . . . Ave Maria.

A whispering came from the house . . . "Beautiful . . . so lovely."

Herr Direktor took his monocle from his eye and wiped it. He had won. He had won the audience. He had won London. Few knew the exquisite pleasure of standing at the back of a crowded house, feeling the fusion of the house and the show, players whipped to a frenzy until they transcended themselves and were infinitely greater in the aggregate than their sum total as individuals, until they were the complete expression of his will upon them and, through them, upon the audience which was responding now as one mass to every change he played on the keys of emotion, excitement, or laughter.

No, there was no sensation in the world that could compare with it, to stand at the back of the theatre pulling the strings of power as one wished on this great mass of people.

What fools these dictators were who set themselves up in their ignorance to use the world as their theatre, not realizing that people can only rise to their height of feeling and response in short periods and not permanently; that you can play upon people as you wish if you will not play your music until they sicken of it and hate it.

That was the secret of the theatre. It was like music. His players and his audience came unaware, but once in the theatre they were his instruments. Once make them forget their little selves, they were his orchestra to play on as he wished, provided he was skilful enough.

It was power, so sweet a power, but power he had to win each time, a never-ending gamble more fascinating than any other thing in the world. He had learnt his lessons in the past twenty years, and the most important one of all was that he could hold such power over his audience and his players by liking people; all of them. One could not play to one section of the people and scorn the others. There was no money that way. One had to play to the people, all the people, and find the common denominator of them all, top, middle, and bottom layers.

Herr Direktor wiped his monocle with a tingling sense of elation. This was success, the very essence of success.

To stand in the dark, unknown to the audience, unseen by the company, and to feel the show and audience welded into one great instrument, stretched to their utmost capacity for performing or enjoying, this was the ultimate sensation, pure and undefilable.

Love of woman could not compare with it.

Rosana was singing again. How long was it since he had first met Rosana that night she sang in Madrid? How beautiful she had been. How well he remembered the party afterwards, how young and gay and overflowing with life she had been. How well he remembered telling her all his plans, his dreams, and ambitions. She had thrown all her contracts aside to join him there and then.

He thought of the tour through the East, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore. Little Chiquita had been so lovely then, just a small Spanish child . . . no, not altogether Spanish.

No matter who came and went, Rosana would always be with him. The Continental Revue had never had a star as lovely as Rosana had been in those days; there could never be anyone who could reach down to his heart-strings as she had done to-night, as she always did. No matter what new scene entered the show this one would always be in it, with Rosana singing Ave Maria.

He had loved her so much in those early days, but she had left him long since for something she found in that scene, some spiritual orgasm. After the first flush of her youth had worn off, her natural gaiety had died away, she

had become silent and serious as though this particular scene had grown to be the real part of her life, the real expression of her own deep religion.

His own vitality had flowed on and past her, but she had never left his company, never reproached him. She lived only for her act. That was why it was invariably successful. To her it was a sacrament.

His vitality had flowed on and past her, he had taken love where he found it, all about him, lips and eyes and breasts and soft flesh . . . dipping into the variety of love, white, yellow, brown, and black until it was all a vast sameness of sweetness, satiating but never satisfying.

In all those years since the rapture of Rosana's youth, he had never been in love with any of the women he had known. All the love he had had to give he had given to his revue. It was the revue that had pushed Rosana aside. He loved it to the full height, depth, and breadth of his capacity to love.

If at times, many times, he was unscrupulous, it was only for his revue; in love all things are fair. But equally for his revue he would sacrifice himself or anything he possessed. His loyalty to those of his company who would give all they could of themselves to his revue was unbounded.

Animals, when they were loved and well-cared for, gave without asking anything in return. There was something satisfying about the love of animals, something so clean and simple, and undemanding. He loved animals and always had a hundred or more with the show. They diluted the human element and had a deep influence on the company in some subtle way.

Anna, of all his company, was nearest the animals. She understood them and she loved them even as he did and, like them, she gave all and asked nothing in return. But there was no question of love between them. Anna was devoted to him and he was devoted to her in the same way that he loved his leopards. Her lithe, supple form with the ridge of the stomach muscles hollow like the lean flanks of the wild beasts, the control and co-ordination of her muscles and limbs, made her kin with her animals.

She was in her early twenties and he had for the past three years found in her something he had not found in any other woman, a devotion and an unstinted loyalty, animal-like in its simplicity, with no influence on or interference with that vast realm of himself that lay between the flesh and the spirit, the self-centred dreamer and schemer, the planner and organizer, the business man who controlled, moved, and managed a complicated mobile property.

He pulled himself out of his reverie as the curtain fell at the end of Rosana's song and the house burst into a hurricane of applause.

# Chapter Fifteen

"Arabisch Bild schnell," shouted Pappy Newman, as the glaring spots flooded the stage. With a war-whoop the Arabs tumbled into the centre of the stage, thirty brown men with rippling muscles, spinning, jumping, yelling, whirling all over the place. Applause broke from the audience, roar after roar of clapping.

"Bravo!" cried a voice. Dozens of voices took up the cry. "Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!"

"Someone will break his neck out there," said Pappy. "They are going crazy."

"One more or less won't matter," grinned Roger.

"This applause is sending them wild. They're going too fast."

The Arabs, intoxicated with applause, were reckless. Every man seemed mad. Suddenly at a shout their tumbling ceased. They raced at the strong man in the centre. One leapt on his head and two on each arm. Up and up they climbed until their celebrated pyramid was five ranks high, a fantastic weight of men.

Then, not to be outdone, little Biji, like a squirrel, dashed at the pyramid, making a spring. Quickly she was passed from man to man until she reached the topmost man, Paulus. She straightened herself up with abandon, put her hand to her mouth and shrilled a wild warlike yell.

"Whoo . . . oo . . . oo," shouted Biji in her excitement, as the house broke into unrestrained applause. Biji leapt up into the air landing on Paulus's head again. "Whoo . . . oo . . . oo."

"Biji," shouted Paulus. "Vorsichtig! My head, my neck, my head." He grabbed her foot to steady her.

The descent began. Biji, sliding down recklessly, landed in Baba's arms as he waited to catch her. One man after another dropped light as a gazelle to the stage. The somersaulting began again and then, in a flash, everyone was gone. Tearing off the stage they rushed up the stairs yelling wildly, to make their next change.

"Clear everything," shouted Paulus, as the last Arab turned the stairs. With a great leap he cleared the lower eight steps, landing on the broad step above.

"Here, here, here," cried the doorman. "We have had enough of that."

Paulus turned with a grin and a flash of white teeth against his dark skin.

The doorman whose nerves were proving unequal to the frenzy all about him shouted again. "Now look here, young man. I've just about had enough of this to-night. They've been carrying someone to the hospital after nearly every scene. I'll have none of this yelling and jumping."

Paulus could not understand a word. With a war-whoop he cleared the next eight steps, then another eight. Down three floors floated his echoing war-whoop . . . "Whoo . . . oo . . . oo."

The doorman turned to address members of the company scurrying to their places. They took no notice of him.

"Forty years I've been in this place," he shouted, his voice out of control. "Forty years and I've never seen such bedlam. A lot of lunatics, and them two running it is as crazy as the rest. I can't stand another night of it. I won't stand another night. I'll speak to Sir Osborn and ask him to transfer me to another theatre."

No one took any notice of him, but everyone smiled at him as they passed to the stage. He turned and slammed the door of his little office behind him.

More shouting was coming down the stairs, this time in Russian as the Russian dancers, two dozen of them, leapt down the stairs, three and four at a time. Shetland ponies with Russian trappings and bells trampled through the stage door, prancing and rearing. There was a patter of running feet turning the landings.

"Les enfants!" shouted Kasha. "Les enfants. Ha, mon petit!" He swept a little Chinese child into his arms just in time to save it from the rush of those behind him.

"Whose child is this?" he cried.

"She is my little sister," replied Lotty. "She has come to spend the night with me."

Lotty, half-Chinese, half-English, sixteen years old, born of several generations of troupers, stood in the hall in a white bathing suit ready for her

contortion act.

Kasha pushed the little child into Pappy Newman's arms and flashed on.

"Now look here, Lotty," shouted Pappy over the din. "You might have left that until to-morrow night. The stairs are cluttered up enough as it is without all those children playing there too. Here, Jackie, take your train to the dressing-room. You cannot stay there."

Jackie, the Hawaiian child, became stubborn.

"I want to hear my mother sing."

"Here you are," said Pappy, taking the quickest way out. He thrust his hand into his pocket, brought our some coins and rammed them in Jackie's hand "Go upstairs like a good boy."

Jackie decided to retire, taking his little Chinese friend with him.

So well was everything timed from stable to stage that the tiny ponies, twenty in number, arrived in the wings just as the curtains were ready to part. They were trembling with excitement. A Russian wedding was in progress in a Russian village. The tiny ponies dashed away, whirling in figures of eight across and round the stage. There were four sets of ponies each five abreast, driven by a girl on roller skates. Eyes sparkling, nostrils quivering, they danced and pranced to the familiar music, around and around, rows of bells jingling, white harness studded with jewels sparkling in the light. Then, just as quickly as they had come, they were clattering through the wings and the Russian dancers were on-stage. Around and around they whirled catching the frenzy of the act. They broke away and Olga, the wife of Kasha, flung herself into the Kamarinsky dance.

Lubichov, enthused by the music of his native land, beat his baton with more and more zest. Again, the Russian dancers flung themselves into action. They leapt and jumped and whirled, their white satin suits, snow-white fur hats, scarlet leather boots, vivid in the light.

The curtain dropped and parted again. Kasha was alone in a spotlight, clad in scarlet cossack uniform with black fur hat and black riding boots. This was his dagger dance. Daggers sparkled in his high boots, daggers glittered in his sleeves, and four daggers were held by their points in between his teeth. He whirled and turned, spinning across the stage, throwing his daggers high into the air and on to the stage, leaping back and forth as the audience broke into cheers. The more they cheered the more reckless he grew. He was Kasha, the greatest dagger dancer of all Europe, making his first London appearance.

Suddenly the lights went out. They went on again immediately and the curtain was rising on the Typhoon scene. This time everything went right. The wind machine decided to behave, and flowers, trees, and stuffed forms all were swept away by the fury of the storm in their right sequence. There was a burst of cheering and applause. The audience had passed the stage where clapping could satisfy its enthusiasm. Herr Direktor at the back of the house glowed, he sensed every reaction of the audience and everything was well. The laughs came where they should, the silences came where he willed them, and the applause burst as he had timed it.

The company began trooping on the stage for the Javanese spectacle.

"Where is Kahn with the elephants?" cried Pappy Newman. He ran out into the alley to see. Kahn, sitting on top of the big elephant with the little elephant following behind, was coming slowly up Charing Cross Road from the stable.

"Where have you been?" called Pappy, as Kahn turned into the alley. "The scene is almost on."

Kahn in his red turban and tweed coat sat comfortably on the elephant's head, calm and undisturbed.

"I am in time," he said.

He reached the stage just in time to jump off, hoist Anna into his place, and walk on into the limelight to the accompaniment of thunderous applause. All the Orientals of the company were on-stage. Olivia swayed into her dance of the South Sea Islands to the accompaniment of Hula's guitar. She smiled a dazzling smile at the audience and kept her eye on her husband, Hula, to see that his eye was not wandering.

Finished, she squatted down on the floor beside him while Rani swung her water bottles.

"Why look at that Elizabeth?" said Olivia to Hula with a scowl. "I see you again do it." Then she remembered she was on the stage and she turned her dazzling smile to the front again.

"Aw, you are the most crazy woman I ever see," whispered Hula, as he strummed his guitar through the languorous melody.

Yogi, in the wings, prepared for his act.

He unwound his long turban. This was the only time he was ever seen without it. He dropped his shawl on the floor and his long grey hair fell to his shoulders. With only a loin cloth about him he spread his rug in the

centre of the stage. He sat on it and faced the audience with his still calm eyes. Then he doubled himself in two and wound his legs around his neck. He unwound and wound himself into so many different impossible positions it was hardly possible to tell which were his elbows and which were his knees. In the midst of his contortions his grave wise face was utterly serene. He worked very fast and then he suddenly disentangled himself and jumped up. Back in the wings, he stooped to pick up his shawl, and he was an old man again as he walked up the stairs to his dressing-room.

Anna's snake dance was on the stage. Everything was going well. The scene finished and everyone rushed for the next change of costume.

"Fifteen minutes' interval," called Roger.

Everyone stared and stopped. "Fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, fifteen minutes," said Pappy Newman. "And don't stare just because you never had an interval before. This is England and in England there must be two acts, so you can have fifteen minutes' rest. Go and rest."

Just at that moment Kathi came into the wings. Still in the bathrobe, she could walk now.

"You shouldn't have come back, Kathi," said Pappy Newman. "What happened?"

"Two broken ribs," answered Kathi.

"Well, pack up for the night and go home."

"No," she said. "I am going on for the ballet scene."

"You can't. It is not necessary."

But Kathi was gone up the stairs to change.

Applause was rolling through the house in great waves as Anna was acknowledging the curtain calls on behalf of the company. The company did not hear it. In spite of fifteen minutes' rest there was too much to do to waste time listening to applause. There were still so many scenes to be gone through, many costumes to prepare.

Elsa and Friedl came along the hall, their arms filled with souvenir programmes which they were going out into the house to sell. They had not the slightest idea how to make change in English money. In every country they had the same trouble since they only spoke German. When they received money for the programme they would hold out a handful of change and let the customer choose his own. They were picturesque in their German

peasant costumes. They both liked going out into the house. Friedl liked it for the money she made since she had both her mother and her own child to support in Berlin. Elsa liked it for the acquaintances she made. She had grown up in a Continental circus. She always had a full pocket of money which she handled very carelessly, lending it to any member of the company who asked. If the debtor forgot the debt so did Elsa.

# Chapter Sixteen

Up in the dressing-room Tania came over to Kathi. She helped to remove Mundi's dressing gown and Kathi winced with pain. Tania saw the bandages around her chest.

"Ha!" she said. "That is bad. Perhaps you should stay in hospital."

Kathi smiled wanly. "They said I must stay there, but I tell them we never stay. I come back with Harry."

"He is badly hurt?" asked Tania, her dark eyes flickering over Kathi restlessly.

"He must go back to-morrow for an X-ray."

Tania nodded. "You see, he has been punished for what he did to Mario."

"That is so," said Kathi. "You will help me into my costume?"

Tania smiled, a not entirely innocent smile. "Herr Direktor would be angry if you go on again to-night."

"He knows?"

"He came behind and I told him."

Tania never missed an opportunity of catching Herr Direktor's attention.

"But I must go on."

Tania looked at Kathi's milk-white skin above and below the bandages. She was so slim and so soft, so perfect. Tania glanced down at her own skin bare underneath the dressing gown. It was brown as a nut and firm as a ripe kernel. No man would break her ribs.

Her lips smiled as her eyes rose to meet Kathi's. "I think Herr Direktor, he like you. Some day he will make you his star."

"I want only to dance. I am not clever like Anna."

Tania laughed, a bright laugh of a mischievous young girl. "She is old. Soon she will be twenty-two and he will be tired of her. She go too much with that Pat."

Kathi rose. She was in pain, but she was not interested in the gossip of the company. Her mind turned away from it.

"I will go and see Yogi. He knows how I will get better quickly."

Tania watched her. "I will tell Herr Direktor you are back."

"No, please, it does not matter."

A smile moved over Tania's face. "You have no ambition, no?"

Kathi did not reply. As she left the dressing-room Tania jumped off the make-up table and looked at herself in the mirror. Kathi had everything, beauty, talent, and stage personality; she had everything except the wit or the vitality to take advantage of it. On-stage she was a light switched on; off-stage the light flickered out, and she was nothing more than a beautiful doll. That suited Tania. Tania had not missed Herr Direktor's growing interest in Kathi and a close friendship with Kathi was Tania's obvious way to divert that interest to herself.

Herr Direktor was talking to Harry on the stairs as Kathi came down. He was in the highest spirits, but he gazed down at her in concern.

"My little Kathi, you are badly hurt?"

"No," she smiled up at him. "No, I am ready for my next act."

He frowned. "No, no! Harry cannot go on either. He will take you home. You must go to bed and to-morrow I will come and see you."

"But please . . ."

"No!" he patted her gently. "You are beautiful and brave. All my company is brave. None of them will stay in the hospital. They like too much to be here. But you must think of me. I have plans for you, Kathi. I plan a new act for you alone. It will be a very beautiful act." He turned and shouted down the stairs. "Harry! You will take Kathi to her room in a taxi."

Then he was gone.

The girls in the dressing-rooms hurried their changes. They retouched make-up and pushed hair into place.

Sally, the little English dancer, sat at the dressing-table pouring out a glass of cognac. Sally was eighteen years old, but an old-timer on the stage.

"Evelyn," she asked, "do you want a drink?"

"Sure," said Evelyn. Sally filled another glass.

"Look at this new way of lining the lips," said Evelyn. She took an eyebrow pencil and drew a thin line around the cupid's bow. The result was most effective. Several of the girls tried it.

Sally drained her glass. "What a speed Lubichov took our numbers to-night. I was winded every time. What will happen on the stampede if he goes on like that? This stage is so wide we shall never make our rounds behind the wings."

They collected their props and shoes and started down the stairs. The company was already assembling for the next act.

Dick Nichols flexed his limbs near Albert Henn. "Lovely old theatre this," said Dick.

"Yes," said Henn. "But there is no waiter back-stage. We cannot eat during the performance as we did abroad."

Places were taken for the opening scene of the second act. It was the orchestra act and the English orchestra filed up the stairs. Herr Direktor appeared, baton in his white-gloved hand.

He had lost his over-riding dominance of the night before. He looked young. He was always that way on opening nights, as though he had drunk of some secret nectar of the gods and it had wiped from his face all age, all care, all responsibility. Once again to-night he had tapped his well-spring of happiness, and it was an elixir of youth.

And now, when he had worked his cast and his audience to a peak of performance and enthusiasm, he was about to step on that peak, resplendent, immaculate, a god on the little Olympus which he himself had created.

Lubichov always stood in the wings when the orchestra scene was on. All the care and responsibility that Herr Direktor had thrown off descended on Lubichov. He stood with nerves tense for a missed cue.

Zira moved from her position on-stage and crossed to a girl who was speaking to Harry. She held two ribbons of her costume. "Would you please tie this, dear?"

Harry balanced on one leg immediately held out his hand and took the ribbons. "Let me, Zira."

Zira tossed her head, but did not object.

Lolita, the Spanish dancer, watched the little play.

"Humph!" said Lolita, with a wink at the other girl with Harry.

Zira passed Lolita back to her position on-stage. “That thing,” she said, referring to Harry, “he always interferes where he is not wanted.”

Lolita watched her back and winked again. “That Zira, she cannot fool me. I know her well. She pretend all the time she want Mario, but that is not so. She want Harry because he have more money, and she only use Mario to make him jealous. All the time she do this.” Lolita began one of her mimicking acts for the crowd. “First she look at Mario this way.” She gazed passionately into Ching Chong’s eyes. He stepped back startled. “Then she look at Harry this way behind Mario’s back. But men they all alike anyway so it does not matter. I know them all. Mario, he the same. All men the same.” She shook her black head and rolled her expressive black eyes to emphasize her words. “I know Mario many, many years, yes, many, many years.” She was twenty years old herself. “He change his women many times, yes, many times, believe me.”

“Look out,” said someone. “The fireproof curtain is coming.”

This was the cue to take places. Herr Direktor walked to the centre of the stage. He stood watching Pappy Newman who held one hand up while his eye, glued on the peep-hole, watched the dimming of the house lights. Slowly he lifted his arm and dropped it suddenly. Herr Direktor, as quickly, lifted his baton and slashed it through the air. With a crash of sound from every instrument on the stage the curtain parted and the company was off for another two hours’ non-stop performance.

# Chapter Seventeen

Herr Direktor was no fool, as the English orchestra might have imagined from the past forty-eight hours' rehearsal. He made a point of studying the audience of every country to get the feeling of the audiences and to plan new numbers. Before the company left one country for another, the most popular music of the next country was arranged and worked into the show.

The most popular song in London at that moment was "Hold that Tiger", and Herr Direktor's baton crashed every instrument and voice on the stage into the rhythm and swing of "Hold that Tiger". Few of the company had the faintest idea what the words meant, but that did not matter.

Then it was over. The lights were dimming; a spotlight flooded the organ. Abruptly the tempo changed to the sentimental "Sweethearts Waltz" from the operetta "Maytime". As it finished, the accordion girls, dozens of them playing Horner accordions, waltzed around the stage playing "Tales from the Vienna Woods".

Lubichov was in a state of nervous prostration in the wings. There was never a rehearsal in which one or several of the girls did not miss a note. But to-night they excelled themselves; they swept through the number with a gaiety that was infectious, and when Anna worked her way to the centre for the final chord and took a bow there was a roar of applause.

Into the midst of the applause little Gretchen tripped on-stage for her soprano solo. She reached for the microphone which someone had forgotten to lower for her. Two feet above her head, it enraged her. "Damn you," she said. She kicked it, grabbed it, and shook it while one of the boys ran forward to help her.

Herr Direktor began to laugh. Suddenly he remembered he was on the stage and that this was the opening night. He turned to the orchestra and picked up the tempo in a flash. Gretchen, breathless, finished her number and dashed off into the wings. The lights dimmed and the music broke into another popular tune of the season. A quartet of girls began to sing, the rostrum with the harp began to rise as the harp took a solo verse.

Herr Direktor began to increase the speed. The girls dashed on for the tambourine dance. Faster and faster his baton flashed. Kick-bang, kick-bang,

they went, reversing their swings as their feet flew over their heads; kick-bang.

Now came a burlesque. The men of the company, Pappy Newman included, danced on for the men's ballet. Garbed only in pale blue brassieres and blue silk panties, carrying garlands of flowers they danced a minuet, Dick so thin, Pappy so fat, cavorting around the stage.

Laughter echoed through the house. Before the audience could recover, the lighting changed and Herr Direktor, arms apart, swept the orchestra into the opening chords of La Bohème. No conductor could have carried things off more flamboyantly than Herr Direktor did in that last flourish of the opening of the second act. The curtain swung down, applause roared through the house, but the curtain was up again and the Rosana trio were in front of a drop of old Spain in full Spanish costume, to the click of castanets.

Herr Direktor made his way to the back of the house again. All eyes were on Rosana, Lolita, and Chiquita, mother, sister, and daughter. They were of the same height with black silky hair, dark eyes, golden dresses, high combs, and flowing mantillas. Barely had they reached the side of the stage when the faint strains of the organ seeped through the drops playing "Meditation from Thaïs". The drops parted and in a dim light the ballet could be seen. Far at the back of the stage the organist played, his head bent low, seemingly an old man with white Liszt-like hair.

Sweetly the music rose. . . . Meditation . . . the ballet dancers, poised on their toes, hands above their heads, quivered across the stage. They parted and Kathi appeared slender, ethereal, lovely. High on her toes, her head and arms held back, she seemed to float like thistledown to the front of the stage, the most beautiful ballerina in all Europe.

High in the galleries Peter Kyrle caught his breath and his hands gripped with tension. At the back of the theatre Herr Direktor smiled. Kathi with two broken ribs had forgotten pain in her dance, she had disobeyed him because she could not bear to be away from his show. His eyes watched her and there was not a sound from the audience. Beauty always stilled an audience. Her body was as lovely as her face and when she danced there was something beyond movement, beyond the music, a fusion of the movement and music till it flowed through the limbs in a creation single and perfect. She was an artist where others were craftsmen.

Suddenly he knew the truth of Kathi. Where Anna was animal and other girls human, Kathi was spirit. That was why there was that strange affinity between Kathi and Yogi.

Herr Direktor was conscious of stirring emotion. Other women he had loved and had come away spent, Anna he had loved because he had found comfort in her, as one found affection from a pet animal and pride in its sleek condition and clever tricks.

But in Kathi he would find beauty and, beyond that, he would find peace when he wanted it, rest and stillness; love that would fill him and send him back to the world with strength replenished.

What a fool he had been not to see it. He had desired her as all men will desire beauty that subtly eludes their grasp. But now she was seventeen and soon men would pursue her, other men. He wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything before. As he watched her holding an audience enthralled, another revelation struck him. He would marry her. Like all great ideas it was simple. One could not love Kathi otherwise.

Kathi would never plague him to be made a star. She would be content. She only wanted to dance and be part of his show. She would never be jealous of his love for his Revue and for his people. She would never try to thrust herself between him and the show, clamouring to be more than others or resenting the ability of younger performers. No, she would always be with him, restful, unobtrusive, and a beautiful decoration.

What a fool he was not to have seen it before.

The ballet had closed about Kathi and she was off-stage now. From the back of the organ limned with light, a form appeared. The rostrum rose. There was a gasp from the audience as Tania could be seen, Tania, nude, the long shaft of light revealing and concealing her young and beautiful body under the flimsy black silk net flung around her.

Herr Direktor smiled. She was clever that child. Who would have thought of that scarf, who else would have draped it so carelessly yet so skilfully? She was only fifteen, yet what a body she had . . . caught just at the flowering. Perhaps she had talent also. He watched her. He wondered if she had ever had a lover. Those Hungarian gypsies matured early. No, he thought, she was a shrewd child, she would give nothing away without a price.

Applause was rolling through the house. Tania on her rostrum was descending behind the organ, the curtains were closing. Below the stage she jumped off her rostrum, unwound the black net and picked up her dressing gown and tied it carelessly around her.

She heard the applause, laughed with delight and ran up the stairs to the stage.

"Where is Kathi?" Then she saw her lying on one of the trunks, one hand across her eyes. Yogi was holding the other sitting by her side with his serene eyes staring in front of him. For one moment it flashed across Tania's brain that something was flowing between the two, a healing power.

"Kathi, you must go home. Herr Direktor will be very angry. I will take you."

She had a momentary vision of plaguing Pappy and several others so that it would come to Herr Direktor's ears that she had insisted upon taking Kathi home, but Harry spoiled it.

He hobbled from the stage door on his own damaged ankle. "The taxi is here. Kathi. Help me to carry her, Tania."

But Hugo, the strong man, was waiting for his act, and he picked Kathi up, light as a moth in her ballet costume.

Rita's solo act was on the runway in front of the curtain, and Tania was forgotten. Rita, with her raven hair tumbling to her shoulders, dressed in no more than a brassiere and ceinture of sparkling metal sequins, had a basket of tiny moss roses. She worked directly above the audience singing an Italian flower-girl song. She laughed, she danced across the runway over the heads of the pit musicians, smiling into the faces of the men in the front rows. As she sang she threw roses into their outstretched hands and laughed at the scramble for the prize.

Rita flirted brazenly and scattered to the winds the dignity of the starched shirts in the front rows. Rita had played this part since childhood and with each season had become more daring with the audience. Stepping down into the aisle she picked out an old gentleman on the aisle and sang to him in her native tongue. She gave him a rose, leaned over and kissed his bald head, leaving a bright red imprint from her lips. Embarrassed as he was, he laughed with her as she climbed the runway once more and dashed back to her dressing-room.

Once there she wiped the lipstick off her mouth distastefully. She disliked that number now that she had grown up, but Herr Direktor would not hear of dropping it. She sat and stared at her face in the mirror. Usually she never noticed any one face in the audience, she was not interested in men, but to-night she had seen a face she could not forget, the face of a handsome fair man sitting alone. He had caught her flower and thanked her

. . . but she shrugged her shoulders . . . she never saw any of them again so what did it matter.

# Chapter Eighteen

Behind the curtain the stage hands were building the Jungle Scene.

When the curtain rose, a hyena stalked loose in the thick jungle, monkeys jabbered from the hanging creepers, brightly coloured parrots chattered in the branches. In a tree-top sat Olivia, the Hawaiian girl, singing and smiling. Murmurs rose from the audience.

It was a magnificent spectacle and through it Olivia, incongruously, sang "Moonlight and Roses". Applause broke out as Olivia finished her song and, with it, a scream from back-stage.

"What has happened?" cried Pappy Newman. He stumbled through the mass of props lying in his way. "Sophie, what is it?" He took her arm and led her to the light. "You are bleeding, Sophie. What has happened?"

"It was the hyena," she sobbed. "He clawed me as he passed." She showed him her bleeding leg.

"Get her to the hospital quick, Pappy," called Roger. "It might be poisonous. Pat has to go too. He has been bitten by the little monkey."

Quickly Pappy rushed her to the stage door in time to get into a taxi with Pat. Then he ran back to his place on the stage again.

"Francine," he called to the ballet mistress. "Find someone for the back legs of a zebra. Sophie has gone to the hospital and won't be back in time for the Circus scene."

The girls had the stage again in their staircase tap scene. Up and down they went with rhythm and precision, sixty smiles and a hundred and twenty legs. Then they were gone and Anna was on her dangerous Wheel of Death scene. Hugo, the strong man, hoisted the enormous perch topped by a wheel to his shoulders. He balanced himself with knotted muscles and upturned glance for a minute until it was steady and then Anna, lithe and light, climbed up the perch and into the wheel. With feet and arms outstretched to the rim of the wheel she began to whirl round and round as the lights spotted her. Round and round, faster and faster she went as the house burst into applause.

As the wheel slowed the girls ran on again with ropes of bells. Down into the audience they ran picking their men and hanging the ropes around their necks. Anna, down on the stage again, directed the bell ringing amid laughter and the audience had a chance to show its musical talent. By now the audience was gathered into the intimacy of a party with the company. The house was in a happy mood.

Frau Schiller who owned the dog act was shouting wildly at her big German dogs as she fitted them with false pony heads. On the dogs' backs rode dummies. The girls, now back at their koffers, were fitting themselves into zebra heads and legs. All the members of the company were coming downstairs from their dressing-rooms in the strangest mixture of costumes. They were to be the audience on the stage and were going to the circus.

Madame Rastella and her spouse settled in one of the property boxes at the side of the stage. Rastella in Prince Albert coat with long black whiskers was a staid Victorian gentleman and Madame matched him in a purple velvet gown with three plumes bouncing on her head. Rita was a gamin in a beret and trench coat while little Lotty the contortionist wore a flat Edwardian straw and a trailing skirt. She held the arm of her supposed husband, Max van Huten, who was equally Edwardian with a flowing moustache. In his hand he carried a moustache cup. Yasmini and Lotus, the Indian girls, wore dresses of the same period, with tiny waists and bouncing bustles.

This time the curtain rolled up, making several false starts as the wooden pole on which it rolled crashed several times to the stage, much to the amusement of the audience. At last it went up with the aid of half-a-dozen clowns.

Once the curtain was up Rani danced across a tightrope wire balancing herself with a parasol. She danced across and back, she jumped and turned light as a feather while the audience burst into applause.

"Look at that Rani," said Yasmini, quite impressed. "She could go to America with the circus and make lots of money."

"Sure," replied Lotus in the box beside her. "And what she do all the time?"

"Yes, what she do," answered Yasmini. "She get engaged all the time. Everywhere we go Rani get engaged to a different man, always Chinese."

"Yes, and everyone called Wong."

Yasmini laughed. “Sure, that funny too. Must mean like Smith in America. For sure if Rani keep on she be Mrs. Wong in some country yet.”

“Here, you girls,” called Pappy from the wings. “Show some life out there.”

Yasmini broke into a broad stage smile and clapped. “Who am I applauding anyway. Not that Agathe Hornetta?”

The Hornettas raced around the stage on their high one-wheel cycles, Agathe, a twenty-year-old blonde, spotless in snowy satin, with her auburn-haired brother whom she adored. They whirled around the stage, enjoying playing together as much as playing to the audience. Then the other brother came on in his comedy part, a balancing act of crazy skill.

“You know”, said Yasmini, “they are leaving the show to go to the French Casino in New York. Herr Direktor cannot get them another permit to work in Germany because they are partly Jewish. Funny, eh, not to be able to go home to your own country?”

Next came Herr Schiller’s dog act. The dogs circled the stage like ponies carrying their dummies. Herr Schiller stood in the centre of the stage with a long whip, which he never used on the dogs, but which he cracked in the circus style that befitted his top hat and ringmaster’s outfit.

“Here, Roland, Roland!” whispered Yasmini, as the dog dashed past. Roland began to wag his own tail under the false one and pulled over to the box as he heard his name.

“Yasmini,” cried Pappy Newman from the wings. “The old man is out front if you want more fines this week.”

“One pound five shillings off this week already. You think I forget,” answered Yasmini. “Look, Lotus, the handsome man down there, you think he the King?”

“The King!” said Lotus scornfully. “You think he come to see this show?”

“Well, maybe not, but he very good-looking just the same. You think maybe he look at me, Lotus?”

“Perhaps. You try.”

Yasmini began to preen herself. Smiling broadly in his direction she attracted his attention. “Look, Lotus,” she said. “He smile.”

“Arabisch, Arabisch!” cried Pappy.

The Arabs whirled on the stage shouting and somersaulting with furious energy trying to outdo each other. Little Biji and Baba went around and around in their cartwheel whirl. Yasmini forgot about the man in the audience. "Come on, Biji," she shouted. "Wunderbar, wunderbar!" she clapped madly. Biji, hearing Yasmini's voice, forgot the applause of the audience, straightened herself up, smiled broadly at Yasmini and then was off again.

With a wild yelling the Arabs were off-stage, and on came tiny Gretchen, whip in hand to direct her Zebra act. The human zebras danced and tapped and kicked one another and everything went well until the leading zebra noticed Madame Rastella's plumes and mistook them for grass. He made a dash for her box whereupon she swooned with admirable comedy and collapsed into Rastella's arms. The zebra started back in surprise, cocked his head on one side and started for the audience. Down the steps he went to excited squeals from the women of the audience. He dashed up the aisle biting at customers on all sides.

Once in the lobby Friedrich pulled off the zebra's head and Jimmy stepped out of the hindquarters.

"Say, Friedrich, that was hot. How do we get out of here? We shall have to run around Leicester Square with our own legs."

As Jimmy and Friedrich ran through the alley carrying their zebra's front and rear, Kahn began to unshackle his elephants which he had kept in the alley ever since his first act had finished. By now he had a large crowd around him, as he always did when he began to prepare for the finale of the show. Kahn had come from India with his elephants and never left them. They knew him so well he could do anything with them, whereas no one else could manage them at all. He unshackled the chains, and, calling to the big one, he walked away. The little one wound its trunk around the big elephant's tail, and they followed Kahn to the stage door.

The music of the Stampede came out to greet them as the entire company crowded down the stairs and in the wings, all in their most colourful costumes of the evening. Everything was ready for the Grand Finale.

All sixty of the chorus girls represented the dances of every country in a non-stop whirl. Around and around back-stage they rushed, each one whipping off one costume and changing into another laid out on chairs back-stage. As each dance passed from one country to another, a cyclorama picture scene of each country passed across the stage. The girls made a chain

with clasped hands, a never-ending chain, each new costume coming on with the appropriate scenery linked with the hand of the last girl of the scene just leaving the stage. For each girl there was a member of the company back-stage helping her to change, following her to the wings hooking up the costume or tying a shoe as she hopped on one leg.

Little Katherina, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Beatrix, the Dutch dancer, ran from one to the other. The pest of the show at all other times, she was the mainstay back-stage of the Stampede. With Dutch calm she produced anything and everything just in time to complete the costumes of the girls going on-stage. Only the excited and rushed girls knew how indispensable she was as the Stampede flashed through the music of every country, Italian, Hungarian, German, Dutch, Russian, Finnish, Spanish, Greek, Chinese, Danish, Swedish, Irish, French, Scottish. As the long chain finished, the girls appeared in black and white, with black silk hats. The orchestra broke into modern rhythm, the skyscrapers of New York began to appear and the orchestra crashed into Sousa's "Stars and Stripes".

All the other members of the company poured on-stage, applause roared through the house, and last of all came the dogs and the elephants and cheers broke over the clapping.

Once more Argentina rang through the house with every voice of the company. Herr Direktor appeared in the wings, someone pulled him on-stage, and with everyone laughing and singing, the curtain went down. Up and down, up and down it went. "Bravo, bravo!" The audience stamped and clapped and cheered. "Speech, speech!"

That was the last thing Herr Direktor wanted to give, as in moments of great excitement his English sometimes deserted him.

Finally the music stopped. "Speech, speech!" shouted the audience. "Speech!"

Herr Direktor was embarrassed. He looked at Anna, took her by the hand and cleared his throat. The applause dwindled.

"I have so little to say," he began. "We only wanted to make you happy. This is our first time in England, and if we please you as we have tried to do, then we feel our mission is accomplished. So I thank you for your kind reception to-night to all my big 'familie'. Good night."

The applause flared up again. The curtain dropped. The applause broke into cheers. The curtain went up again and the side drapes swung down meeting in the centre with an air of finality.

“Come, quick,” called Pappy, as he and Roger made a dash to the centre. One held a curtain forward and the other held one back, making a space of about two feet.

“Come on, children,” called Pappy. “A bow for everyone, quick!”

A long procession began, each group in turn, and each individual artiste. For another fifteen minutes the applause rang out. The company had fulfilled Herr Direktor’s request, it had been the greatest opening night of them all.

# Chapter Nineteen

The audience was leaving the theatre, the orchestra was playing a last quick march and everyone on the stage stood still waiting for it to finish. Then Herr Direktor took the centre of the stage.

"Now, my children," he said. "I have watched you from the back of the theatre all night. You have given a splendid performance. I know everyone has done his best. I am very pleased and I am very sure in England we shall have a big success. Now I want to say since you have tried so hard, that this week Herr Newman . . . where is Herr Newman?" He began to shout, but Herr Newman was nowhere in sight. "Oh, well, I will tell him later. This week I will give each one of you five shillings extra."

Herr Direktor held up his hand, there was a beaming smile on his face; like a parent with a big box of chocolates he had given each child a small candy, a very small one, and the children were delighted.

"Now," he continued. "To-night I did not take notes, and although the performance was so good, there is always something wrong." A wave of fatherly sentiment swept over him. He had drunk deep of happiness that evening and he could not bear the thought of not having his big family around him next day. "So to-morrow . . ."

"Christ!" muttered Jimmy. "He is going to rehearse!"

"So to-morrow at 9 a.m. we shall just meet here for a little talk. Perhaps we can make some changes. . . ."

"Herr Direktor! Herr Direktor!" Pappy Newman's voice called from the side with a note of concern. "Herr Direktor, if you are finished I wish you would come. We are going to the hospital. Anna has been mauled by the little leopard."

"Was ist los? What is the matter?"

"It was that Vixen," said Newman. "Anna went to say good night to Rex. He is so jealous, that little one. Anna had her arm on the cage and he reached out and clawed it. Her arm is badly mauled."

Herr Direktor hurried to the wings. "I told her, I told her," he said. "I told her never to go to the cages at night."

He met the doctor whom Pappy had called in. Anna was with him, wrapped in a bathrobe over her costume, her arm bleeding badly.

"She will be all right," the doctor said. "She will spend the night in hospital. We'll fix her up."

He took Anna through the door from the stage while all the company stared. Brusquely Herr Direktor turned.

"To-morrow at nine sharp, everyone! Herr Newman, call the papers at once about the accident. Tell them Anna will be here at 8.45 for photographs and interviews. See that you get all the reporters. It will be good publicity. Gute Nacht."

He followed the doctor and Anna.

For a moment the company watched, then like a crowd of children, realizing the parent was gone, they burst into unrestrained noise. Singing and dancing they trooped through the hall and began climbing the stairs . . . Frank and Auguste playing "Argentina" on their accordions . . . little Lotty balancing a plate on the end of a long bamboo rod . . . Rani swinging her water jugs . . . the big dogs excitedly barking, while Schiller shouted "Shtop, shtop!" . . . Rita dancing upstairs banging her tambourine . . . Rastella singing "La Bohème" in full voice . . . Ching Chong carrying his pile of knives . . . Charlie the snake charmer smiling as he helped Yogi wrapped in a shawl. Up and up they trooped, filling the stairs . . . Boris dancing in his embroidered Chinese costume, swinging his black pigtail to amuse the girls . . . Henn and Elsa trying to lassoo the others as they turned the landings of the stairs . . . Friedl in Hungarian puppet costume, chattering to Elsa . . . the Nichols family in tumblers' tights . . . Ronnie in toreador costume . . . girls in the blue taffeta of the Vauxhall Gardens scene . . . the Spanish Rosana family all in gold, Lolita talking excitedly and rolling her eyes. Endlessly the procession wound up . . . Long Tom dragging his heavy weight, still talking to little Kaspar, and Gretchen in her high French heels . . . the Italian Perch Act with the children trying to talk English . . . little Lotty with her young Chinese sister . . . the Russians laughing and shouting in their native tongue . . . Tania singing about love . . . Zira, Yasmini, and Lotus in saris of pastel shades bound with silver, their dark faces smiling and big velvet eyes flashing. Behind them followed Lubichov in his red Russian smock, young for the moment, laughing and flirting . . . Olivia, Hula, and Mundi with their steel guitars, playing and singing. . . . The Hornetta brother and sister, intimate, arm in arm . . . Herr Schiller, with top hat and ringmaster's whip, smiling at his fat wife puffing up stair by stair . . . Juanita singing a Brazilian

tune. Then came the girls in their black-and-white New York costumes, silk hats cockily over one ear, all young, all in riotous spirits, singing at the top of their voices . . . "Don't wear a frown on Broadway, for Broadway always wears a smile" . . . Up they went . . . and down from the floors above floated the strains . . . "Broadway . . . always . . . wears a smile". Last of all came the Arabs, clearing the stairs with wild leaps, Paulus bringing up the rear, clearing each set of eight steps with one leap.

Far above the strains of two guitars could be heard . . . "Broadway always wears a smile." In the dressing-rooms the girls were dancing and singing.

The old doorman in his cage looked baffled. The call boy stood close by.

"I don't believe they intend to leave this theatre to-night," the doorman said. "It is half an hour since the theatre should have been closed. The orchestra has left long ago. Look here, Bob, you make the rounds again, call out everywhere, 'All lights out in fifteen minutes'. We have to get out of here somehow."

The call boy quickly made his rounds. Up and down the stairs he shouted, "All lights out in one minute!"

No sooner had he descended than the stairs were loud with the patter of feet racing down the stairs. The members of the company were tumbling out of their rooms as though the devil were after them, some still in make-up and some half dressed.

The doorman was even more baffled than before.

"Gute nacht," they called, depositing their keys.

"Gute nacht, Pappy."

"Bon soir, Papa."

"Buona sera," the Italian children called.

"Goodee nightee," smiled Ching Chong politely.

"Gute nacht, Pappy," called Elsa. "Kiss Elsa gute nacht, Pappy." She leaned in through his window. Ronnie pulled her out. "Don't mind her, Pappy, she's always that way."

The old doorman grinned.

"Gute nacht, Pappy." Paulus the Arab grinned widely. "Schlafen Sie gut!"

The doorman looked bewildered.

"He says he hopes you sleep well," said Ronnie.

The old doorman nodded and smiled at the Arab. "Thank you, thank you," he answered, hanging up the keys.

In another moment they were all gone. Everything was silent and still. Smiling to himself, the doorman put on his hat and coat and locked his little cage door. Perhaps they weren't so bad after all, he thought. . . . It was years and years since so many people had made such a fuss of him all in a few minutes. Perhaps he would stay for the run after all. It was just their way, they were like a lot of children, he would get used to their noise. Yes, that was it, he thought, just like a lot of children. He went out, closing the stage door behind him.

# Chapter Twenty

The alley outside the theatre was deserted. Somewhere in the night a clock struck one. The dank air in the alley waited for another note to echo some life into its emptiness, but no other note came.

The heavy cobblestones were worn shiny with the years, and dampness added a glistening sorrow to their blackness. At this hour the alley was a backwater of darkness, drab and dead. The small electric sign over the stage door was out. The gas light on top of the green iron post was also out and the squared panes of glass, iron framed at the top of the post, kept their grime to themselves. The tall brick walls on three sides were covered with sooty grit from the smoke and fog of London. No sounds came from the Charing Cross Road. The stage door was locked. At the dead end of the alley the huge door to the stage was barred for the night. The back doors of the night club were closed and outside were rows of garbage cans.

The sky above was black, the air was cold and fog drifted down from the high dark walls. A wooden box stood forlorn at the end of the alley, left behind by someone who had sat long hours in a queue.

On the pavement lay a lonely programme of the Continental Revue with its covers outstretched like arms on the cold stones and open to a page of laughing faces.

A sound of footsteps turned into the alley, a small sound against those dark high walls. The footsteps had an aimless quality as though they were carrying their creator somewhere in spite of himself. They turned into the alley and dwindled to silence under the lamp-post.

For a long time Peter Kyrle leaned against the lamp-post, his coat collar turned up and his head shrugged into its shelter against the creeping chill of the night. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets and, hatless, his dark hair tumbled over his brow like a black wave on a troubled ocean.

He had gone to his rooms after the show and had come out again unable to think of sleep. He had walked and walked through the night and now his feet had led him to the spot where he had first seen Kathi under the gaslight. He knew her name now, he had seen it in the programme. He knew so many of their names now. Yogi and Tania, the girl he had seen naked, and the fat woman who had laughed at him; he had seen them all and recognized them

from his gallery seat and in the programme. Everything since that odd mischance of the wrong turning the night before last, had burned in single vivid impressions into his brain.

He had need to think, need to resolve the turmoil that was stirring within him, tormenting him and wrenching all his roots from their foundations.

One smile from Kathi could have eased his torment. He tried to picture her face as he had seen it under the gaslight in the alley, but it eluded him and yet never had a face made so sharp an impression upon him. He had fallen in love. It had to happen when he was broke; it had to happen with a girl who was one of the stars of the show, with a girl the programme called the most beautiful ballerina in all Europe.

He stood against the lamp-post as lonely and depressed as the alley, dimly appreciating the comfort of gloom at such a crisis in his life.

He stared at the open programme of the Revue that lay on the pavement. It lay there, a bedraggled memory of sentiment, burlesque and beauty, of saccharine music, forests of legs and superb animal skills. Yet while he had been up in the gallery he had been hypnotized with the rest of the audience and it had seemed to him the best show he had ever seen.

It was all so vastly common, reaching a common denominator of humanity in that great audience from the gallery to the stalls, a torrent of skill and gaiety, touched with vulgarity but shot here and there at intervals with sheer beauty. Kathi, ethereal and weightless, dancing alone in the spotlight, had been breath-takingly lovely. Individual scenes, individual voices suddenly caught the breath with beauty and then broke into the flamboyance of a tap-dancing chorus, all flesh and smiles and slickness.

Somewhere in it all lay a secret that belonged as surely to life as bread and butter.

The Herr Direktor took three hundred people of all races and of all skills, used them like instruments, extracting from their talents the distilled essence of what was best in them till the human jealousies and pettinesses fell away before their combined skills, some great, some trivial, and what came out was like music, newly created with each performance.

If Peter Kyrle, artist, unknown and without money, could only grasp the secret of it he could do the same with his art, art not for the few but earthy of the people, yet in tune with the gods.

Or was he only a dreaming fool?

A little wind swirled from the Charing Cross Road into the alley, breaking the fog into whirls that danced up into the darkness. The little wind caught the pages of the programme on the pavement. Its icy finger marked the face of Herr Direktor, smiling and monocled, the fat face of Pappy Newman, so efficient. The small wind was like a finger of fate looking through a list of prospects for consideration. It flipped over the pages, touching the rows of smiling faces, the fat Rastellas, the young Tyroleans, the Arabs and Anna, and Tania and Kathi. For each of those Fate had its own store.

These were not ordinary people. None of them was ordinary. They had been sifted from all the talent of Europe. They were an aristocracy of their own who had daily, nightly to rewin the esteem of the public and hold it in competition with their own companions in the company and those on the outside waiting to come in. Even the young ones, the girls who draped the stage decoratively, even they had to win and hold their places by their beauty.

Like the lilies of the field they sowed not neither did they reap. They only gave pleasure. Generations of troupers lay in those pages, old and young. Somehow from one generation to the other they survived. Yet when the world was ploughed under by troubles, the lilies of the field were the first to be trampled.

Suddenly Peter Kyrle straightened himself with a jerk. He had an idea. He had nothing to lose, everything to gain. He turned and began to walk out of the alley and there was a new crispness in his steps.

# Chapter Twenty-one

Herr Direktor was in a magnanimous mood. Rested and refreshed he was relaxed, bathing in the afterglow of success with his large family all about him.

He was taking the rehearsal with leisurely ease, touching up the performance here and there like an artist daubing unimportant touches of paint on a finished picture. The mood of relaxation would not last long. Tomorrow he would be off like a dynamo, every day crowded with urgencies demanding his time and attention. There was his tailor to see for an orgy of selection and fitting and perfecting, there was the Home Office to visit about his naturalization papers; there was the German Consulate to visit to get the permits for re-entry into Germany. Then there were auditions to arrange. All the agents were to send him talent so that he could build a bigger and better show for the Continent. There would be the planning, designing, preparation and rehearsal of new scenes for the opening in Hamburg, new musical arrangements, new chorus numbers, old scenes to be rearranged for new acts to fit it. His days ahead were so filled with things to do that he sat now basking like a cat in his moment of relaxation.

Not once did he lose his temper. If anything went wrong he spoke in a gentle soothing voice. He sat with Lubichov and Pappy in the stalls, discussing irrelevancies over a cup of coffee. They were expecting Mario at any moment. Herr Direktor had arranged his permit at the Home Office and had sent a telegram and tickets two days ago.

A call boy came down from the stage door.

"There's a gent wants to see one of you gents. 'E says 'e's Mr. Peter Kyrle and 'e's an artist what left some sketches here."

"Left some sketches here?"

"They're in my office," said Pappy. "The python was going to eat them."

"They must be good then." Herr Direktor's monocle fixed the call boy. "Send him in. And send for the sketches."

Peter Kyrle appeared at the side of the stage with the call boy who pointed a finger at the three men sitting in the stalls. He descended the steps and approached the three older men.

"Mr. Peter Kyrle, I believe?" Herr Direktor introduced him to Lubichov and Pappy Newman. Both accepted the introduction as though it were a privilege and looked at the new-comer. He was hardly more than a boy and a very attractive one.

"An artist, I believe?" Herr Direktor was at his most charming and the tone of his voice left no doubt but that he had the greatest respect for artists, particularly for young ones who might some day be great.

"I'm sorry to intrude," said Peter, "but I. . . ."

Herr Direktor waved his hesitation away with a slight gesture of the hand. He fixed Peter through his monocle.

"You saw my Revue last night?"

"Yes."

"You liked it?"

"It was . . . wonderful."

Herr Direktor turned to the other two. "Wunderbar! You see, London likes my show. He is an artist and he thinks it is wunderbar." Herr Direktor loved flattery, with the unrestrained hunger for it of theatrical people. He turned back to Peter. It was his pride that he could make snap judgments about men, women and animals and never be wrong. He saw a dark-haired fresh-complexioned boy, diffident in the English manner, with a touch of the poet behind his dark eyes. Herr Direktor had not chosen talent of all kinds for twenty years without knowing the signs.

"Pappy, the portfolio. Ha, here it is."

He took it from the call boy, then he held it towards Peter. "May I?"

"Please do."

Herr Direktor untied the portfolio and recoiled.

"Ach! But they smell!"

"Surrealism!" cried Lubichov with delight, regarding a stain framing a stale piece of cabbage.

Peter stepped forward. "I'm sorry, that's garbage."

"Garbage?" Lubichov thought this was a good joke. "An original!"

Peter hurried to wipe the offending spot with his handkerchief. "I threw them in the garbage can." He tore off the stained corner of the top sketch.

Pappy Newman burst into a deep chuckle. “Now I see why the python wanted to eat them.”

Herr Direktor stared soberly at Peter, his monocle glittering. “Why did you try to poison my python?”

Peter, forgetting his nervousness, told them briefly of his venture into the darkness of the stage, and the three men roared with laughter. Herr Direktor took the portfolio from Peter and turned over the sketches. He saw lines with a remarkable boldness and freedom; he saw a flair for catching the life and spirit of a subject on paper; he saw water-colour used with a clean boldness of full-brush washes. This boy was good.

Herr Direktor shut the portfolio, adjusted his monocle, and stared at Peter.

“I will give you a year’s contract. I have much that you can do for me. You will see Herr Newman about your contract and you will report to me here at nine o’clock to-morrow.”

He pulled himself up from his seat, ignored Peter, clapped his hands. “Come, Pappy, places!” Peter, forgotten, sat down to grasp the significance of what had happened.

Suddenly there was a squeal from the girls on-stage and a rush towards the wings.

“Mario!” exclaimed Herr Direktor.

Over the heads of the girls, Mario was seen, clasping one pair of hands after another, kissing here and there, glowing with pleasure to be back with the company. Zira had disappeared to the dressing-room and Mario did not ask about her. Absence had healed both broken hearts and not a crack remained, Mario saw the three men in the front of the house and he pushed through the girls. He came across the stage extension and jumped down. As if he had been away for years they all shook hands, ignoring Peter.

Then Mario whispered into Pappy’s ear.

“So!” said Pappy. “You had to take a taxi. You couldn’t walk.”

Mario smiled and waved his hand. “It is a trifle. I will repay you.”

He took the money Pappy gave him, called one of the girls and sent her off to pay his taximan. Then he turned with a broad smile and looked from Herr Direktor to Peter.

“Our new artist,” said Herr Direktor, introducing them.

"Ha!" said Mario, as if the announcement were of the utmost importance. "Ha!" He took the portfolio and began to look through the sketches. Peter wondered who he was and what he did.

"Mario," called Pappy. "Rehearsal."

Mario pushed the portfolio back into Peter's hands. "I shall be very interested in you. You will be very happy with us; plenty, plenty work; little, little money."

He leapt to the stage projection and pirouetted with broad comedy to the stage. Everyone laughed. It was good to have Mario back again.

Peter found a door that led to the stage. He slipped through to the stairs to the dressing-rooms. He stopped and looked up. He might see Kathi. He was part of the show, the show in which she danced. On the second landing Tania passed him. She stopped when she saw Peter, recognizing the embarrassed boy who had emerged from behind a piece of scenery.

"You are with the show now, yes? That is nice."

They both squeezed to the rail to let Madame Rastella's huge bulk pass. Madame wagged a finger at Tania and rolled her eyes. "You should not bring your gentlemen friends into the theatre, Tania. Maybe Frau Schiller will steal him."

Tania laughed again, a spurt of laughter. Frau Schiller ran even weight with Madame Rastella. "He is with the company now. He is artist, real artist, not artiste."

Madame stared at Peter. "Ha, that is he, the one I have seen. Oh, la, la!" With Tania on one side and Madame Rastella on the other, Peter was hemmed in. "Yes, I think he is in love with Kathi . . . poor Kathi. . . ." Madame Rastella knew how to get a world of comedy into one glance. "Yes, I think so. Yes, Tania, I see him look at her. She is lying there on the koffer, so beautiful, so fast asleep. Oh, la, la! One cannot miss that look in the eyes . . . I know . . . it is the love at first sight . . . one moment you are happy or miserable like everybody, and the next moment you are happy and miserable all at once at the same time." She spoke in Italian. Peter could not understand a word. "You see it, Tania, in the eye. Ha! that is romance. It goes like this." Her fingers jabbed her immense bosom. "Pouff, an arrow right in here. Ha, that is wonderful . . . but you have to be careful. Sometimes the arrow go right through and out the other side then you have only a hole." She rolled her eyes again.

Tania's eyes were wide on Peter. She spoke in English.

“That is so? You are in love with Kathi, yes?”

“Me?”

“Madame Rastella say so,” said Tania. “Maybe that why Kathi break her ribs.”

“What?” The word jerked involuntarily from Peter.

Tania caught the meaning of his concern.

Tania avoided his question. “Ja, she break two ribs. She like eggshell, very strong, but if you crack it . . .” Tania shrugged. “It break easily. Must be very, very careful when you make love to her or she break.”

Peter blushed.

Tania grinned mischievously. “Kathi very, very good girl . . . she never let anyone love her unless she love him . . . never . . . never. . . .”

Madame Rastella began to lower herself downstairs step by step, gurgling with laughter.

All this had happened very quickly, but Peter was already seeing Tania as a link to help him to Kathi. Tania, behind her laughter and teasing, was seeing Peter as a link in her own scheme of things. Love is a fire and one can feed it with fuel to make it burn. Then one can cook one’s own porridge on the fire. If Kathi could love this Englishman she would not love lightly; then Herr Direktor could love Kathi as much as he liked and Kathi would be blind to it. If Kathi did not respond to Herr Direktor he would want her all the more and he would neglect Anna. Then perhaps she, Tania, would come in between.

Tania smiled with her dark eyes fixed on Peter’s.

“Maybe you would like to see Kathi, yes?”

They made way for Maria, who passed slowly, heavy with her child. Her sharp ears had caught some of the conversation, and her sharp eyes had seen some of the by-play. She told it to Anna. She had it mixed.

“That Tania,” said Maria. “She steal anything; she make eyes at Herr Direktor, she make eyes at Pappy, and now she steals Kathi’s friend.”

Anna watching the rehearsal from the wings, sat with her fur coat draped over her bandaged arm. “One day she make one eye too many and then she lose both.”

# Chapter Twenty-two

Tania did not take Peter to see Kathi that same day. She wanted to tell Kathi first about the new English boy with the company, how he was crazy with love for her, how he was an artist, a real artist; maybe some day he would be famous. She suspected that Herr Direktor would come to see Kathi after the rehearsal, and that it would not be proper for Peter to be there.

Peter Street, off Dean Street, was a short forgotten street that had been left undisturbed by change for generations. Kathi's room was not a cheap room, but Harry Nichols had arranged that. It was a graceful room with pleasant deep-set windows and an antique bed that had passed from owner to owner with the room. It was a four-poster with delicate posts and a curtained canopy to match the Adam woodwork of the room. An Adam fireplace was set in one wall, with a cheerful fire burning in the grate.

Kathi was lying in bed dreaming. She did not want to lie in bed. One grew better so much more quickly when one was back-stage with the company. Herr Direktor had insisted that she stay in bed and had sent the English doctor. But it was lonely. Meanwhile she let her thoughts run idly and she remembered that odd young man in the alley.

Then Tania came, full of the story of the same young man. Full of the story that he was ravished with love for her, so much so that he could not eat until he had seen her. Madame Rastella had seen him on the night of rehearsal gazing at her as she lay asleep on the koffer back-stage, and he could not move for looking at her. It was very romantic—but he was very romantic and Madame said that the English, when they loved, loved for ever. They were very romantic, and very, very faithful—even when they were married. Tania let her imagination run. This boy was so quiet and so shy, not like Ronnie or the Nichols. This boy was so different, he made you feel like sometimes in Hungary when the gypsies play the violins and it is a Summer night in the country around a fire, and something inside you wants to dance up to the stars on the notes of the music and then dance from star to star, something inside you, added Tania, that makes you feel so sad and so happy. She hit her bosom with both fists in her eagerness to impress Kathi with her passion and her envy of the love that the artist was waiting to lavish on Kathi.

Tania heard heavy footsteps on the stairs. “It is Herr Direktor,” she whispered.

Tania opened the door to Herr Direktor with a smile of disarming innocence. She countered the first frown on his brow at her presence by slipping out behind him. She turned at the door. “Good-bye, Kathi, I will be back in half an hour to see that you have your dinner before I go to the theatre.”

Then, seeing the appreciation on her solicitude pass across Herr Direktor’s face, she danced down the stairs to walk abroad and enjoy the feeling of men’s heads turning to see her in her gypsy costume. Herr Direktor liked his people to wear their national dresses in the street. It was good advertisement and very cheap advertisement.

Herr Direktor glanced around the room. He was pleased with Harry. It was a beautiful room.

He sat on the bed. “Tania is staying with you, Kathi?”

Kathi smiled.

“She has a good heart, that child,” he added.

He paused and looked at Kathi’s face wondering if it were her so fair hair against the pillow or the transparent blueness of her eyes that made her face so pure. What could have been in him not to have seen her like this before?

“You do not feel any pain, Kathi?”

Her head shook slightly and she smiled again. Herr Direktor had always been so “correct” with her, never unkind to her at the rehearsals as he was to the others. But for him she would not be here in London. But for him she would not have been in the alley that night. Swiftly all her thoughts and feelings were focusing on one object as though, at the ripe moment, an overwhelming emotion had come into her life gathering together all her loose dreams and fusing them into meaning and purpose.

For once in his life Herr Direktor was at a loss. His ideas had been very different when he had told Harry to find Kathi a nice room. A revelation had come to him last night as he had watched Kathi dancing. A week ago he would have thought it unbelievable that any girl would move him with thoughts such as those that were running through his mind.

Suddenly his life with Anna seemed no more than a projection of his own vanity through a pet animal who had no relationship with his deeper

self. Here lying on the white pillow was a different kind of beauty. All beauty, like all men, might have a price, but the only price that could buy Kathi was love. That was dangerous for a man of his age whose life was absorbed in a single love, his company, but, looking at Kathi, he was conscious of a great hunger, not of the flesh, but of the heart.

It was a new and disturbing sensation, but he knew as he looked at her that the realization which had come to him during the opening show was the truth. Kathi had something to give him which none of the other women he had known had been able to give. Rosana in those early years had given him a zest and stimulus to succeed. He had grown beyond her and she had fallen behind him. Anna had given him freedom from the need to think of other women. But something in Kathi promised him rest and replenishment with a placid beauty that would not obtrude upon his own life. There was something in Kathi of which a man could be sure whether he were near her or a thousand miles away. But there was also something in her inviolate and inviolable.

He felt it repelling him, keeping him, in spite of the intimacy of this quiet room, at arm's length.

It was so new a feeling that he was both surprised and confused. He thought that in his fifty years he had met all kinds of women and yet always there was something different. Kathi not only looked like the Princess from some fairy-tale, she lived in one; its atmosphere surrounded her and repelled the intrusion of earthly thoughts and feelings. Kathi lived in an act, so completely absorbed in it that she was not touched by real life. The idea pierced the soft sentimental underside of his heart. How foolish of him not to have seen it before. But off-stage she was so unobtrusive, so lacking in the vitality of the others that she melted all too easily into the background and was lost, like a violet in grass. She needed to be taken apart and kept alone, placed on a pedestal for one man to love and all men to admire.

Without speaking again he rose from her bed and went to the window and looked down into the street at his car. Kathi would look superb in that car . . . in the soft cloudy grey of a chinchilla coat, of course.

Or was this all a trick of age? Was he being a fool?

He turned sharply and went to the bed again.

No, the same feelings assailed him, piercing through his polished surface, his bombast, and his vanity.

“Kathi, my dear, you must stay in bed until the doctor says you can get up. Those are my orders.”

“But no! I must come back for my dance.”

“No. I have arranged it. I will find a new number for you, for you alone. You will stay here. I will arrange that you are looked after very well. You must have flowers. I will have them sent to you immediately.”

It was odd that as he left for the theatre Tania was leaving too, and she stopped him at his car to tell him with her ingenuous smile that she had arranged with the landlady to give Kathi a good dinner and to look after her while she, Tania, was at the theatre.

“You are a good girl, Tania. Jump in. I will drive you to the theatre.”

Tania snuggled into the car as delighted as a child and as pleased as a woman having a foretaste of what would be hers eventually.

Herr Direktor took no further notice of her. He was gloomy. He was a sophisticated man of the world, one who had been most careful to keep women as a colourful and varied background to his life, but only as a background. Now at his age, fifty, he was thrown back to boyhood by an emotion that was as foolish as it was disturbing.

# Chapter Twenty-three

Tania was enjoying her intrigue. When she gathered Peter to take him to Kathi she found him nervous, a new lover full of apprehensions. The first heat of love had wilted his personality and, like a starched collar on a hot day, there was no stiffness in him to face the ordeal of meeting one so far beyond him.

Tania took care of that. She had a flair for love. Doubt was the destroyer; defeat that and the hesitant lover became the proud cockerel strutting his spurs, ready to take on the world.

She ran from Herr Direktor's car to her rendezvous where Peter had been pacing up and down in an agony of suspense.

"I have very, very good news for you. First you write the address, yes?" She shrugged and her eyes laughed at him. "Ha, you are so much in lov' you will forget the street even though it has your name; you forget everything when you are in lov'." Her eyes searched his. "I have very, very good news for you. Kathi, she like you very, very much. She say she see you with Yogi outside the theatre. Kathi, she like very much that you are artist."

"But . . ." Peter's words stumbled. "She's a star. How could she be interested in me?"

Tania laughed, a laugh that seemed innocent of her calculating mind. "She very clever but not star. Maybe Anna, yes, because she does many, many things, but she is old."

"Old?"

"Yes, she twenty-two. Kathi iss young."

"How young?"

"Maybe seventeen. Most girls they lov' many, many times. Never, never before have I seen Kathi in lov'. All the time she is thinking of you . . ." Her hand flew to stop her lips. "Ha . . . but I have told you!" There was distress in her voice. "You will not tell her I told you, no?"

Peter stared down at Tania. The implication of her words began to dawn upon him and his wilted nerve began to recover its fibre. Tania was telling him that Kathi loved him.

"But", he said, "she only saw me once."

Tania laughed. "You see her once and what happened? Like Rastella say, pouff! and you are in lov'. Kathi the same. Very, very romantic." Tania saw that her work was good. She had set the scene, prompted the players, and the act would be a success.

When Peter entered Kathi's room he saw himself no longer as the frustrated artist. He had work that was interesting and he had fallen in love and was loved. No man could ask more. He was going to plunge into this revue, tear the meaning out of it and put it on canvas. He was going to paint Kathi . . . a portrait that would astonish the world. . . . Du bist wie eine Blume . . . yes, Heine's poem expressed it.

Those were the first words he spoke to Kathi. They were startled from him as he saw her head framed on the pillow, expectant, shy, but lovelier than he had dreamed.

He took her hand. . . . "Du bist wie eine Blume!"

Then he laughed involuntarily because he was master of the situation, a possibility that a half-hour before was inconceivable, and he saw in Kathi's eyes all that Tania had told him.

Kathi felt the pressure of his hand and smiled. . . .

"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?"

"I studied it at school, but I don't really know it."

Then he realized that she did not understand a word he was saying. He stopped speaking, realizing that he was sitting there wanting to flood out all the thoughts he had to exchange with her, his ideas and all about himself, and his ambitions together with a myriad questions about her and the show. But they were both dumb, and unable to speak the other's language save in elementary phrases.

Perhaps that fact saved them, protected the tender plant of love, forced by Tania—from a quick weedy growth, and let its roots strike deep. But Peter's first reaction was to see the humour of the situation. He laughed, then kissed her hand. It seemed much easier to do that in a foreign language.

"Ich liebe dich," he said. "Sprechen Sie das en English?"

She laughed and corrected his German. "Sagen Sie das auf Englisch . . . Konnen Sie nicht Deutsch sprechen?"

"Nein," he said. "Ich liebe dich, I love you."

“I lov’ you.” She said it slowly, solemnly. Then they both smiled and that smile dissolved all the doubts, and all the confusions of a lover’s first meeting.

# Chapter Twenty-four

The London run was a great success, only brought to an end by the rigidity of previous commitments. Every night the house was packed and every day Herr Direktor held auditions to find new talent for his company. He had reached as high a peak as he could with the present revue and he had shown it in every important theatre on the Continent. Now he must rebuild it anew and return to the Continent, his revue bigger and better, modern to the minute, once again to match his power against the audience of Europe. He looked forward to the test and plunged into the creation of his new show with zest. He made Pappy Newman and Lubichov sweat with new scenes, new music; he overwhelmed his great family with work, and it had no alternative but to grow closer knit as a unit.

Herr Direktor was riding the peak of his career with zest. He was also working towards a culmination of his emotional life. Whether it took six months or a year did not matter because this was different from anything that had ever happened to him before. He was less with Anna, more with Kathi, but so little each way that it was hardly noticed by anyone except Anna and Tania. Tania could wait and Anna knew that she had nothing to fear from Kathi. Kathi never made anyone jealous and Tania had seen to it that Maria had carried to Anna stories of the love affair between Kathi and the new artist. Everyone in the company knew of the new love affair except, strangely enough, Herr Direktor.

Yet, oddly enough, the attraction to Kathi that he and Peter Kyrle shared drew them together. He took a great liking to Peter. “Ha, my artist. Sit down. I have an idea. We shall have a new souvenir programme. You will draw for me all the company, some in caricature, some in character. Some you will paint in oil. Anna, Kathi, Dorothy, Rita. We shall have the best programme ever printed, with beautiful girls, yes, maybe some nudes. Tania, Marianne, Anna-Liza. It will be gay, it will be beautiful, it will be magnificent. It will be my revue.” He turned to Peter with a smile. “You can do it, yes?”

Kathi was back at work without waiting to complete convalescence. That was an accepted thing in the Continental Revue. All day Peter and Kathi were somewhere near one another, but always there was something to separate them before they had hardly spoken. Gradually they were overcoming their language difficulty, Peter’s German, from a school

background, was progressing faster than Kathi's English, but between the two they could exchange their thoughts and feelings, and when it grew too hard the excuse for silence was welcome.

The company had taken their love affair to its heart. It was, as everyone admitted, very, very beautiful. It gave every girl the conviction that such love could exist, and, that being so, it could happen to any girl. It was a living proof within their midst.

Tania enjoyed the two lovers more than anyone else in the company. Tania, who saw so much, was learning quickly. She attracted men like flies around a honey pot, but kept them at arm's length. Tania considered this a small sacrifice for a reputation for discretion in the eyes of Pappy Newman and in the ears of Herr Direktor.

She wandered in and out of the lives of Peter and Kathi, gay and carefree, apparently unselfish but entirely self-seeking. The room in Peter Street took on an aura of happiness into which the liveliness of Tania would dance singing gypsy songs in her low husky voice to split the quiet serenity of love into a party. She was perfectly aware of what she was doing and intruded with a mischievous abandon.

Tania came to Peter Street one afternoon with Mario. She saw Kathi, lovely as a flower, silken fair hair and china-blue eyes, milk-white skin so faintly tinged with pink. But Tania did not envy her. Kathi was the one girl in the company who did not want what she wanted. Kathi's vitality was consumed on the stage leaving nothing for off-stage intrigue. This love affair with Peter would remove her still further from competition.

"Come, Mario," said Tania. "Kathi is making the Englishman his tea. We go, yes?"

But Mario never left when there was any prospect of food or drink, even tea, so they stayed. They talked over tea and the conversation was all about the theatre. It was Tania who changed the subject.

"You like the room, here, Peter?"

Peter had moved from his old rooms to be near them, and had the attic room in the same house. He nodded.

"To-night," said Tania, "I will go there and you will come here, nicht war?"

Only the clatter of a teaspoon echoed this sudden bombshell. Kathi flushed and Peter stared at Tania. Mario stifled a laugh. The silence was full

of embarrassment save for Tania who sipped her tea loudly. Then she looked from Kathi to Peter with wide innocent eyes.

"You are in lov', nicht war? It's not right for me to be here and you up there so far away."

Mario rose and bowed to Peter and Kathi with extravagant courtesy. "I, Mario, I will remove the body."

He held the door while Tania, stifling her laughter at Peter, walked through.

Mario caught up with Tania at the street door. She linked her arm in his and laughed. "They are very, very funnee, yes?"

Mario squeezed her arm. "I think one must watch you very, very carefully. That pretty little head of yours bursts with impatience."

"But they lov'. It is not wrong when one lov's."

"You are gypsy, you would not understand."

As they walked, eyes turned to look at the exotic pair. Mario continued. "There is love and love. When you love like that it is enough to love."

"But you, you do not lov' like that?"

"Because I am not so young. They are young. They are of the sky, not of the earth, and if they love a long, long time, it does not need to rush. For them it is better they should marry."

"Then Herr Direktor fire them."

"So, it is better if they love very nicely, not like you. . . ."

Tania was quick to take up the point. "But I do not lov'. . . ."

Mario pressed her arm. "Only because you have some idea in your little head, not because you do not know how."

Tania laughed aloud and the passers-by stared harder.

"With you it is different, my little Tania. You are . . . is it sixteen? . . . you are a woman of the world . . . you have things you want and you have something that men want. You will hold one in one hand and the other in the other hand and you will calculate how you can cheat your man. . . ."

He held up his free hand to stay her protest.

"With Kathi it is different. She is seventeen, but so much younger. She believes in love as in a fairy-tale and maybe it will be always like that for

her. For myself, I like to think the company has one girl like that . . . and we must keep it so. For then we know the world is not so bad a place after all. Nicht war, my little Tania?"

Tania shrugged.

"It is also good that Peter is like that," continued Mario. "I think he is. Even if I cannot always tell."

Tania laughed quickly. "I will find out for you."

"Do not interfere," said Mario calmly. "You can tread on the flower of love, my little one, but you cannot create one."

# Chapter Twenty-five

The members of the Continental Revue piled off the train one cold, murky, drizzly Sunday afternoon and deposited their many bags and cases on the station platform at Leeds. The company was on the move again. The London run, much to the regret of Herr Direktor, had come to an abrupt end in the midst of wonderful business, but his bookings were made and there was no alternative.

From the station, Leeds was grey and drab under heavy skies, and the deadness of a provincial Sunday was added to the dreariness.

"Of all the dirty places," said Gretchen. "Now where do we go from here?"

"To the digs, I suppose," replied Dorothy. "Have you no address to go to?"

"Sure," said Kaspar. "We reserved a place, but there seems to be only one taxi and there are so many of us."

"We'll go by tram then. Nancy, you find out how we get there," Dorothy decided.

On the platform the members sat around, chattering in every language. They looked very prosperous. Nearly all the girls had bought fur coats in London. Some fur dealer had made what he thought to be an unbelievable scoop and had arranged to sell fur coats to any who wanted them at so much a week. The sales resistance was nil since anyone in the company would take anything that could be bought so easily.

"This way, everyone," called Nancy, coming back. She led the way to a tram across the street. She crammed the tram to the doors and left the remainder with Dorothy and the other English girls, to wait for other trams. Riding quite a distance, Nancy then walked her charges up a lane and came to a series of cross streets. Here were the professional lodgings of Leeds. From here one could make a short cut through a back lane past the fish-and-chip shop to the stage door of the Empire Theatre. Up the streets they went, all the length of one street, pouring into the houses on both sides. The street emptied rapidly; then, as by magic, heads began appearing out of the windows on both sides of the street. Everyone began calling across at one

another, laughing and shouting in every language, German, Arabic, Hungarian, French, Italian, anything except English.

There was much shouting across the street, discussing comparative rents and who was rooming with whom.

Pappy Newman came out of one of the houses with Sophie and everyone shouted at him asking where he was going. When he said the baggage would soon be unloaded, heads disappeared by magic and soon there was a stream of artistes passing through the back alleys of Leeds. Down the lane they ran, skipping and singing over the dirty wet pavement, past the shoe repair shop, past the fish-and-chip shop.

Herr Direktor sat with Anna in his big cream car. Seeing his family pouring out of the alley to the theatre he was as pleased as if he had not seen them for months. Anna, seeing the crowd, jumped out of the car in her leopard coat and ran to meet the others.

Peter, Kathi, and Tania came to the theatre together. Peter was unsettled and depressed. The memory of that room in Peter Street was in him. It had been gracious, calm, and secluded; the hours there were so packed with happiness that to leave it was like leaving part of himself behind. Kathi had not seemed to mind leaving and Tania was delighted to be on the move. Now they were in drab theatrical lodgings in Leeds.

All Sunday afternoon the unpacking went on. Hundreds of costumes were carried upstairs to the dressing-rooms. There was not half enough space for them. Lines were strung up through the halls, and the costumes strung up on the lines. Pappy Newman saw them and shouted that they must all come down, the fire department would never allow that sort of thing. Down came the costumes and the lines. There was a stream of people loaded with the costumes to the basement and up went the lines again hung with costumes ready for the quick changes. Dressing-rooms were being created out of every inch of space; places forbidden to the artistes were commandeered. The doorman found his office taken over, and the rooms for the local orchestra were filled with Arabs.

Maria, who was now becoming clumsy as her time came upon her, hurried back and forth across the stage with Anna, arms full of costumes. Herr Direktor looked at her with distaste. He did not like Maria, and he knew she was going to be a trouble and expense to him.

When the unpacking was finished, all the company trooped to a big restaurant. Rita sitting between her Mama and Papa opened the bundle by her side and placed a long loaf of French bread on the table. She called to a

waitress for a knife and carved the loaf up on the table without apology. The Rastella family could not enjoy a meal without bread and whenever they went to a restaurant they took a loaf with them because there was never enough bread. It made no difference to the quantity of other food they ate.

Early one morning that week there was great excitement along the street of lodging houses. Word spread that Maria was not well. A doctor was called. He said she must go to the hospital at once; but Maria was German and could not speak a word of English; she refused to go, the doctor was not to be trusted. Finally, Anna was found. Maria was young and homesick. She lay in Anna's arms weeping and regretting the day she had ever left Germany; but at last she and Anna drove together to the hospital.

Nancy and Dorothy were dressing in their room when the landlady knocked.

"Here comes the old pest," said Nancy. "Come in."

The landlady was excited. "Isn't it dreadful," she said. "To think my poor friend, Mrs. Locke, over there at number twenty-seven, should have so much bother."

"What bother?" said Nancy.

"Why that awful girl from your company, they have taken her to the hospital. She's going to have a baby."

The woman was greedy for gossip.

"Well," said Nancy, "she is the one that will have all the bother, not your friend, Mrs. Locke."

"Yes, but to think she always ran such a respectable place and now she gets people like this in her house. I am surprised that two such nice girls like you would stay in such a company. They say the girl has no husband."

"No husband?" Nancy's blue eyes mocked the woman's insinuation. "Why of course she has a husband, a lovely husband."

The woman's eyes flickered suspiciously from one girl to the other. "If she has, where is he, allowing his wife to travel around in such a condition?"

"He is in Berlin, of course," said Nancy.

"What does he do?"

"He has a big position on the radio station," lied Nancy.

"And he allows his wife to work as a maid?"

"She is really Anna's sister and they want to be together at a time like this."

"Well, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed the woman. "Doesn't that just show you the way people start tales."

"Yes, it does," said Nancy. "And the way people carry them."

It was now discovered that Maria had been so certain her baby would be born in Germany that she had not bothered to buy anything at all. All the female members of the revue were in a state of excitement. Without stopping to plan they rushed to the shops and bought over and over again the same articles of clothing. They spent recklessly and bought all the beautiful things and few of the practical things. Little Gretchen, who had always longed for a baby of her own, was more excited than anyone.

"It will be a girl," she said. "I know it will be a girl. I am buying all the things for a girl. I bet Pappy Newman it will be a girl. I bet him a pound. He is buying all the colours for a boy."

Pappy Newman and Gretchen, Pappy big and fat, Gretchen tiny and petite, packed the gifts in suitcases and took them in a taxi to the hospital. Everyone was excited about the new baby. The only one who took no interest was Maria.

"It will die," she kept saying. "It will die."

"No, no," said Anna. "It will not die, Maria. You must think what you want to call it."

When the baby arrived, Gretchen won her bet; it was a girl.

"Now", said Gretchen, "she must call it Marie-Louise. I am going to the hospital to make sure that Maria calls it that. It is such a pretty name, and that Maria has the brains of a rabbit, she might give it a terrible German name. It must be Marie-Louise."

So little Gretchen, three feet high, took a taxi and rode to the hospital to see that the baby had a pretty name.

Nothing went right with Maria's baby. It was so tiny and delicate. Even the doctor was not very hopeful. After three days Gretchen was unhappy. She had seen the baby. She had seen that it had been christened with the name she wanted, but Maria did not seem to care. At the evening performance that night the circus scene was ready to go on; Gretchen was standing in the wings when the news was telephoned from the hospital that the baby had died.

Gretchen dashed on the stage to take the zebras through their comical circus pranks. With her high gold heels and long page-boy bob, she smiled and cracked her whip, but tears streamed down the grease paint on her cheeks.

"Don't cry, Gretchen," whispered Yasmini, sitting on the stage in a circus box with her foolish-looking clothes.

Gretchen backed to her, whipping her zebras. "It wouldn't have died if it had been my baby," she said in a stage whisper. "It was such a sweet baby too. It's all the fault of that silly Maria."

Herr Direktor stood at the stage door waiting for a taxi to take him to the hospital. Anna joined him and they went to see Maria. He paid all the bills and made all arrangements. The show would be leaving the town before Maria came out of the hospital. One cold wet day in an English cemetery the baby was laid to rest, a fatherless girl who would have been showered with love by every member of the company had she lived. Gretchen stood by the tiny grave sobbing as though her heart would break.

# Chapter Twenty-six

Rehearsals were now starting at eight every morning and only finishing at five in the afternoon. The show was being polished for its Continental opening. New scenes needed endless work; old scenes had so many changes and new acts to be worked into them that they required as much work as the new scenes. Everyone lived in the theatre except for a few hours in which to sleep, and Herr Direktor's family seemed to thrive on it.

Herr Direktor was building a Bavarian picture against which to feature the Tyrolean boys. He called in a set of carpenters and they built him a ski slide in the basement, one that would dismantle and pack easily. But he insisted that it should be high and long, since the stage at the Scala in Berlin was very wide. This was then hoisted to the stage of the Leeds theatre and rehearsals began. The first day it was tried on the stage, the children of the show trooped back from school in the middle of the rehearsal and all of them squealed with delight and rushed on the stage. Herr Direktor, who at rehearsals was intolerant of the slightest disorder among the artistes, was soft where children were concerned. In the middle of this rehearsal they raced to climb the slide and slid gaily down on the stage, yelling and screaming, little Jackie, Myrtle, and Snowball, followed by the Arab children and Ching Ching; down they swept into the middle of the stage, disrupting everything. Herr Direktor only smiled and, with the children tumbling about his feet, he continued to work through the rehearsal.

Hans, with his German accordion, took the centre of the stage; the stage was crowded with men and girls in colourful Tyrolean costume. They danced and sang the old peasant songs while Hans played, assisted by the orchestra. But Herr Direktor could not get things to suit him.

"Laugh, laugh!" he shouted. "It must be gay. It is a wedding, everyone has been drinking, everyone is merry. Can you not understand?"

They all laughed till their faces ached and they jumped all over the stage.

"You do not laugh enough," he yelled. "You are not gay." He paused and beat his head with his hands for an idea. Suddenly he stopped and pointed at the stage. "Tania, you take the centre of the stage. She laughs the best."

Tania, who had laughed her way to this moment, was suddenly nervous, but her foot was on the first rung of a dazzling ladder. She ran to the centre

of the stage.

"Take the microphone," he called. The stage hand gave her the little hand microphone. "Now sing and laugh."

Tania was staggered. "But . . . but I cannot sing. I have no voice."

"That does not matter," he called. "Anna will coach you."

Anna stared at him in amazement. The centre of the stage had always been her place. Tania was nervous. She was overwhelmed by this sudden development. It was too soon and he would find fault with her and all her plans would be spoiled.

"Begin, begin," he shouted, as he rushed to the back of the house to get a good view.

"You are not smiling enough." Tears welled into Tania's eyes, she wanted to break down and cry, but she fought with herself. She forced her smile; so did Anna, who was by now pushed to the side of the stage by the Tyrolean boys, whose dances filled the stage. They jumped in the air, slapped their knees, swung around madly and ended with their famous cock-fight dance.

After two hours' repetition on this one scene, Herr Direktor was at last satisfied. Tania had held her ground and won.

"Now that stands exactly that way," he said. Anna went off to her dressing-room to weep in private. She did not seem to be able to please Herr Direktor as she had done in the past. Like a pet animal scolded she crept into her own corner and stayed there brooding her resentment of Tania.

After the rehearsal of the Bavarian Inn scene Herr Direktor called Kathi to him. He wanted to take her out to lunch to discuss a new ballet scene he had in mind for her. She excused herself to change and ran to tell Peter she could not lunch with him. Tania was with Peter and she slipped her arm through Peter's.

"I will look after him until you come back."

Peter turned away with Tania towards the stage door. "So you've done it."

Tania was in need of reassurance. She was very young and the strain of the morning had taken toll of her nervous energy. She clung a little tighter to his arm.

"Is that what you are aiming at?" asked Peter.

“I am very, very scared.”

“Scared?” Peter said. “I believe you only use me to practise English, to fit in with your schemes.”

Tania laughed.

“Ja, you do not like it? But I like you very much, very, very much. Not like Kathi like you, but very, very nice. I help you plenty.”

“Maybe you do.” Peter could not resist the feeling that came upon him so often that Tania would get full value for all favours given.

“Maybe you will soon draw my picture. I show you how I want it, beeg smile. Herr Direktor, he like my smile.”

# Chapter Twenty-seven

In Leeds the non-stop pace of the revue was as nothing to the never-ending rehearsals. Herr Direktor was proud of the foreign atmosphere of the Revue, but to retain that atmosphere for Germany he had to gather many English acts, preferably ones that could not speak German. This gave the correct foreign atmosphere off-stage, but since they had to sing or speak German on-stage it led to complications. All over the empty house, all day long there were little groups of performers, new acts or new chorines, with some other members of the company teaching them the lyrics in German.

In a group the new English girls for the chorus were indignant The British Government would not allow the girls under eighteen abroad without a matron, so Herr Direktor had engaged a matron. Miss Day, an ex-dancer. The girls had been looking forward to having a good time abroad. They had listened avidly to the tales of the older girls about the way everyone went to cafés and cabarets after the performance was over and stayed until dawn.

Herr Direktor had broken the news to them that they would be taken by Miss Day from the theatre to their pensions every night at twelve.

Most popular of the new acts was Bill Hardy and his performing mule. Billy Hardy was an old trouper, seventy-five years old and spry as a kitten. Property men were posted among the audience, and pretending to be local people, they would accept his invitation to ride his mule. The mule knew them very well. She would bare her teeth, lay back her ears, and charge. Sometimes they got away in time, sometimes they tumbled into the orchestra pit, sometimes they received Maud's unshod feet to help them off-stage. It was no sinecure for the property men, but they were accustomed to risks. Maud became the pet of the company. Off-stage she was mild, but once in the spotlight she was full of spirit. After she had kicked everyone out of sight, Bill would go up to her while she still snorting and rolling her eyes wildly; he would wave his hands pretending to hypnotize her, then she would quieten and begin to waltz in circles around the stage. At the end of her waltz she would bow low to acknowledge the applause of the audience. She always appeared fully aware of what she was doing and enjoyed every moment on the stage.

One day after rehearsing—Maud did not need any rehearsing, but the property men did—Herr Direktor came back-stage and saw Kathi, Peter,

Tania, and Hugo the strong man laughing together. Tania had been teasing Hugo and he had picked her up, squealing with apprehension, balanced in the air on the palm of his hand.

Herr Direktor stopped in his tracks. Tania's face flushed, frightened, suddenly broke into a wide smile, Herr Direktor clapped his hands once and pointed at them.

"Rehearsal to-morrow at eight. We will have a new adagio dance. Hugo in your leopard skin; Tania, you will be in white Grecian costume, transparent. Hugo will swing you around, you will finish your dance and then as you escape from him he will catch your dress. You will whirl off-stage, your dress unwinds as you whirl, and just as you are almost off-stage, you have nothing. To-morrow at eight, both of you."

Hugo lowered Tania slowly and Tania's eye caught Peter's eyes. "I didn't do that," she said.

He laughed aloud. "You asked for it and now you've got it."

No one knew what Tania suffered during the next few days. She was terrified of Hugo's great clumsy hands and clumsy strength. Hugo caught her light body and flung it about as he wished, grabbed her ankles and swung her around within an inch of the floor at a dizzy pace, then tossed her up and caught her. Through all this new routine Tania had to smile. Herr Direktor bawled at them, worked them to weariness, and reduced Tania to nervous exhaustion. In the end he moulded her to his wish, and she suffered it because now she had three acts.

# Chapter Twenty-eight

Late one afternoon, in the sunshine of a lovely spring day, the ship carrying the members of the Continental Revue worked its way through the big harbour. Hamburg, early in 1938, was a busy port filled with ships of every nationality. The warm sun was bathing them, its light and shadow etching their sea-worn hulls with clean lines and lively colour.

After a great deal of waiting, the ship docked and, with no passport or permit routine, the company went ashore. The passports had been gone through in bulk. Leading the procession Herr Direktor sauntered slowly through the warm sunshine followed by his family of over three hundred, all dragging heavy cases. The customs shed was reached and bags were placed on the long low tables while officials quickly passed along the line.

Peter found himself in a taxi with Kathi and Tania. Tania knew Hamburg well and had acted quickly.

"I know a nice place, very, very nice place for us. Good for you, too, Peter, for your work. But first we go with the others to the theatre."

Driving through the sunshine of the late afternoon Hamburg appeared a beautiful city. Spring was much further advanced than in England and the air was warm and balmy. Everything seemed prosperous and picturesque. There were flowers everywhere and the trees were in the full foliage of summer. Little canals criss-crossed the streets bringing with them smells of the sea. The streets were full of hundreds of workmen bicycling home from work, all dressed alike in navy blue coats and black-peaked German caps.

The German girls boasted that their government was wonderful because everybody had work.

Elsa Henn was driving in a taxi with some of the British girls for whom she was going to find rooms. She was delighted to be back in Germany. She had not made many friends in England and she could not live without friends. To keep herself surrounded with them she bought them presents. Money meant little to her. It came and went quickly.

Albert, her husband, had been brought up in Germany, but his father had been English. Albert was a fine fellow and Elsa was fond of him, but one man was not enough for her. They had a rope-throwing act, but their

speciality was a knife-throwing act. It had been a sensational act, Albert pinning Elsa to a board with knives that missed her by a hairsbreadth. Then one night he had missed the hairsbreadth and the knife had shaved Elsa's head. She had spent several months in hospital and the police took away their permit so that they were never allowed to do the knife-throwing act again.

Elsa was mentally unbalanced owing to the knife-throwing accident and at times she would quarrel violently. After the quarrels she would go out and buy extravagant presents for the girl with whom she had quarrelled.

The drive to the theatre was long and the string of taxis passed through the busy shopping section. The British girls peered out at the prosperous shops, at the great trees that lined the streets and the children regimented in their school uniforms, little girls with mousy pigtails, in black sweaters trimmed with red and green and buttoned with gilt buttons, boys in short double-breasted grey jackets with wide lapels. They gave an impression of doll-like stiffness and discipline.

Elsa took her friends to their modern apartment, a huge place built around a dark, evil-smelling courtyard. Everything was old and heavy, the doors ponderous and the stairs of stone. Ringing the bell on the second floor she was greeted by the German landlady. Elsa was immediately recognized, but for all that, her friends were given rooms of very ancient vintage with stifling German box-beds, on which one slept between two thick feather spreads. The windows of the rooms around the courtyard looked into one another and were situated to make everybody's business and toilet a public affair.

Celia stared at her bed. She had never seen a German bed before and wondered where the blankets were.

Mary went to the window. She examined the curtain. She was an old hand. Suddenly she laughed.

"My God!" she said. "If it isn't one of my old pals come out to greet me."

Celia turned to see what Mary was talking about.

"Bugs," said Mary. "The whole damn country's full of them, and they don't half love the English. There would never be a war with England if the German bed-bugs had a word in it."

"I'll sleep on the floor."

"You won't. After you've been here a month you won't notice 'em. I brought a dozen tins of Keating's Powder."

The girls went out in the street again. Crossing the street they found a café filled with members of the revue. The place was loud with laughter and chatter. Everybody was gay. It was spring on the Continent, soft warm air, sunshine, no rain. Outside the café the leaves of the trees danced in the breeze, little trams stole quietly up and down the boulevards; there were strange signs, strange names everywhere.

The barman behind the counter watched the artistes and smiled. He knew many of them from former seasons and gave them credit willingly. Keller's Revue always played in Hamburg and the artistes always ate in his café opposite the theatre. Those who knew him climbed up on the stools and gathered around the bar to talk. He asked about their trip. They told him about the London success.

Frank Sumner, the organist husband of Francine, the ballet mistress, came into the little café.

"When you are all ready", he called, "Herr Direktor wants everybody to come down and open their private luggage for the customs, and reporters are going to be there to take photos when the baggage is unloaded."

The café emptied quickly and Frank pushed everybody into the long waiting line of taxis and directed the procession back again to the docks. They arrived as the animals were being taken off the ship, and their arrival completed a state of bedlam through which Pappy Newman swore and bawled. The little Shetlands, wild-eyed with excitement, were led to big lorries. Off came the leopards, swung by derricks in their cages. Kahn followed with his elephants, their trunks swinging to pluck all the food that was offered them by members of the company who got in the way of everything. Then came the scenery, acres of it, and afterwards the baggage, hundreds of trunks of every size. The organ was hoisted from the depths of a hold; and reporters interviewed anyone they could pin down, and photo-flashes shot from unexpected angles.

Finally the three hundred members of the company were shepherded together and driven to the customs shed again to wait in the fading light, all with keys in hand.

Herr Direktor came in. He was in a splendid mood.

"First of all," he announced, "I want to tell you it will not be necessary for you to remain here. You will leave your keys here on the table and I will

attend to everything; but, first, sit where you are."

He walked all around the rows of artistes, giving each one ten marks. "I know you have no money," he added. "That will keep you going until to-morrow when Herr Newman will give you money. Now go and enjoy yourselves for the rest of the evening. I only ask that you be at the theatre for 9 a.m. to unload the baggage. Auf Wiedersehen."

There was a scramble for the tram-cars.

In the town they scattered. Some went to the street of cabarets, some to the theatre since it was always open for the artistes, some to visit the little wine cellars and coffee kiosks along the boulevard. Sitting under the trees in the soft spring moonlight they drank coffee and wine and talked of the future and the past. As the evening wore on they drifted back in groups to the café opposite the theatre, where they knew they would find the others.

Mario, large-eyed, tall, strikingly handsome, in evening dress, came into the café. He was back on his beloved Continent and he wanted company for the night.

Yasmini was very pretty to-night. She had just spent an hour in front of a mirror in her dressing-room. She knew from her former tours on the Continent that she must now look her best. To-night she was dressed in a long pastel-shaded Indian sari with her long black hair waving to her waist, a red rose over one ear and a row of silver bangles on her arm.

Mario's eyes swept over her appraisingly. They were a handsome couple.

"Do you want to dance, Mario?" she asked.

"Yes, Yasmini, I want to dance," he said softly. "Where shall we go?"

"Call a taxi, Mario, and I will tell you."

They stepped through the door into the balmy night. A taxi drew up to the kerb. Mario bowed Yasmini in with the air of a millionaire and then slammed the door.

# Chapter Twenty-nine

Both Tania and Kathi were excited at the return of familiar scenes. Peter was taken to an old block of houses near the theatre, up flights of stairs to an attic studio opening to a railed balcony that overlooked a jumble of roof-tops and chimneys.

It was Tania's plan that all three of them should live together. There was a side-room for the two girls. Peter wanted to stay, but the girls were impatient to get to the café to eat and mingle with the company.

Bill Hardy, of the performing-mule act, joined Peter as the two girls joined another group of girls.

"That's a girl for you," chuckled he to Peter. "I can spot 'em, I can spot 'em a mile away. In this game good-lookers are a bob a dozen; then you get a girl like that kid; she's nothing to write home about and she has no more talent than the next one. Then all of a sudden she pops out of the crowd and she's a star. Why? 'Cos she's got 'it' . . . the stuff that comes across the footlights."

"She's only a kid," said Peter.

Bill Hardy took his pipe from his mouth and pointed it at Peter. "In this game some women ain't ever kids. Not on the Continent, anyway."

"That's wrong," said Peter. "Take Kathi for instance. . . ."

It was an unfortunate instance and Bill pinned it down with his pointed pipe.

"Kathi, she's a real beauty. The old man picked a winner when he picked her. But what's she got beyond that and putting you in a bleeding trance? When she ain't with you she's sitting with Yogi, both of 'em never saying a word. But you're an artist and maybe you like to live with a picture, but that ain't my way of seein' it."

Bill wagged his pipe. "Now take Tania. There's a girl with spirit. I like a bit of spirit, something to bite against. Where would my act be if Maud was all sweetness and light? She's a grand girl; she'll kick and bite anyone. You've got spirit to work on."

Bill judged all women by the standard of his beloved Maud, his performing mule.

When the girls returned to pick up the men, Tania had hardly sat down at the table when Peter saw her stiffen, and turn suddenly pale. He followed her eyes and saw a man sitting alone beckon her with his hand. There was a possessive air in the movement. Peter turned back to Tania. She was suddenly very young and very frightened. Then she rose slowly, and walked across the café.

"Where's she going?" asked Bill. All three watched her as she went to the man. He was swarthy, flashily dressed in cheap clothes, lean and hungry.

"So that's it," muttered Bill.

"What is?" asked Peter.

"Never mind, watch."

They saw the man smile, an unpleasant smile. They saw the tense quick exchange of words.

"A pimp," said Bill.

"A what?" asked Peter, startled.

"A pimp. Poor kid."

They saw Tania match anger with anger and then saw her turn and come back to her table, white, frightened, and angry.

Bill laid a hand on hers. "What's wrong, kid? What's he want? Who is he?"

"Nothing to do with me."

"O.K. Take it easy. Anything I can do?"

"No."

Leaving Bill behind, Peter took Kathi and Tania back to the studio, Tania was sullen and silent until they were in the studio, then flung herself on the divan and buried her head in the cover, trying to stifle the sobs that racked her.

Kathi slipped down by her side and tried to comfort her, but Peter could see that Kathi had missed all the meaning of the episode. It was not within the range of her experience. It was as she sat with Tania that Peter saw her, an ornamental swan trying to comprehend the wounded hawk.

He stared down at Tania, lying bruised in spirit on his bed. Tania had been mature ever since she could walk. All these people on the stage were abnormal in some way or other, abnormal in skill or abnormal in mind. Long Tom the giant and the Wagner midgets, the Nichols family, Anna, were abnormal in their muscular skills, so on throughout the company, all were abnormal in some way.

Peter was the young painter, maturing rapidly, seeing as he had been trained to see, all the things and people of the world in sharper outline and meaning than the untrained mind. He was standing in that Hamburg studio suddenly seeing where all these people fitted in. Rastella eternally singing, the Nichols family always tumbling, Hardy playing with his mule, the Russians, the myriad legs of the choruses, Yogi contorting his body, and Anna whirling round in her wheel balanced in the air by Hugo the strong man. He could see it all on canvas, painted by him with all its meaning, its essential pattern in relationship to life.

He stared down at the two girls, Tania's happiness broken, Kathi fluttering around her uncomprehending. For the first time since that night in the alley, he was seeing Kathi whole. Nothing of his love had changed, but he was seeing it for the first time in perspective.

"Leave her to me, Kathi."

He picked Tania up in his arms and carried her to the little room off the studio. He sat her down on the bed, and shook her. It worked. She sat up sullen and angry and no longer broken.

"Now," said Peter. "Tell me what it is. I will help you."

Tania's angry eyes flashed at him. "You? I don't need you. I kill him."

"Nonsense," said Peter sharply. Then softly: "Tell me anyway."

Her eyes flashed at him again, this time suspicious. Her sullenness was gone and she was no more than her age, a hurt child. She lay back on her bed and stared at the ceiling as she told her story.

"My father was violinist at big café in Budapest. When my mother die he send me to convent and then when he die they put me in orphanage. Not nice that. Then when I am fourteen there comes my uncle; that man to-night he was my uncle. He wants me, he say, for his family to make it nice for me; he say he want me to train for violinist like my father.

"Then one day he come fetch me. He take me some place where his friends drink, seven of them. They rape me, all of them.

"When I cry he beat me and keep me locked in the room. Then in one, two days he bring man and try to sell me. I get away. Now I only want to kill him."

"How does he know where you are?"

"When I ran away I don't know how to find work. I ask policeman in street and he laugh and ask me what I want to work. I say in house, any house, and he give me address where people have office to send out maids. Right away I go to house. I kill that woman too some day; she think I am slave. Then one day comes Keller's Revue. Big advertisements and plenty talk in the house. I go see. Then I go see Herr Direktor. He ask me if I come to answer his advertisement for posers in nude. I see no advertisement, but I say yes.

"Then he say take my clothes off. I am frightened, but it is my chance.

"Then he say I give you contract one year. Are you a good girl? Yes, I say, I was in convent until this year. That is good, he says. I want only good girls with my revue and if you have any trouble with any man you come see me."

"How long ago was that?" asked Peter quietly.

"One year, just after I am fifteen."

"How did this uncle of yours find you to-night?"

"Keller's Revue very well known."

"And what does he want now?"

"He wants me to give him my money and then he follow show and find me men, rich men; he say we make plenty money. He mean he take all the money and when I am no good he throw me in river and get new woman."

Peter took up her listless hand. It was a good hand, sharp-lined and firm, with none of the softness and delicacy of Kathi's hands.

So this, thought Peter, was the carefree minx who behaved as though she had never had a thought or a care in the world. She had been in the jungle undergrowth of life and had come our with claws sharpened.

Peter dropped her hand and stood up.

"Stick with Kathi and me. We will look after you."

Tania said nothing more. She turned to the wall. She had looked after herself well enough for the past two years and one did not use lambs to keep

wolves away.

# Chapter Thirty

In Hamburg Peter began his painting for the souvenir programme. With his new understanding of Kathi he painted her in watercolours, a bold free portrait with delicate washes laid with a full brush. Herr Direktor smiled with pleasure when he saw it, it had caught all the quality and child-likeness of Kathi.

Peter also painted a nude of Tania. He painted it in oils, in rich warm tones. He admired the tough fibre of her spirit. He strove to catch the sexual magnetism of her body, and the satin smoothness of her dark skin and the ripening curves of her young body vibrated with it.

Herr Direktor was pleased with that too.

"Ja, ja!" he nodded. "Dass ist gut."

Peter did all his other sketching in a dressing-room which had been kept for him in the theatre. Herr Direktor pushed him to finish the work for the new programme. It must be ready for the opening in Berlin. There was no time to waste.

The opening in Hamburg was a great success, with all the excitement, accidents, and thrills of any opening of the Keller Revue. Every afternoon and night during the run the theatre was packed.

The company practically lived in the theatre except for their nightly excursions to cabarets and a few hours to sleep in rooms. There were two four-hour shows everyday, Sunday included, and, with rehearsals every morning, there was no time for private lives.

Everyone lived in the "hall". This was the company green-room and was a feature of Continental theatres. From the back of the stage, stairs led up to a long hall, the full width of the theatre. The hall itself was about fifteen feet wide and the dressing-rooms opened on to it. The doors were never closed, no matter what state of dress or undress was apparent inside. At the far end of the hall, doors opened on to the roof where the washing of the company hung, perpetually changing, on lines. Life was frank and communal.

The first day after the opening night the company were in the theatre an hour before time. Little Ching Ching was hard at work washing and rinsing the family clothing, holding it up to the light to see that there were no spots.

"Schwer?" asked Hannachen, a German chorus girl, laughing at Ching Ching as he rubbed more soap on.

Ching Ching smiled widely. "Yes, hard with this German soap. It does not make it so clean."

"You speak German well, Ching Ching," said Hannachen.

"Yes?" Ching Ching beamed. "Oh well, it took me one year to learn. That is a long time to learn a language."

"How many do you speak?"

Ching Ching smiled and shrugged his shoulders. He did not know. He was nine and he had been in so many countries that he did not know how many languages he spoke.

Hula and Olivia sat in their dressing-room practising a new number on their guitars.

In her room Frau Schiller was making new costumes for the dummies who rode her dogs. The small sewing-machine which Frau Schiller carried with her all over the world was humming easily. When she had finished her costumes for the Berlin opening there were all the new rugs to make for the big dogs. Her contract had just been renewed for a year and so, at Herr Direktor's request, she was making rugs with gold letters on them, KELLER'S REVUE. Aaron the dog trainer would be taking the dogs for long walks every day through the towns they played and Herr Direktor could not miss such an opportunity for advertisement.

The new juggler stood on a chair in a corner of the hall in white satin shorts and shirt trimmed with gold. With a dozen golden hoops he was making a series of geometrical patterns in motion.

Sally, an English chorus girl, watched him fascinated. The juggler was a new arrival and Sally was set for a conquest. The trouble was that Sally spoke only English while he spoke only German. For the moment her first task was to cut him out from the crowd. Later she would think about words. Sally had an innocent smile, a soft voice, and thick chestnut curls. Miss Day, the chaperon, did not like her. Sally had said she was nineteen years old, but Miss Day did not believe her and did not think she should be wandering around the Continent just a few months beyond her, Miss Day's, control.

Sally intended to keep out of Miss Day's way. This was her first tour abroad and she was going to have a good time. She intended to collect engagement rings. Everybody in the company collected something so she

had decided to collect engagement rings, which were not hard to get and were liquid assets. She smiled again at the juggler, but for the moment he was too absorbed in his hoops.

The Rastella family sat in their dressing-room, at ease at last after all their months in England. Their door, like every other door, was wide open. Madame, in a heavy cambric corset cover and long cotton bloomers, sat working on her Russian cross-stitch. Rastella, in long woollen underwear, sat with his feet on the make-up table studying an opera score. Rita, in brassiere and brief panties, sat, unconsciously lovely and young, on a high chair dreaming about Claud.

Claud was an English gentleman, tall, blond, extremely handsome with a Guard's moustache that fascinated Rita. Rita had thrown Claud a rose on the opening night in London when she had gone out in front to do her flower-girl song. She had remembered his face all the next day. She saw him the next night sitting in the same seat. She threw him another rose.

The next night she picked out her prettiest red rose and set it in a corner of her basket . . . already she was dreaming dreams, and who knew what might happen when she went out in the limelight. He was there in the same seat with the same smile. After the show a gentleman asked to see Rita at the stage door. The call boy ran up to the dressing-room and Rita came down. Claud was there and he asked if he might have the pleasure of driving her home, he had his car outside. Rita did not understand a word and called Long Tom to interpret for her. When she heard the request, she smiled and nodded. Long Tom told him where she lived and Rita ran to change. Romance had come to her just as she dreamed it would. She was sure it was fate. To-morrow she would begin seriously to learn English. She would marry and become an English girl . . . Rita with her mop of ebony curls and dark eyes . . . Rita, who never left her parents for a day, who had always been so happy with Mama and Papa.

Claud went slightly pale when he saw the Rastella family descend the staircase, big fat Mama and flamboyant handsome Papa. He had meant his invitation to be intimate. He had no time for regret. Big Mama overwhelmed him with an excited flow of Italian and handsome Papa shook hands enthusiastically. Claud did not know quite how to handle the situation, but he looked at Rita's glowing face and decided it was worth taking the whole family if necessary.

The Rastella family gasped when they saw the car; it was even more splendid that Herr Direktor's car, so evidently Claud had money.

Claud did not miss a performance in London, and every week-end during the English tour he motored to see Rita. He gave her a watch. He gave her a wireless set. He took her to his house on the Thames at Maidenhead—with Mama and Papa, of course, for, try as he would, he could never separate her from her family. He showed Rita his stables and his hunters and Rita thought he asked her to marry him. She was never quite sure because her English was weak.

When they left for the Continent, Claud said nothing about marriage. He had not given her a ring, nor had he mentioned anything about coming to see her on the Continent. So they said good-bye and Rita wept in private; her father said she had the "love sickness" which he considered perfectly proper since at her age he had been the same way.

In the next room to the Rastellas the Gold Girl was making-up. She had just arrived from South America and was to appear in the Organ scene, replacing Tania who had been rehearsed for other things. Opening a package of gold dust and a huge bottle of glycerine she poured the dust into a bowl, the glycerine on top of it, and began to stir. Tiny particles of gold covered everything in the room and floated in front of the lights. She was nude. Unconscious of the open door she began to paint her body with her hands. Starting with her legs she worked up until her entire body and face were coated with gold; having covered every inch of flesh, she gave her golden sandals a fresh coat; she recoated the cap which covered her auburn curls, and, standing up straight, rubbed the surplus gold on her hands, over her breasts and down over her stomach. Finished, she began to rehearse her slow movements before her mirror, a glittering picture of beauty. A little gold cross hung around her neck. She was very religious and very strict.

Then she emerged from her dressing-room to dance in front of the long mirror in the hall. She practised a long time, watching every movement with critical eyes, because she was a serious artiste. She was a Hungarian and had come to the revue from the Argentine. She longed to go back. There, she had received innumerable propositions and, after her suitors had discovered her virtue was unassailable, very many proposals of marriage.

She was undecided as yet about this show. Herr Direktor had offered her a long contract, but he had proposed to her that she should appear quite nude in the Berlin show. She had been shocked. She had strong principles and a leaf-like fragment of a ceinture was a symbol to her of all clothing. Without it she would be guilty of immodesty. In view of Herr Direktor's request, she had decided to wait before committing herself to any contract.

In the chorus girls' dressing-room everyone was busy rushing around in various stages of undress. Little Connie, from the north of England, was trying to comb her brown hair into a becoming style in front of the mirror.

"What are you reading there, Mary?" she called.

Mary stood in the middle of the room drying the wet white on her legs. She had just received a bundle of papers from home.

"Listen to this, girls," she called out. Everyone turned. She held up the paper she was reading. "Edward Lyndoe, among the Stars . . . that's them up in heaven, not us." Mary made all her plans under the influence of Lyndoe's astrological predictions. "There will be no political troubles. Lyndoe says so and he never makes a mistake. He says there is no indication of England entering a war in 1938, so we can go ahead and enjoy this year abroad. That's a relief." Mary folded the paper with conviction and pushed it behind her make-up mirror for further perusal.

"I hope he is right," said little Connie, not quite sure.

"Of course he is right," answered Mary. "He is always right. I arrange my plans according to Lyndoe. If he makes a mistake this time I will never believe a word he says as long as I live."

Pappy Newman's bellow came up from the stage.

"All on, all on!"

The girls grabbed their props and change of slippers and raced from the room. The matinée overture began. The curtain rang up. Charlie, the snake charmer, walked up and down at the foot of the staircase to the hall with his pet mongoose on a leash. Anna was petting it.

"You little darling," she said. "He knows me, Charlie, look!"

It snuggled up to her like a pet dog. Anna was gay. She was rehearsing every day with a new adagio dancer, an Argentine with a slim waist, a powerful torso, and a tanned skin under which muscles rippled with every movement. He was dark-haired and handsome. Herr Direktor had chosen this handsome partner hoping that a mutual attraction between them might be useful to him later in the year.

A man from the Zoo came in the stage door. He carried a big basket and asked for Herr Direktor. Herr Direktor came out of his little office and smiled when he saw the man.

"Ha, the snakes," he said. "Let me see them. How many have you got?"

The man opened the basket. Two reptiles squirmed and began to crawl out. The company gathered around. The snakes had thick bodies and were about six feet long. Herr Direktor picked one up, holding the body as tightly as he could while the snake twisted and thrashed out of his reach. Getting a good grip, he pried the mouth open, squinted through his monocle into the reptile's throat.

"Anna, Anna," he called. "Come and see this one."

Anna came and also looked down into the throat. Herr Direktor talked to the man for a long time, bargaining until he got his own price. He called Pat to come and take the snakes away, took the man into his office to pay him. Two new members had joined the Continental Revue.

Now the leopard act was on. The German chorus girls were all changing together in one big room off-stage. As the act finished the leopards were led away. Pat, looking after the new snakes, forgot Rex; his leash had been slipped from the hook on the stage. Finding himself unhampered, Rex went over to look at the girls. He sat in the doorway of their dressing-room, six hundred pounds of wild beast, yawning. One of the girls dressing by the door felt the hot breath on her back and turned. Her scream sent a panic of girls across the room. Anna raced across the stage and saw Rex yawning at the mass of frightened girls. She grabbed his collar and pulled. Rex was always pleased to see her and he wanted to play. His great paw pushed her easily against the wall, but she came back with a smack across his muzzle that hurt her hand more than Rex. He swayed to his four feet with dignity and stalked to his cage in the animals' quarters.

The Russians had finished their act; they poured up the stairs to the hall and passed the open door of the dressing-room where Mario sat surrounded by the Arab boys. Strains of the music from the stage below could be heard as the Arabs sat around Mario, listening to him intently. He was reading a love-letter. The Arabs could not read, so Mario both read and wrote their love-letters. Their love was communal and so were their letters, no matter how intimate.

Mario was a trusted friend of the Arabs and when he had no money, which was frequently, he moved in with them, much to their delight. He knew the legends and folklore of many countries and they would do anything to trap him into telling a story, sitting around him motionless while he acted every word.

In the next dressing-room, Friedl and Elsa sat under the strong lights of the dressing-table. They were laughing and talking about Berlin. Both were

anxious to go there; Elsa because the shops were so much nicer there; Friedl because she would see her little Julie.

Friedl and Elsa both hunted money eagerly, but not for themselves. Elsa wanted it to buy presents for her friends and Friedl wanted it for her daughter. She was going to make her daughter Julie the greatest toe dancer in all Europe. Friedl had grown up in the Berlin opera and had become the premier dancer. She was at present making a mask for Herr Direktor, painting the features of a Medicine Man under the strong light. Friedl was clever with her hands.

"Herr Direktor has promised to take Julie in the show in Berlin," she told Elsa.

Elsa nodded. "Friedl, where is Julie's father now?"

"I do not know. It is so long since I have heard anything about him."

"Why will you not marry him, Friedl? He liked you."

"I would not marry anyone," laughed Friedl.

"Why you laugh?" said Elsa. "I am married, but I have good time like you."

"I have my Julie. She will be very great toe dancer. No, no, I would not marry. Julie is my life."

Elsa nodded agreement. "Julie, she is very nice. Maybe Herr Direktor put her in act with Kathi. Kathi very good."

"Kathi very good, but my Julie will be better than Kathi some day, better than anyone."

"Maybe Kathi she marry Peter and then your Julie take her place."

"Kathi, she is crazy. She think all the time of that fellow."

Elsa began to smile as she remembered something. "He draw sketch of Madame Rastella in her corsets and Rastella in his underwear, and I laugh my head off. I think that boy be good fun if he not in love so much."

Friedl seemed to agree. "I think Tania she know that too."

"Something funny there too," said Elsa. "She go with them all the time. First when she come here last year she run after all the men plenty, plenty men, now she run away from men."

"Maybe she just learn sense," said Friedl.

"Maybe she just put her beef in cold storage, eh, Friedl?" Elsa's sudden coarse laugh echoed through the hall.

In the next room, Kasha, the Russian aristocrat, sat ready to go on the stage. He was clad in a white satin Cossack coat with a white fur hat and scarlet boots of soft kid. A pile of sharp daggers lay on the make-up table beside him. Kasha was telling little Biji, the shock-headed Arab child, a Russian fairy-tale in Arabic. "And so," he said, as he rose from his chair to collect his daggers for his act, "and so, little Biji . . ." his voice was soft, ". . . they lived happily every afterwards."

Biji, wide-eyed with enchantment, sat on the edge of her chair, her little brown face turned up to his in complete trust.

"For ever and ever?" she asked.

"Yes, kleine liebchen," he said so softly as he left the room, "for ever . . . and ever . . . and ever." His voice trailed dreamily into the hall.

In the next room Rani and Mundi stood by the open window, the warm spring breeze filling the room with the scent of flowers. In the garden below birds were singing and the leaves of the trees rustled in the slight breeze. Rani, the little Chinese girl, with a froth of white ballet skirts to her knees, was ready for her wire-walking act. Rani was a good girl. She looked so small and young. Her blue-black hair was curled in a long page-boy bob and her ever-smiling almond eyes were gazing at Mundi, the Javanese boy, dressed in white with a wide scarlet sash around his waist, his steel guitar under his arm.

Mundi smiled down at Rani.

"Rani, to-night we shall go to a cabaret. You would like that?"

"Yes," answered Rani, who was very fond of Mundi. "This time you take me, not that Sandra."

"I always take you, Rani, whenever you will come."

"I thought perhaps you like better to take Sandra," she answered coquettishly.

"I do not like to take Sandra at all, only you." He bent down over her upturned face and kissed her lips gently.

In the next room Rosana sat at her dressing-table knitting fine silk lace. Over the mirror were the sacred pictures she had carried from childhood. The Spanish Madonna was faded and worn; it had been in every dressing-

room Rosana had ever occupied. There was the daguerreotype of her mother who had died in Paris. There were always fresh flowers in front of it, as before a little shrine; flowers bought daily in the market-place on the way to the theatre.

Rosana was gentle and serious. She lived for work and worship and she had long since lost the dividing line between the two. She made all the costumes for the family acts and studded them with jewels with a little hand-machine she had picked up in Paris years before. Her needlework was exquisite.

The music of the Don Giovanni Minuet floated up from the stage below. The hall was filled with the coming and going of every conceivable costume up and down the stairs from and to the stage below. Mario stepped into the hall. He was dressed for a burlesque part in the men's ballet and he wore silk panties and a broken brassiere. The only other covering for his lanky frame was the long hair of a Pelisande blonde wig. Elsa came out of her dressing-room. She wore black satin trunks and not much else. The stately music of Don Giovanni grew louder and swelled up to the hall from the stage. Mario and Elsa, the two company clowns off-stage, paused dramatically as they saw one another. Mario slowly raised his hands above his head and Elsa followed suit. They began to pirouette and their faces held a static expression of stage rapture while they contrived absurd mishaps from which they disentangled themselves. Each mishap sent the onlookers into laughter. They ended the dance with Elsa lying across Mario's knee, her arms about to draw his lips down to hers. At that moment Mario heard his music cue from the stage. He dropped Elsa with a bump and dashed down the stairs in three leaps.

At last the long matinée worked to a conclusion, as the Stampede scene took up its whirlwind tempo. Every member of the company was on-stage and the hall was deserted, but only for a few minutes. At a certain point in the Stampede the procession of the German landladies began. Up the stairs to the hall they came, dozens of them with laden baskets. For a few extra marks a week the artistes had their dinner cooked by the landladies and carried to the theatre just as the show was finishing. They came in a stolid procession at the exact time every day, through the stage door, up the stairs, to the hall. They deposited their baskets outside the doors of the dressing-rooms and then went away.

The last strains of the Stampede crashed out as the curtain fell and there was another stampede up the stairs. First the baskets were opened to see

what was inside and then tables and chairs pulled from dressing-rooms. The tables were set end to end until they stretched the whole length of the hall.

Soon, the entire company was sitting down to dinner. The members laughed and talked together, eating as a family. They passed food from table to table as they compared what their different landladies had brought and exchanged morsels for sampling. They were dressed in all kinds of costumes. Herr Direktor came up carrying his own sandwiches and coffee to join in the meal. Pappy Newman followed. They talked over changes, cues, the business of the show, joined in the conversation. So it continued until it was time to make up again for the evening performance. All were absorbed in their encircled lives of the stage; they were at their happiest together with no thought for the future. Life went on like this from day to day and, naturally, it would always go on like this.

# Chapter Thirty-one

Next morning the company gathered amid a hum of excitement at the theatre. The day was warm and sunny.

Herr Direktor was at the theatre waiting in his new English tweeds with a sporting bow tie and a rakish pork-pie felt hat made by the very best English hatter. He ushered his company to a long line of tram-cars commissioned to take his family to the docks. There, a harbour boat was waiting. He counted his family on board and the ship moved out slowly into the harbour. He stood in the bow of his ship among his crowded company pointing out ships of every nationality. His field glasses were in his hand and his Zeiss Ikon camera was slung around his neck. Of every photograph he took he would have three hundred prints made, one for each member of the company, to be kept among their souvenirs as a memory of this day. The weather had played up to him with soft sunlight, a faint haze, and oily smoothness of the water. It was a perfect stage setting and it pleased him as if it were a compliment to himself.

Looking at the traffic of the world, ships that carried people and things to the far corners of the globe, he thought that there could not be a more beautiful sight in the world than this. He loved ships. He loved anything that could take him from country to country. That had been his life always. His Scottish grandfather had been a sea-captain in a Brazilian service and the love of the sea had hopped a generation and settled on the grandson. For the past twenty years he had travelled and the world was as familiar as a room. He loved people in all their variety, and made friends among every class of all races.

He was sentimental, but he was a realist also, and he exploited to the full his knowledge and his connections. In Germany he was completely German; in England he was his Scottish grandfather's child; in the New World, he was an American. It was profitable to be so.

His hat discarded and his hair blown in the wind, he turned beaming to his company and raised his camera to take pictures. He took these pictures for the company as much as for himself so that when this day was a memory of the past—like so many of the memories he had packed away in his long theatrical career—not only he, but those who had been with him, could take their pictures out and recall the moment when he had snapped them.

The sun was warm, the ship steamed lazily through the crowded harbour. Everywhere there was the busy hum of action, winches rattling, derricks swinging, men shouting, but the sounds were muted over the water as belonging to another world. The rest of the world was working, but the Continental Revue was on a picnic. As if the sight of so much activity and colour emphasized the contrast, an air of relaxation stole over the tourist ship and the artistes split up into smaller groups and then began to pair off.

Mario, lying in a deck chair, was with the Gold Girl, matching his experience against her prudery. It was an idle whim on his part, toying with the impossible.

Pappy Newman, his face covered with his ten gallon Stetson, lay in a deck chair with Sophie's hand in his. Herr Direktor, going from one pair to another, had just left Anna with Carlos. Anna did not fail, however, to watch Herr Direktor as he leaned over the rail with Kathi, Tania, and Peter.

"Kathi," he said, "I have a nice surprise for you. I must go to Berlin. You will drive with me. I have arranged for your parents to spend a few days there and you will take a few days' vacation from the show."

Kathi had not seen her parents for a year.

"But this is wonderful."

"I like to see my children happy and I know that will make you very happy."

He did not mention that in some things he liked to be correct. He intended to discuss with her father his intentions of marrying Kathi, perhaps next year when his liaison with Anna had come to a natural end. He had not missed the growing attentions of Carlos to Anna. It was better that these things should take a natural course. He did not like trouble in his company.

Tania, quick as usual to see all the possibilities of a situation, made mental note of it.

"I have no parents," she said, more to attract attention than to express regret.

"For you I have something else," said Herr Direktor. "To-morrow you will begin singing lessons with Rastella, and Francine is to rehearse you in Anna's dances. You are to be her understudy. I will also arrange with Auguste that you have lessons on the accordion. It is time you began to learn more."

Tania felt she had been singled out and the rest would follow if she were very, very careful.

The dark image of her uncle crossed her mind. Peter would tell her what to do. She had learnt so much from him already, what she could wear and what she couldn't, what colours were best for her and how to use make-up so that she did not look cheap like some of the other girls. Perhaps he would know how to get rid of her uncle.

"Well," said Herr Direktor, "doesn't that please you?"

"I will work very, very hard for you," said Tania, flashing up at him her vivid smile. He patted her hand. "You are a good girl, Tania. Work hard for me and do not spend too much time in cabarets. That is good if you want to make progress."

Tania did not trouble to tell him she loved cabarets, but that she was scared in Hamburg because all the time she knew her uncle was waiting. Men like her uncle had their methods and they were ruthless.

But that could wait. She saw that Herr Direktor wanted to be left alone with Kathi. Tania pulled Peter's arm.

"Come, there is Mario alone. He has shocked the Gold Girl and she has left him."

They sat down, one on each side of Mario. Tania, irrepressible, full of curiosity, laughed. "The Gold Girl, she is difficult, yes?"

Mario turned his large eyes upon her and stared solemnly at her mischievous eyes. "Never, never be a serious artiste. Take Peter, take Kathi, take the Gold Girl, they give everything to their art and what have they left for life? Nothing! They only want to be good and to marry."

"Anything wrong with that?" asked Peter.

"Nothing," said Mario. "It is only that I do not understand it, and what I do not understand, I do not understand."

"That is very profound," said Tania seriously.

Mario stared at her again. "I think you understand . . . I think you understand many things."

"Love?" asked Tania.

"No, not love . . . maybe life."

"I show you," said Tania. "There is Bill. Look, he is dreaming of Maud, his mule. I go and see if I can make him dream of me instead."

She was off and Mario watched her as if appraising her. "Too much brain, that one. It is a pity, I prefer them without brains. One does not have complications then."

Peter had a sudden whim to tell Mario of the uncle who was pursuing Tania, but Mario's next comment forestalled him.

"See," said Mario. "All around, everywhere, they are in pairs, always in this company they pair off."

"Is it always like this?"

"On the Continent, yes. Here on the Continent, artistes of the people are simple like the people; they fall in love and they make love; they fall out of love and they change; that is logic, is it not? But when they are in love, then they are very, very faithful, and that is good for the company. Too much change, that is bad for the company, it is no longer a big family."

"And you, Mario?" Peter smiled.

Mario shrugged. "I, I am not a true artiste. Always there are some of us who are not true artistes. It is my fault that I do not create beauty; I only appreciate it. It is you who are the lucky one, you create pictures and you love one girl. Me, I do not create anything, and I love all women. But here comes Anna."

Peter left Mario as Anna came up with obvious intent to take over Mario.

"What is it, my little Anna?" asked Mario gently.

"It is nothing." Sallow-skinned in the bright sunlight she lay in the chair beside Mario, relaxed but aware like one of her own leopards. She lay quiet for a moment. "He talks much to Kathi."

"You need not worry about Kathi."

"Sometimes these quiet ones . . ."

"But not Kathi," said Mario.

"That Tania, she is different."

"That little one, she intrigues me," said Mario.

"You make love to her, no?"

"No!" said Mario firmly. "That little one is a gypsy horse trader. She will give nothing without getting a good bargain. Me, I love only for pleasure."

"Me too." Anna looked where Tania was laughing with Peter. "I think she is a dirty little gypsy."

"Anna!" Mario's voice chided her gently. "You must not be jealous of the young ones. They are not clever like you."

Anna subsided. She took Mario's words at their face value.

The ship was back at the dock. The sight-seeing trip was over. Once on shore, Herr Direktor led his big family to the harbour restaurant where he had engaged a dining-room and arranged a heavy German dinner. Rows and rows of tables were set and down the centre of each table were great jugs of beer and Apfelsaft, for by now the day was warm and everyone was thirsty. For two hours they all ate the solid German courses. There were no speeches; everyone, faced with so much free food and drink, and with appetites sharpened by the salty air, ate and drank.

The afternoon was hot and between the acts of the matinée the company sunned itself on the roof, sluggish from the excitement of the morning and the heavy meal. The lines on the roof were strung with washing. The girls had washed their costumes in their pensions, having risen early before the picnic to do so, but only those that had been crowded on the roof since nine o'clock were dry and now the rest had to be dried in time to wear for the acts later in the afternoon. There was no room on the roof so the girls took armsful down to the yard. There, amongst the big dogs playing around, Pat and his pet monkeys, Charlie sunning his snakes, Shetland ponies and white horses, and the elephants, the girls hurried to find a place where they could dry their costumes sufficiently to iron them in time for their acts.

Up on the roof the luckier ones sat around waiting for their washing to dry.

"Well," said Mary, the outspoken north-country girl. "When I joined this show I never expected to be a washerwoman."

"Why did you join, Mary?" laughed Dorothy.

"To learn languages," said Mary. "Last year I learnt two words in German, this year I know one. Say, do you notice how everyone in this town seems to be studying Spanish?"

Sonia began to repeat a story her landlady had told her about all the equipment Hitler was moving into Spain.

"What is it for?" she asked. "Does he intend to take Spain for himself? My landlady says when the people here have so little money and so much tax, why does he give so much to Spain?"

She addressed her question to Frau Schiller. Frau Schiller shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you like this Government, Frau Schiller? They make the rest of the world dislike them, the things they do."

"What I think," said Frau Schiller, "means nothing to them. Perhaps I could say plenty, but it is better to keep this shut." She pointed to her mouth.

Descending the stairs after the matinée, Mary noticed a crowd around the call board reading a typewritten notice.

"Now what is wrong?" she asked. "More trouble, I suppose."

"Pappy Newman wants all the foreigners in the office at seven sharp."

"Is that us?" asked Mary.

"Sure."

"Calling us foreigners? What a nerve! Trouble with the police, I suppose, for not registering properly. They have so many damn rules it would take all day to keep them. They not only pinch 42 per cent of your salary in taxes every week, the damn crooks, they want to pinch half your time as well."

"Yes," said one of the English girls; "if they took that much of your salary in England there'd be a revolution. The Germans are suckers, and they're making suckers out of us, too."

At seven o'clock all the English members gathered in Herr Newman's office. Pappy Newman looked worried.

"Close the door, Mary," he said. He got up on a box. "Close that window, Dick. There might be someone out in the yard."

"Say, what is this anyway?" asked Bert, the property man.

"Keep quiet," said Pappy. "You will know soon enough." He watched Dick to be sure the window was shut tight. Then he checked the door again.

"Now I want to tell you crowd something. Herr Direktor told you before we came to Germany to have nothing to say about politics. You are not in

England now. It is not your affair how they run this country. We have warned you to do no talking.

"You British are the trouble, you are too outspoken. And don't bother repeating what the landladies have told you, because if you get in trouble with the police the landladies will only deny they told you anyway."

"We don't blab," said Jimmy, one of the property men.

"No, of course not," said Pappy. "Now about this war in Spain. There are no German soldiers in Spain and that ends the matter. THERE ARE NO GERMAN SOLDIERS IN SPAIN, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" he shouted.

"Now, Max Van Huten, you will kindly take that radio out of your dressing-room at once. The fireman has reported to the Government that you are listening in all the time to the B.B.C., and that it gives news about Spain."

"What does the fireman know?" asked Jimmy. "He can't speak a word of English, the old liar."

"I am not going to argue with you gang any more. After all, I am the manager."

Everyone laughed.

"Get out," shouted Pappy, getting off his box. "No one can tell you gang anything. I am sick of you. You will get us all into trouble before we leave this country next November. Don't expect me to help you. And, Max, remember that radio."

"Yes," answered Max.

"Clear out the whole of you." He turned back to his desk. "I have work to do."

They all pushed out into the hall, laughing.

"Good old Pappy," said someone, and then they all split up to go to their dressing-rooms. Pappy's warnings soaked away like water in sand.

Herr Direktor and Peter were in the studio at the theatre. It was necessary to make a decision which sketches were to be used for the new programme because Herr Direktor was going to Berlin for a few days. The new programme was to be magnificent. There was already a souvenir programme lavishly illustrated with photographs, but the new programme was to be very different.

The dressing-room was littered with sketches and finished paintings. Against the wall stood the three main pictures, an oil portrait of Anna, the water-colour head and shoulders of Kathi, the nude of Tania. Peter thought the oil of Anna was uninspired and that he had missed the essential quality of Kathi, but there was no doubt that the nude of Tania was the best thing he had ever done.

Herr Direktor screwed his monocle into his eye. "Ach! That is good. Ja, that is good!"

Tania, had she heard him, would have been delighted. She had wheedled time and patience out of Peter to put more work on her painting than he had given to any of the others. Now she was lying against the dressing-room wall, absent in the flesh but real and alive in oils. Anna was good; Kathi's portrait was delicate, but Tania's nude would sell the programme; that, and the cartoons. The cartoons were lively. Bill and his performing mule, the Rastellas at the circus. Little Biji, Snowball, Hugo the strong man, the midgets.

Herr Direktor thumbed through them. This was better than he had hoped. He had the wit to see that this boy had more than ordinary skill and for a few months' pay had given him a collection of souvenirs of his show that would have cost much money from an established artist. Herr Direktor gathered the sketches into the thick portfolio. He assumed naturally that they were his property. After all, did he not create them by seeing in one glance in London how clever this boy was.

"Bring them down to my office." He pointed to the three large paintings. "I will take them all to Berlin with me. Maybe I will arrange an exhibition. This will be good 'Reklame'."

Then he stopped. A frightful squealing and trumpeting came down the length of the hall from the open window at the end.

"Mein Gott! The elephants."

He dropped the portfolio and ran out.

A little while before, Kahn had been brushing the elephants down at the back of the theatre where he had taken them out in the yard to enjoy the spring sunshine. Chained to one of the supporting pillars of the theatre they were enjoying the warm sunshine. But unfortunately the German police arrived, two of them, stern and officious, to see Kahn. It seemed that they suspected Kahn's papers, for he was British but had a dark skin. They demanded his passport. Kahn had no passport to show them, he had left it in

the pension. Herr Newman came out into the yard when he heard the policemen begin to bawl in the German way at Kahn. Kahn, used to the bawling of Herr Direktor and Pappy Newman, did not take any notice. He went on brushing his elephants. Pappy came up as the policemen were getting red in the face with anger.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he said, "there is no trouble. Khan will go immediately to his pension for his passport if you will wait a few minutes."

"That we cannot do." They did not trust Kahn out of their sight. "We shall take him with us to his pension."

"Hurry up and get it," said Pappy to Kahn.

"I take the elephants," said Kahn. "If I can't they get lonesome."

"Leave them here, I will watch them."

"But I cannot leave them. They will be distressed."

The police took action. They each took an arm and Kahn had to go. The elephants started to follow, but found themselves tied to the pillars with heavy chains. They began to cry and beat their trunks in every direction. Then they began to trumpet. Pappy Newman bawled at them in every language he knew. Their trumpeting turned to squeals of anger. They began to pull and snort, rolling their eyes and lashing their trunks.

Pappy Newman was scared. He tried heading them off with a long pole, but they reared on their hind legs and tried to crush him down. The pillar began to crack. Herr Direktor ran out into the yard. There was a dangerous tremor in the pillar. The whole balcony above would crash down if it gave away.

Pappy bawled for someone to run after Kahn. All the members of the company, in and out of costume, ran down the street yelling, "Kahn, Kahn!" Passers-by gaped at the absurd chase. Then Herr Direktor flashed by in his cream car, monocle in his eye, mouth grim, hair blowing in the wind. With a screech of brakes he pulled up outside Kahn's pension which was near the theatre, dashed up the stairs and packed Kahn down, regardless of the policemen. Kahn away, he stared at the startled policemen through his monocle. He knew how to deal with German policemen. He began to bawl at the top of his voice with a stream of invective and an air of authority. When he had finished with them he packed them into his car and went to deal with their superior officers. He understood Germans well and knew that such brawls must be carried through a rising crescendo of shouting to the

last official. He who shouted loudest and longest won, and Herr Direktor was well practised.

Through the streets Kahn ran as fast as he could, picking up the stream of excited players and turning it after him like the brightly coloured tail of a comet. The elephants saw him coming and immediately ceased to rampage. Kahn, as soon as he could see his elephants, stopped running and walked quietly and more quietly as he came near. Then he smiled and murmured to them. They began a soft cooing sound and stretched to the end of their chains trying to reach out to meet him. Completely quieted they caressed him with their trunks as he petted them and smiled.

Herr Direktor returned with a smirk of pleasure on his lips. He had come away from the police station with flying colours. There was nothing he enjoyed so much as a bawling contest. He went upstairs to Peter's studio in a charming mood, but Peter was gone, so he settled down again and opened up the portfolio once more.

# Chapter Thirty-two

The next day Peter had nothing to do, and Kathi had no rehearsals. They went to the Alster Platz for morning coffee. They walked in the sun and through the shadows of the Lindens on the side of the square lined with steamship offices. Peter, attractive with his dark hair tumbled over his brow, with his careless clothes, was in complete contrast to Kathi. Slim in a grey English flannel suit, she was hatless and her silvery blonde hair fell soft as silk to her shoulders in a long smooth wave. Her startlingly fair beauty made people turn to stare as she walked, happy to be free for one whole morning after the gruelling rehearsals of the past month. It was near the end of the Hamburg run now and soon the show would be on its way to the spectacular opening in Berlin.

Tania for once was not with them. Tania was suffering torment for the sake of ambition. Rastella bullied her in her singing lessons, Francine worked her hard in her dances. Hugo threw her around, swung her by her ankles, until she was in agonized anticipation of being hurled over the footlights. He finally threw her on to her feet, whirling her and unwinding her flimsy wrap, until she was a flash of nudity. Herr Direktor was confident it would bring the house down. Tania agreed it would if it didn't kill her first. She stuck it with a grim endurance.

It was rare for Peter to be out alone with Kathi in the morning. He was enjoying it too much to remember how much a part Tania had always played in their conversations, but he was realizing how the barrier of language still limited any real exchange of ideas between himself and Kathi.

The Alster Platz was lovely in the spring morning. It was in the centre of Hamburg, four streets around a square lake, fed from canals and smelling of the sea, with swarms of seagulls floating around and over it, swooping down to the water with harsh plaintive cries. On one side of the square were the steamship and tourist offices and on the other, the best shops of Hamburg. The side-streets running off the square were filled with little pastry shops, gift shops, and flower shops. Facing the lake was the Alster Platz café, a one-story white building. The windows were gay with window boxes of spring flowers. There were flowers in the entrance and flowers on all the tables. A few steps led down to the main room, A terrace opened out to the shops of a side-street and another faced the lake. It was the most popular

place in Hamburg at the coffee hour. It was also the most expensive; its Torte were famous, and its Kuchen the most elaborate and delicious in a city that specialized in such things.

As Peter and Kathi entered, all eyes turned to Kathi, and the tall thin head-waiter bowed them to a table. Opposite their table, across the water, a long-legged stork stood on one leg on the straw covering of a small raft. From the lake came the tangy sea smell, and from the interior of the café came the odour of freshly roasted coffee floating between an undertone of voices and an overtone of soft music.

Kathi was happy. Peter was conscious of a sense of fulfilment in his work and in his life. He had proved to himself in these past months that he had a talent that could not fail to take him to success. All that he had to do was to use it, and with Kathi as his inspiration, it seemed easy.

"When are you going to Berlin?" asked Peter.

"To-morrow."

"It will be strange to be without you."

"It will be so short a time."

They spoke in German.

It had never entered Peter's head to question Herr Direktor's motive in taking Kathi with him to Berlin. It was quite a reasonable thing for him to drive her to see her parents, a typical gesture on his part.

"When you come back," said Peter, "I will paint a real picture of you. That one for the programme is too much of the outside, I will make them look through the beauty of your face and see you as I see you, transparently beautiful all through."

It was difficult to say all that in German so part of it was in English and Kathi did not understand it, but she knew that tone in his voice and she smiled.

"When I was a boy there was one book in the library I took out again and again. It was a book of German fairy-tales and the princesses were all like you. You aren't like these other German girls."

"I am an Austrian, I come from the mountains. We are not Germans. My grandfather says there has been only trouble for us in the mountains since we were taken into Germany."

Peter laughed. “I will take you out again. Perhaps I should come to Berlin and meet your parents and ask for your hand in marriage as the prince always did in the fairy-tales.”

A slight cloud hovered on Kathi’s brow as if the world had intruded on a childish dream. Kathi kept all her little worlds separate. The mention of marriage had touched one dream with another, her world with him and her world with her parents. Peter didn’t want her any different. The world had been cruel enough to him in his first struggles in London, and when he was with Kathi he stepped with her into her own dream-like world. He saw people at nearby tables staring at her, and felt he would have to pinch himself to realize that it was happening to him or that such a person as Kathi was possible.

Then he wondered. What had he ever talked about with Kathi? Tania had always been with or near them in their waking hours, and it was she who had supplied the spark that touched off laughter and conversation. But had he ever talked of the world and affairs, of art and what it meant to him, of what life really was, of food and money, of babies or anything that was part of life as most people lived it? He realized with a faint wonder that he hadn’t. He, like everyone else, had always tried to protect Kathi from contact or even thought of the world apart from her dancing. That was perhaps why her dancing had that ethereal quality, perhaps why she had her own peculiar influence upon audiences. She just didn’t belong to this world. But what did it matter? He was in love and loved. There had been an inevitable fate about it from the very first moment his feet had turned, by mistake, into the dark theatre alley in London.

Someone had thrown bread on the water of the lake and the gulls were swooping down, fluttering over the water with harsh cries. The stork ignored them. A faint breeze wafted the sea smell into the café. The music of a Viennese waltz floated over every other sound. Peter was happy and he would never hear that waltz again without catching the echo of that lovely morning.

# Chapter Thirty-three

Peter wandered through the streets of Hamburg. He was restless and at a loss to know what to do with himself. He had lived the past months at a peak of activity and, now that Kathi was gone to Berlin, reaction was setting in with a restlessness and complete inability to touch a pencil or a brush.

He had wanted to take advantage of the next few days to explore Hamburg with a pencil and sketch-book, but there was no desire in him to see or do anything.

That morning, too, he had quarrelled with Tania. She had come into the studio from her room and had sat on his bed. She was not herself. She had been working under too great a strain, doing too many new things without sufficient rest. Behind it all was the relentless pursuit of her uncle, and the necessity for constant alertness to avoid some trap he might set.

She had come into Peter's studio after a restless night for both of them. Kathi had left the day before; Tania wanted to talk to Peter and to grope for a little sympathy. But both of them were on edge and a trivial remark flared up into an exchange of words from which Tania flung out of the room to go to another gruelling morning of rehearsal.

Habit turned Peter's feet back to the theatre, half hoping that there he would not feel so acutely the absence of Kathi. He walked through the stage door to the back of the stage. He crossed back-stage in the shadows where the three Borzoi hounds were waiting to rehearse in the new number for the harp scene. There was something restful in the patience of the animals, a powerful counterbalance to the restlessness of this mixed company. He understood now why Herr Direktor kept so many animals. Without their immense patience, the company, in its whirling tempo, might fly apart in a shower of sparks. With his back against a koffer, Peter sat caressing the dogs and felt better. Then, somewhere behind him, he heard voices. A girl was laughing.

"Do you think he doesn't know it? He's no fool. First it was Pat and now it is her adagio dancer."

"She's crazy."

"She's no fool. Do you notice how last year she was always with him wherever he went. This time he's always leaving her behind."

"How long has she been the star of this show?"

"Three years."

There was another laugh. "Maybe he's taking another dip in the basket. Now's our chance, girls."

"Not for me. To be star in this show you've got to work ten times as hard and take a cut in salary."

"You're jealous."

"Not me. Let Kathi have it."

Peter sitting with the dogs had heard the voices, but had taken no heed. At the mention of Kathi's name he could not help but listen.

"You mean that's why he took her to Berlin with him?"

"Well, you don't get something for nothing."

"Say, but she and Peter . . . no, she wouldn't do that. Not Kathi."

"These German girls don't think the same way about things as we do."

Peter sat still. His common sense should have told him he had caught an echo of the everyday gossip of the theatre where every little incident was chewed in the cud until the next mouthful of gossip came along. The voices moved away, but Peter sat on. As an artist he had reached a pinnacle after months of work and now he was tumbled from it, feeling like a wet rag, wrung dry and cast aside. That would have passed, but into such a mood there dropped the spark of jealousy. It fanned to a flame. He remembered the solicitude of Herr Direktor for Kathi on a hundred occasions lately. He saw them driving together to Berlin. How did he know her parents were actually in Berlin? How did he know Herr Direktor with his suave way of talking himself out of anything could not make Kathi believe there had been a misunderstanding? How could he know that once she was away Herr Direktor's smooth tongue might not talk her into anything? Kathi was simple and trusting. How did he know what her ideas of good and evil were?

He left the theatre white-hot with thoughts that tortured him. He went back to his studio rooms, but everything there piled fuel on his thoughts. His imagination tortured him with a thousand possibilities. He flung out again into the street and through the streets and back again to the theatre and away from it again. Late that night he returned to the theatre and Tania, who had

been watching for him all evening, flew up the stairs to catch him in his dressing-room studio, now empty and littered only with the rubbish of his work.

Tania ran in, her dressing-gown loosely tied around her, as she came away from her adagio scene. She was disturbed; she had received a note telling her to be at a certain cabaret without fail that night or take the consequences.

For a moment she forgot herself. She watched him sit down and run his hands through his hair. Then she knew without him speaking that he was tortured about Kathi. A faint smile ran across her face and was as quickly wiped away.

She leaned over him. "Peter, Peter. Wait for me. Do not go. I must see you."

She ran from the room again down the stairs to make her change for the next act. All day she had not seen Peter; the note had come and she had been afraid. But now Peter was back and she was excited. A little devil of a thought ran through her brain. She would take him to the cabaret to-night. They would finish this business. She was at a crisis. Everything she dreamed of could be hers, but first this business of her uncle must be solved. She was no longer afraid, but calculating.

After the show she ran up to his room in costume. She looked around, he was not there. She ran down to the stage door.

"Did you see Peter go out?"

"Ja, he is in the café across the street."

She ran upstairs to change quickly. She slipped on a short black dress, low cut and with a wide black leather belt, tooled in warm, dark colours with peasant decoration. Her hair fell in dark waves to her shoulders, and, with her dark dress, framed her white, tense face.

She did not leave by the stage door to face the barrage of stares and comments. Her uncle might be there, and she did not want to run that risk alone. She left by the yard where the animals waited patiently to be taken to their stables. She found Peter brooding in the café.

"Come," she said. "Before the others come in, we will go to a cabaret."

Peter did not care where he went so long as he did not have to return to his rooms until he was too tired to think. Tania hung on to his arm as they went through the streets towards the harbour.

"I am sorry, sorry, sorry I say those things to you this morning. Never, never, never will I quarrel with you again. You are unhappy. Come, we must dance and we shall drink cognac."

He let himself be led by her. She was full of chatter, not her usual chatter, but chatter over an undercurrent of nervous tension.

The cabaret was a tawdry one, with a mingled crowd of dock workers and seamen. The music was noisy, the show was crude, and the cognac was harsh. It fitted Peter's mood and it fitted Tania's mood. They sat behind a wooden rail on the raised balcony that overlooked the floor.

Tania's eyes were flickering all over the place alert, watchful. Then her hand gripped Peter's arm. "Look, there he is."

"Who?"

"My uncle. He told me to come here or else he . . ."

"Or else what?"

"Maybe he throw acid at my face or something like that."

Peter turned to stare at the man, who sat across the floor watching Tania. Swarthy, undersized, he looked evil. So that was her uncle, thought Peter. What devil's brood did she come from?

"All right," said Tania. "Now I go to him. Follow me if I go out with him. Don't lose sight of me or maybe you never see me again."

With a queer excitement in her eyes she got up and crossed the room. Peter ran his hand through his hair and watched her. He wished he had never come. He wanted Kathi back just for one moment to reassure him. He couldn't bear another day tortured with the thoughts that had plagued him to-day.

He saw the two at the other table rise, and he saw the man follow Tania. Quickly Peter rose to follow. In the street outside, he slipped back into a doorway as he saw Tania stand deliberately for a moment under the street lamp by the bridge that crossed a canal. Then she turned with the man into the lane that ran between the wall of the cabaret and the canal.

"The little fool," muttered Peter angrily.

This was no part of Hamburg to be hanging around dark alleys. Even the police never moved around here, except in pairs.

He almost ran around the corner, paused as he could not see them in the shadows, then picked them out, Tania against the wall and the man close by.

The man turned swiftly as Peter came up and Tania mocked him, saying something in Hungarian. The man's hand flashed to his belt and there was the gleam of a knife. In that moment Peter, with a swift instinct to self-preservation, lashed out with his fist and the man staggered back against Tania. Tania made a quick thrust, the man stiffened with a gasp of agony and then crumpled to the ground.

There was a faint splash as Tania pitched a bloody knife into the canal.

"Quick," she said. "Help me."

She bent down to the feet of the limp figure and Peter, without pausing to think, took the head. Tania pulled towards the bank and then letting the feet drop she pushed the shoulders from Peter's grasp and the body splashed into the water.

"Christ!" muttered Peter.

"Quick!" Tania grasped his hand and pulled him with her to the shadow of the wall. They both pressed close to the wall and then they heard the sound of double footsteps.

"The police!" whispered Tania. She caught the gleam of her uncle's knife on the ground, picked it up, pulled Peter to where shadowy steps led up to a back doorway. There she pressed against him in the corner and he could feel her breasts against him and her heart beating like that of a frightened bird. The footsteps grew nearer, coming down the lane, the measured tread of two policemen. In Peter's brain beat the words, "Murder, murder, murder, murder," slowly, steadily, relentlessly.

Against his shoulders Tania had her head; against his chest she pressed her breasts; against his stomach, from her belt, there pressed the hard shape of a murdered man's knife; against his legs her legs, and around his waist, tight, clinging, her arms.

Then the steps were near and he felt the police would hear Tania's heart thumping against his body. The two clung close, not moving, hardly breathing, and then the steps were passing them, passing them, and going away slowly, steadily.

A wave of relief flooded Peter.

"Come," Tania whispered. "They are gone."

She took his hand again and took him along the lane. There was another faint splash as she pitched the other knife in the water, and Peter incongruously noticed the smell of the sea in the night air.

Now they were in a back street, and at the end of the street there were the lights of a tram-car; then they were on a tram-car sitting close together, without speaking, on their way back to the café where Pappy was giving a party that night, and they would find all the others laughing and dancing. But none of the others had committed murder, only these two who had come in late with faces drained of colour under their dark hair.

Peter's hand gripped Tania's and dragged her back.

"No, not there."

He dragged her out into the night again.

"Where?" said Tania, her white face looking up into his.

"Cognac. I must have cognac," he said viciously, "and air."

They sat at a table under the trees of a wide boulevard. There were soft lights among the trees and bright lights along the boulevard. The little silent trams ran up and down and the world was going on just as if the bottom had not fallen out.

"Bitte?" said the waiter.

"Cognac . . . four."

The waiter brought in four small glasses of cognac. It was better cognac here and Peter coughed as the first burned his throat. But he followed it with the second and the dreadful chill that was on him melted away.

Tania drank slowly.

"So this is the pay-off?" For the first time since that other cabaret his eyes met hers. Her eyes seemed to burn with fever.

"The pay-off?"

"An American phrase. You will need it when you get to Hollywood. You will get there, of course."

"You are not angry?"

The naïvety of the words sent him into harsh laughter.

"For favours received. . . ." His voice was dulled. Then suddenly he examined his hands. "I must go and wash my hands."

He rose to go into the café. Her hand pulled him down. “No, no! Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me.”

“Leave you? I can never leave you again. Wherever I am and wherever you are, you’ll be with me. That’s the end. By Christ! your price was high.”

Worried by his maundering she spoke, “What do you mean, the end?”

He drank up his cognac and leaned across the table to Tania.

“You’re fifteen. . . .”

“Sixteen now.”

“Sixteen, then. You are sixteen. You’ve murdered a man and I’ve helped you to do it.” Tania stared at him with intense eyes, half frightened by his smouldering mood. “You’re sixteen, you’re young. Like soft mud your brain will close over this night and wipe it out from your thinking. You’ll go ahead as you’ve done already, trick by trick, you callous little devil; you’ll build your house the way you want it and you’ll use me, Kathi, Anna, Herr Direktor, and all the rest of us just the way you want them and when you’re through you will toss us in the ditch.

“You help me and I’ll help you!” He laughed bitterly. “You gave me Kathi on a platter . . . I can see through you like glass. . . . Damn that music . . . why do they want to play those sickly waltzes?” He turned with a futile gesture towards the orchestra in the background. “You gave me Kathi . . . she doesn’t see through you . . . she doesn’t see through you . . . you probably sent her to Berlin with him.”

“No, no, I did not do that.”

“Tell me, is he after her? Tell me! You know if anyone does. Tell me, you damned little bitch.”

A slight smile crept up to Tania’s lips. This flaying was like the clean lash of a whip to make her forget the rest of the night.

She nodded. “Yes, but Kathi lov’ only you.”

“Love?” His voice was dull again. “Love? Christ! Can’t you see you’ve murdered that, too? I had the Garden of Eden, and where am I now?”

“Kathi lov’ you. If I lov’ you I would not care.” Her face was sullen, the faint smile gone. “You don’t think we do good thing, no? You think it better for him to make me cheap prostitute, other girls, too, maybe? Me, I’m glad we do it, I’m glad we kill him. I plan it like that before we go to cabaret; he like garbage. Now he gone.”

Her English, painfully acquiring accuracy through her persistence with Peter, slipped under the stress of the moment.

She drew her breath in between her teeth with a sharp sound. She was realizing that she had removed a major obstacle from her path and the relief after the past month of fear and worry was greater than any fear of the crime. She had killed a man and was without any remorse. She did not care if Peter felt remorse.

"What about the police?" he asked.

"Soon we go to Berlin."

"But they'll find the body and investigate."

"Plenty men found in harbour and in canal near harbour, plenty men and they care nothing. You drink this."

She pushed her cognac over to him. She signalled the waiter for more. She must make him drunk. He did not know how much he was drinking.

A hungry exultation was in her veins. Cognac and crime, like a vicious aphrodisiac, were loosening all the restraints she had set upon herself in her pursuit of stardom. She had killed a man and was not afraid. He had been in her way and now he was gone. He had thought to drag her down in his power and instead she had used her power of life and death, even as now she held the power of life and death for Peter and Kathi, a different kind of life and death.

She breathed heavily as she watched Peter drink, and realized how much power she, Tania, had to control men. She had sipped it before, but to-night she had drunk deep. Kathi's man was in her power. She had done what she liked with him and could do what she liked with him, and still give him back to Kathi who was too innocent to see through people.

Peter rose unsteadily. "Let's get away from this damned music."

They walked along the boulevard, neither speaking any more. The cognac was working upon Peter. He was like Adam cast out from the Garden of Eden into utter darkness. He had fallen in one short day so far and so fast. Self-torture, distrust, and misery, and now, on top of it all, he was a murderer. It was the end of everything. Deeper and deeper his thoughts dragged him down.

Once back in the studio full of the associations of Kathi and of his own success, he stared around dully, half-drunk, but with sharp single memories of happiness leaping and stabbing him, one after another, until he was wide

awake and unable to bear it. He put his hands to his head to shut his thoughts away, but they were there inside his head, unbearable. He had had everything the world could offer him and now he had thrown it all away. He had murdered a man and with that crime he had murdered Kathi and his own life. Damn Tania, damn her and blast her to the depths of his own hell.

He dragged his tie off, dragged his shirt off.

Then he stopped, staring at the divan bed.

No, he couldn't sleep in that bed, he couldn't sleep at all, and he couldn't bear his own thoughts. He couldn't sleep until he could shut his thoughts from his mind, and he couldn't do that until he was drunk.

He reached for his shirt. He would drag Tania out of bed and take her out to drink with him.

He crossed the studio to her door. He stared at the door and swayed slightly. He ought to kill her, that's what he ought to do. She'd killed him just as much as she'd killed that man. Her knife had stabbed the man, but he had helped her to drown him.

Tania lay on her bed. She had undressed, but she was not in her bed. She did not want to sleep. The wine of life she had drunk to-night had been too strong. She needed another draught before she could still the rise and fall of her breasts under the dark excitement that was in her breathing. She stared through the gloom of her room and there was no sleep in her eyes.

She heard her door open, heard his footsteps, heard his voice, harsh, bidding her to get up again, telling her he was going out to get drunk. There was a dull hopelessness in his voice. She laughed to herself in the darkness, her hand reaching out caught his and pulled him down to her side. Her naked arms reached around his neck and drew his head down to her breasts. Here was Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. True it ran through Hades, but what did that matter if the torture of thought was unbearable.

Suddenly she felt his hands bite fiercely into her flesh and his lips were on hers crushing them, bruising them, loving her with his body, but killing her with his mind. Fierce exultation burned up in her to meet his passion and all memory of good or evil was obliterated by the fierce drug that was burning their blood.

In the night Tania lay awake. She felt purged and clean and conscious of every fibre of her body. There was no logic in it, it just was; she lay in the darkness awake and aware, full of an immediate, stirring knowledge of being alive. At her side she could hear the heavy breathing of Peter and feel

the warmth of his body. She lay there, how long she did not know, not wanting to lose any of this profound sense of knowing.

Then she raised herself on her elbow and gazed at Peter's face, following every line of it, pale and tired but with all thought wiped away. Her hand lifted to his ruffled hair, ran through the dark locks and lingered. Then she bent over him and her lips touched his cheek, moving up to his brow; soft caressing kisses. Her hands traced the lines of his face, his neck, and rested again on his body.

Kathi could not love him as she had loved him; no woman could ever give him what she had given him. Her lips touched his cheek again. Now she would give him back to Kathi. Again her hand brushed his dark hair away from his forehead and again her lips touched his cheek. Neither her hands nor her lips wanted to leave him and tears were welling into her eyes. With an effort of will she turned herself away from him and cried herself to sleep.

When she awoke again the room was bright with daylight and she was alone. She sat up, half wondering if the previous night were true, then swung her legs from the cover. The door to the studio was open. She looked through and there was no sign of Peter. She went in. The divan bed was undisturbed. Then she saw the white envelope on it. She ran, and sitting on the bed, she took the envelope. It was addressed, in scrawling pencil, to Kathi, and was sealed.

Tania stared at it. She had to know what it said. She hesitated and then tore it open, pulling out the scribbled paper from inside. His writing was bad, but at least he had written in German.

"Kathi, I have ruined everything, spoiled everything. I hate myself, I am sorry. I love you more than anything in the world. I could kill myself for writing this, for hurting you, but it is for the best. I am going away. I will not come back. Peter."

Tania read it again. With a sudden impulse she kissed it, then tore it in two. She was about to tear it in little pieces, but realized she must write another note and copy the handwriting. She held the torn note in her hands and calculated. Kathi would be back in a few days. The show would be moving to Berlin in a few days. Where was Peter? There was much to do, and she had no thought for her late uncle.

# Chapter Thirty-four

Herr Direktor drove to the stage door of the theatre with a flourish and a screech of brakes. He was smiling. Kathi, serene and lovely by his side, was smiling. Berlin had been wonderful and she wanted to tell Peter all about it. They were just in time for the matinée performance. Kathi ran upstairs to change. Tania came running to meet her, flinging her arms around Kathi's neck and kissing her.

"Where is Peter?" Tania was prepared for Kathi's first words.

"Come," said Tania, "I have a note for you."

A few moments later Kathi was opening carefully her first note from Peter. Her eye ran quickly over the contents. Tania watched the smile on Kathi's lips, saw the impulsive lifting of the note to her lips.

"Darling," said the note, "I must go away for a few days to paint a wonderful picture. I love you more than anything in the world, I think of you always, always, always. Soon I shall be back because I shall die if I do not see you soon. I love you, love you, love you. Peter."

Even in forgery Tania could not resist her tendency to over-emphasis, but Kathi did not see anything unnatural about the letter. That was the way she loved Peter and it was natural that Peter should feel the same way.

Herr Direktor went straight to the front of the house without announcing his arrival to anyone. He would see how the show went while he was away. It had been a very pleasant trip to Berlin. Kathi's parents were simple, good people from the mountains. They were delighted to have a free holiday in Berlin and delighted to see their daughter again. The family reunion was touching, and Herr Direktor had wiped his monocle with an air of sentimental benevolence. He excused himself to do his business and later that night he told Kathi's father that he might have deeper plans. He told him over cognac and the very best cigars, and Kathi's father nodded gravely. Of course Kathi was very young as yet and Herr Direktor agreed and felt it was best to mention nothing to Kathi as yet. Perhaps in a year or so they could meet again and discuss the matter in greater detail, but he was anxious that Kathi's parents should know how high in his esteem and in his affections Kathi stood.

She was so different from other girls, so perfect a dancer, every movement as pure and graceful as herself . There had been no ballet dancer like her since Pavlova. Besides that she was a good girl, very, very good.

Kathi's father nodded.

Herr Direktor drove Kathi around with him in Berlin and was delighted to see how people turned their heads to look at her as she sat by his side. When Anna was with him people looked at him. He was delighted to find how naïve Kathi was, how much she enjoyed simple things. He bought her an exquisite watch, paying for it more money than he paid her in half a year's salary, and she was delighted. He mentioned nothing to her of his talk with her father, nothing to her of his intention to marry her. He would first disentangle himself from Anna.

He felt like a boy again, with the emotions of a boy and the experience of a man, and it was a pleasant feeling, a new experience. There was no need to hurry and he must be gentle with poor Anna. He was very fond of Anna. He had never known such a good trouper as Anna. The Berlin visit was begun, carried through and completed with the utmost correctness.

"Do you think," said Maria to Anna in her little dressing-room by the side of the stage, "do you think he took her to an hotel?"

Anna submitted to the combing of her hair. "Not what you think."

"Carlos said so." Carlos was Anna's new partner.

"Carlos always says those things to make me jealous. Kathi is in love."

"With the artist. But if Herr Direktor say she must go with him she cannot refuse."

"No, Maria. It is different. Some animals have one mate, some have many. Kathi, she has one."

Maria combed through Anna's dark hair.

"Herr Direktor has not been in since he comes back."

"He always does this. He will be in front of the house, thinking we don't know he is there."

"Still, he took Kathi to Berlin and not you. That is not nice."

"He took her to see her parents."

"That is good excuse."

"Good enough for me. I tell you, Maria, the one to watch is not Kathi. No, you forget her; you watch someone else, you watch that Tania."

Carlos came into the dressing-room. His smile flashed white teeth across his handsome face.

"He's back," said Anna.

"I know," laughed Carlos. He stood up, flexed his biceps and drew in his stomach ridge below an enormous chest. He was a magnificent animal, and Anna smiled at him. Carlos relaxed and bent to kiss Anna's hair. Then he laughed aloud and patted Maria on her backside affectionately. Then he swaggered out of the dressing-room. Carlos had taken good advantage of Herr Direktor's absence.

Herr Direktor stood at the back of the house as the curtain rose on the opening scene. Everything was now ready for the Berlin opening and he had rehearsed the new show into its final pace and precision. There was no excuse for less than the best. He watched for a few moments as the audience cheered the brilliant opening. Suddenly the expression of his face changed. He took a notebook from his pocket and began to make notes. Everything was wrong; he could see that now. The show was no good. Nobody took any interest; no one did any work but himself; everyone was lazy. His disappointment mounted and mounted as the show swept through without stopping. By the time the last curtain fell he was in a fine rage.

He rushed down the aisle and reached the stage in time to forestall anyone from going to the dressing-rooms.

"Back to the stage everyone," he shouted.

The company crowded back to the stage. Herr Direktor waited for Lubichov to arrive from the pit. Seeing him come, he put his monocle in his eye and took out his well-known notebook.

"So!" he said. "To-day I have watched the show."

His monocle fell to the end of its cord and he swung it to and fro. This was a storm signal.

"The show is no good. It is not fit for Berlin."

He screwed his monocle into his eye again and began to scan through his notes. No one spoke.

"Now, first thing, what is wrong with the Treppen costumes? On the staircase to-night they looked dirty. The costumes are filthy." His voice had

risen to a bellow. “They must be clean for to-morrow’s performance.”

“Herr Direktor,” said Pappy Newman, “no cleaner could possibly have them ready in time for to-morrow’s matinée. It is already after midnight.”

“They must be clean,” he shouted. “The girls will wash them themselves to-night.”

“But we cannot get hot water where we live,” cried one of the English girls.

“Ruhe, ruhe, quiet! I said they must be clean. Either you come clean to the matinée to-morrow or you never come on the stage again. Now the next thing. Mary, what is this I have seen? When you kicked the tambourine to-night you had only half a sole on one shoe. Where is the other half?”

“I lost it in Sheffield,” said Mary.

“So you lost it in Sheffield.” He was sarcastic. “After all those new shoes I bought you for the Alhambra!”

Pappy spoke up for his brood. “Herr Direktor, the girls have done many hours of rehearsal since then. None of the shoes are good.”

“No?” his voice was bitingly sarcastic. “Very well, then. To-morrow everyone in the show will have new shoes. No wonder I never make any money.”

Once more he looked down at his notes. “Tania, your costume is wrong in the adagio number with Hugo. It is not nude enough during the dance.”

“Ja!” said Tania dutifully. How could she whirl half-way across the stage into nudity unless she wore something? He consulted his notebook again.

“Anna, this is important. Anna does not do enough dancing. You must learn a new number for to-morrow night. Something to make you stand out. You and Carlos must do a Spanish number. Lolita!”

“Oui, oui, oui,” answered Lolita, Rosana’s sister.

“To-morrow morning you must teach Anna the Spanish dance your sister did with us in the Far East.” Her other sister had died in the East.

“But, Herr Direktor, it is very difficult.”

“That does not matter. It must go on the show to-morrow night.”

“But we have no costumes, Herr Direktor.” Lolita was bewildered by the impossibility of teaching and costuming Anna and Carlos in such a short time.

"Well, get them!" he shouted. "They must be white . . . white taffeta with bouffant skirts and a long white silk mantilla for Anna and all white for Carlos too, Spanish toreador . . . oh yes, one other thing. . . ." He shook his monocle to and fro on its cord. "Anna, you must have a high gold comb. Harry, where are you?"

"Here, Herr Direktor." Harry Nichols came forward.

"Harry, my boy," he put his hand into his pocket and brought out a roll of bills. "To-morrow when the shops open I want you to be down-town. I remember seeing just the thing I want. There is a small store near the Adolph Hitler Platz, below the automat. You know where I mean?"

"I will find it," said Harry, anxious as ever to please.

Herr Direktor smiled at him. "Yes, I know you will."

"Yes, Herr Direktor, but what about the costumes?" Lolita was worried.

"The costumes, ah yes! Hanna will make them to-morrow. Hanna, you must go early and buy the material. You will have time to make two costumes before the matinée . . . plenty of time. . . . Now let me see . . . what is next?" As far as he was concerned, the Spanish dance was settled. "The costumes of the others are wrong also. Now there is no time to make any more here in the company, so to-morrow night, after the performance, all those who need new costumes will go to Berlin to have new ones fitted. It is only a four-hour train ride, so you will be back here in plenty of time."

"There is no train after midnight, Herr Direktor," said Pappy Newman.

"Very well, I will get buses. They will not take more than six hours. They can be in Berlin at 6 a.m., have breakfast, be fitted at eight. I will telephone and make all arrangements. By eleven o'clock they will have taken all measurements, then they can be back in Hamburg to-morrow at five in the afternoon. We can still do a couple of hours' rehearsal after you come back here."

"When do we sleep?" muttered Auguste.

"You don't sleep," whispered Pappy.

"Now, Francine and Miss Day, you will go along. I want you to see that Tania has a beautiful new costume for the Tyrolean number, also a new evening gown, something that will make her look older. She will announce the show in Berlin."

Even Tania was startled by this announcement. She did not know that in Berlin Herr Direktor had boasted of his new Souvenir Programme to the management of the Scala and had shown them the drawings and paintings. There had been exclamations of praise, but the most praise had been lavished on Tania's picture.

As if to counterbalance the announcement: "Anna must have all new costumes for Berlin. You, Francine and Miss Day, while the girls are being fitted, you must go to the pensions and find all the rooms you can for the younger girls and the English. Just now, in Berlin, there are no rooms, I believe."

Everyone looked from one to the other at this news. Rumours of this kind had already reached the company from other sources.

Herr Direktor was consulting his notebook. "Now, the Vauxhall Garden Scene, that is not good enough for Berlin. It needs re-painting." He looked around. "Where is Peter?"

Tania nudged Kathi. "Do not say anything."

"Pappy, will you tell him he will begin to-morrow morning early and go over with me all the scenery?"

The next morning Peter could not be found, and there was work enough to fill twenty-four hours of every day. Tania forestalled a search by telling Pappy Newman that Peter had told her he was going away for a few days, seeing that all his work for the programme was done. Herr Direktor flew into a rage. Just when he wanted people they were always away without permission. If he didn't return to-day he would be fired.

Late that night, when the performance was finished, several big buses were waiting outside the theatre. The company was hustled into them and started for Berlin. Herr Direktor, driving hard, passed the buses in his big cream car, this time with Anna by his side. The buses drove through the night arriving in Berlin with the dawn. Herr Direktor was waiting at the Scala Theatre and escorted his company to the café across the Martin Lutherstrasse where the artistes from the Scala always ate. As usual, the doors of the café were wide open. The night crowd was just leaving and included nearly all the artistes who were appearing in the current production at the Scala. As Herr Direktor's artistes flooded in there were many exclamations of welcome from those they met coming out.

Cafés were the meeting places for all artistes who trouped between England and Turkey. One day a month, the first Monday afternoon of each

month, was accepted as the day when all artistes playing in or passing through Berlin, met at the coffee hour in the café of the Berlin Winter Garden. There the agents, producers, artistes wishing to make new connections, sat all the afternoon discussing business and the gossip of the road.

Herr Direktor ordered coffee and brotchen and called out for everyone to hurry. Already the wardrobe women and seamstresses were waiting for them at the Scala. He rushed his artistes through breakfast and shepherded them to the theatre. They climbed the long staircase to the big studios at the top of the theatre, and in the long rehearsal room in front they were fitted by the wardrobe women with costumes, some tacked together for fitting, others cut in readiness for tacking. Women rushed back and forth to the wardrobe-room on the right and to the one at the back with costumes of every colour piled over their shoulders, scissors in their hands, pins in their mouths, and tape measures around their waists. Sewing machines were set in the middle of the room.

Amid a flurry of women pinning and pinned, measuring and measured, taking off and putting on, an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colour and costume, Herr Direktor sat unmoving, the lord for whom all these women worked with such a sense of frantic hurry. He alone was quiet and composed, sitting at a table before which everyone in turn or in procession paraded up and down, turning as he told them so that he could view every angle.

His directions were given crisply, definitely, and the seamstresses followed the players, kneeling to pin and tack each costume to his directions.

At last he looked at his watch. It was time to go and everything was safely in hand. He led his family to the café again, ordered dinner and beer for everyone and sat among his family smiling. The show would be all right again now.

The buses drew to the door of the café on schedule, he herded the members of his company into them and waved them off. They drove through the afternoon sunshine to Hamburg along a straight smooth autobahn. Everyone was fast asleep and no one stirred as Herr Direktor flashed past in his big cream car.

# Chapter Thirty-five

On a hot May morning in Berlin members of Keller's Revue deposited their bags in the Scala Theatre and set out on the search for rooms. They must live close to the theatre, there would be so many rehearsals, and here the show was longer than ever. Berlin liked a long show.

Up and down the streets they went, all over the district. They searched and searched, but there were no rooms. There were many strangers in Berlin this year who had come to work in the factories that were preparing for the war. There were no rooms to be found. There was no alternative but to go to expensive tourist pensions until rooms were free. But even then, before they could rent rooms they must fill out pink papers for the police, with the numbers of their passports and a great many details of their lives. Eventually all managed to remember or imagine enough personal history to complete the forms. Then they retired to bed for a few hours' sleep.

But they had reckoned without German efficiency which thought of everything except the comfort and convenience of common people. Obedient to the last detail of regulations the proprietors of the pensions rushed the pink slips to the police, and the police stations stirred with activity.

Sleep for the tired artistes was broken by a knocking on their doors, imperious knocking. Opening the doors they found German policemen in couples, tall, ominous. They stood very stiffly at attention with their heels clicked together. They were in a very serious mood, they had no smiles, they were not to be fooled with. The lighthearted members of the Continental Revue began to feel the chill of Nazi Germany. One member, Tania, had a moment of panic.

Pappy Newman sat the first few days out in his office ready to help anyone who was in difficulties; the less trouble he had with the police the better. Nothing upset Pappy so much as the presence of the police. His own opinions were well known throughout the company, and he was never quite sure in Germany how much the authorities knew. He would be worried until the show opened.

He looked up from his papers to see Anna standing at the door of his office with none of her usual assurance on her face.

"Pappy, I must have some money."

"Money, money, everyone wants money, and now you want it. You don't need money."

"But, Pappy, I have none. How can I live?"

"Live!" he shouted. His nerves were on edge. "Herr Direktor pays everything for you. You have the best of clothes, all your costumes. What do you want money for? You have no time to go to shows."

"Yes, but I must have my hair dressed every other day, and it is so expensive; there is so much tax."

"The taxes drive me crazy." He swept up the papers from his desk and waved them at her. "Do not mention those taxes. You must not criticize the Government."

Anna paid no attention. "And then there are the lunches I must buy. Herr Direktor is so busy; to-day he took Kathi and Tania to lunch." There was a slight surge of fire in her dark eyes. "To-day I have had no lunch. I have no money."

"All right," said Pappy wearily. "Here is twenty marks. Go and have something to eat in the café across the street."

Anna grabbed the note, bright and smiling once more. She flung her arms around Pappy's neck and kissed him.

Anna rushed upstairs. Carlos stepped out to meet her. "It is all right. You have something?" he asked.

"Twenty marks," said Anna. "Let us go. I am hungry."

"Me too," said Carlos. "You see, Anna, how I tell you. You work like slave and you are paid like slave, nothing but your clothes and your keep. Believe me, we could get plenty good bookings in cabarets, you and me, and good money, too."

Anna looked around to see that no one could hear and she pulled his arm. "I am too hungry."

They turned to go out into the garden, and Mario, mopping his brow, came up to them. "Ha, my little Anna, is Pappy in his office?"

"Yes, but very, very bad temper."

"But I must eat," said Mario, sinking down to sit on a box. "I have no money and I have been drinking all day."

He went down the stairs to Pappy's office. He sank down into a chair and held his head between his hands. Pappy looked up. "What is it, Mario? Are you ill?"

"No, it is not that, but all day I have been drinking wine."

"You have been in the café?"

"No, it is Lolita's birthday, so I must go to her party. I go there at nine o'clock this morning and her room is already full of Spaniards, everyone drinking wine, and all morning and all afternoon we drink."

"And the wine did not agree with you."

"It was not the wine that affected my head, it was the talk. Never have I seen a girl like that . . . all day long she talked. And there was no food, only wine . . . wine and talk. My God, how I am hungry. Come, Pappy, you work too hard. Let us go to the café."

Mario was more subtle than Anna. "Come, Pappy, you are worried."

Pappy rose heavily. "It is the police. We shall have trouble. There is Peter. Where is he? No one knows. Herr Direktor is asking for him. He has gone away painting they say. But where? What about his permits, his passport? He will be arrested for a spy, and then there will be trouble for all of us."

"Come," said Mario. "Let us eat. I will find him for you."

When Mario left Pappy in the café to pay the bill, he went to find Kathi. By asking this one and that one he found her up in the rehearsal studio on the top floor of the Scala Theatre. She was sitting with Yogi. Both looked serene and peaceful, and neither spoke a word. Mario bowed to Yogi and Yogi bowed his head in acknowledgment.

"Kathi, my little one," said Mario. "You have heard from Peter?"

"But no."

"He will be back?"

"But yes."

Mario sighed. Kathi was so much a type; her mind had the smooth surface of complete innocence, Mario did not profess to understand it. It was a fault of perfection, that there was nothing beyond it; it sat alone on its pinnacle. For himself he preferred a more human warmth.

"He has written to you, Kathi?"

"But no."

"Not at all?"

"There was his note."

"Ha, a note. You have it?"

A smile lit up Kathi's face. "It is here. I keep it here." Naïvely her hand slipped into the shadow between her breasts and pulled out the note. Mario took it and read it.

"Ha," he said. It was not written in the way Peter talked. Here was a note of mystery. "He sent it to you?"

"No, he gave it to Tania for me."

"Ha!" There was a gentle note in Mario's voice. There lay his next clue. "He loves you very much, this Englishman. He will be back soon. I, Mario, will bring him back."

He rose, bowed gravely to Yogi, and left them. He glanced back as he went out through the door. They were sitting together in silence. He shrugged his shoulders once and went off in search of Tania.

He found Tania in the café among the Irish stage hands, a beer-swilling crowd.

"Mario," cried Pat. "Come and have one."

Mario waved his hand. "Me, I have been drinking wine at Lolita's birthday, gallons and gallons of it, and I, even I, must stop some time. Me, I want this little one." He put his hands on Tania's shoulders.

He took her to an alcove table. "My little one," began Mario, "Pappy is worried, very worried. You know Pappy is afraid, very afraid of the German police. Now Peter does not come back and Pappy thinks the police will pick him up and then there is more trouble for Pappy."

Mario was sure at the mention of the police that a sudden fear had shown through Tania's eyes.

"You know something, yes?" he asked gently.

"I do not know where he is."

"He is away painting a picture. It says so in a note he left for Kathi. But his note, it does not speak like Peter. I love you, I love, I love you. That is too, what you say, too warm?"

"He lov' her very, very much." There was a defensive in her voice and Mario did not miss it.

"Listen, my little one. Always we have been good friends, yes? Let us be frank. There is something between you and Kathi and Peter that I do not know, and this note it has the clue. That is not my business. Only I want to save Pappy from worry and for that we must get Peter back before the police bring him. You know that, yes?"

Tania nodded. "When Kathi go away with Herr Direktor, Peter is very, very jealous, and he go away to get better."

Mario nodded. "Then we must find him. Where would he go?"

"Me, I think he would not go far away," said Tania hopefully.

"True," agreed Mario. "He knew we were coming to Berlin and so he might be here, but he cannot be in rooms or an hotel, because he would be reported to the police."

"But if he sleeps with some woman he would avoid the police."

"But no," said Mario firmly. "Peter, he is a type. An artist, yes, but a virgin. Among the English they tell me it is possible. That being so what you say would not be reasonable, not unless Kathi and Herr Direktor . . . but no, I have seen Kathi to-day and, me, I always know."

He was sure Tania was holding something back.

"Maybe you look in the cabarets," suggested Tania.

"We will go around together," said Mario. "You have some money, yes?"

"No."

"Then we will borrow some."

"There is Elsa," said Tania quickly. "See, already she has been shopping. Ask her."

Mario's eyes lighted. Elsa always had money, and if she did not lend it she spent it. Elsa, too, had already probably covered most of the cabarets in town, including those that were not in good repute.

"Wait for me," said Mario. He crossed to Elsa, bent over her shoulder to give her cheek a smacking kiss. Elsa turned with a coarse laugh.

"Mario, liebchen. Have some wine with me."

"No, not wine."

"You are ill, yes?"

"I am not ill, no, only I shall drown if I drink one glass more. Elsa, you have been in many cabarets since we are here?"

"Plenty plenty."

"Peter, we have lost Peter and I must find him quickly."

"Peter? But I have seen him."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mario. "In a cabaret?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

Elsa shrugged. "How can I remember? Last night we go to so many. No, I cannot remember."

"Now think, Elsa," said Mario gently. He went over a number of names. Fashionable cabarets were out of the question, but Mario knew the others.

"Maybe it was that one," said Elsa to half a dozen of the names.

"Good. Your mind is clear like crystal," said Mario. "You have helped me very, very much. Now you can help me more. Lend me some money so that I can find him. When Pappy pays us I will pay it back to you."

When Mario returned to his table, Tania was gone. He was not surprised.

It was not hard to find Peter. Mario knew the cabarets Elsa had mentioned and he found Peter late that night, haggard and sullen, drinking cheap liquor.

"Peter, you are a fool. What is the matter?"

"Leave me alone," said Peter in a tired voice.

"Leave you alone! You think you are in England where one can be left alone. The police, what about the police?"

At the mention of the police Peter started up and looked around.

"You are not registered anywhere, you have not your passport. Where do you sleep?"

"In the daytime, in the park."

"So! And you drink all night." Mario leaned over. "You have some money if I order drinks, yes?"

"Very little."

"Very well, I will pay for them. Then you will come with me."

"I'm not coming back."

Mario's eye widened. "I do not understand. You were jealous, yes, that Kathi went with Herr Direktor? I tell you Kathi is waiting for you and that you are wrong, quite wrong. All is well. You come with me, you shave, you kiss her, and all is well."

Mario watched Peter's eyes flick nervously around the smoky cabaret. He leaned forward again.

"It is something else, yes? Tania?"

"To hell with Tania!"

"So!" said Mario, and he knew as he watched Peter that more had happened between Peter and Tania than Peter wished to remember. Mario felt a vague sadness. Peter and Kathi had been to him like a recollection of his own youth, so much in love, and that love so new and bright and clear.

"Mario," Peter's voice was tired, as if he had suffered beyond caring. "Listen, Mario, I've got to get out of this country, I've got to get away. You've got to help me."

"But what about Kathi? You love her. One does not run away from that."

"Listen, Mario, I am a murderer. . . ."

"You have killed someone?"

"Yes."

"To protect Kathi?"

"No."

"In the company?"

"No."

"Then why do you worry?" The question baffled Peter. Mario did not understand.

"Murder, murder, murder," said Peter. "Don't you know what that means?"

Mario touched his arm. "Better you tell me everything. There is someone else in this . . . Tania?"

Peter nodded. A faint smile played on Mario's lips. This little Tania had quality; she carried her scars without a whimper.

"Tell me," said Mario gently. The story came out like a flood released, the whole story until Peter and Tania were hidden in that doorway pressed close, body to body, as the police walked by. There Peter stopped. Mario's eyes were on him all the time, the eyes of an older man who has seen worse things, watching a boy suffer as youth always suffers, out of proportion to the cause.

"Ha!" said Mario, as Peter lapsed into gloomy silence. "That is a noble thing you have done."

Peter's dull eyes were sullen.

Mario continued, "One does not worry when one has killed vermin."

"Tell that to the police."

Mario smiled. "That Tania is clever. Many, many men disappear in Hamburg. Plenty seamen, plenty fights, plenty drunk men fall in canals. If he was stabbed, well, his body will not swell with gas and float, it will stay on the bottom. If it floats, he is a foreigner and that kind move without permits. Do you think the police will spend money looking for you? No, no, Peter. That was an act. It is past, it is done. One must forget it as one forgets the show when it is finished. You are to be congratulated." Mario leaned forward. "Me, I hate a pimp."

Mario smiled, lifted both his hands with a characteristic gesture. "So! Let us go. It is nothing."

"You don't understand," said Peter in a tired voice.

"There is something else?"

"I can't go back." Suddenly Peter woke from his sullenness to bitterness. "Mario, put yourself in my place. I had everything I wanted. It fell into my lap. Everything had gone against me in London and then I made a wrong turn and walked into Kathi and Yogi. Nothing was ever the same again. It was as if I walked like Alice through the looking-glass and everything was changed. I was in love . . . no one will ever know how much I loved Kathi, Mario. Everything came my way. Travel, the chance to paint, enough money to live on . . . I had everything in my grasp . . . and then in one night, in one night only, Mario, I threw it all away."

Mario listened sympathetically. "But I do not understand. If there is only this murder . . ."

"It is not only that. Tania murdered her uncle, she murdered me, and she murdered Kathi."

"Ha," said Mario. "It is something the matter with love? That is different. That is serious. Tania has done something?"

In reply Peter buried his head in his hands and his palms pressed against his forehead trying to crush out his thoughts. Mario nodded very slightly. It was Tania he should see to complete the story.

"I have seen your note to Kathi."

Peter looked up. "She showed it to you?"

"We had to find you, Peter. She keeps it in her bosom."

"But . . . she can't . . ."

"But she does." Mario's voice was firm. "It told her you were going painting for a few days, that you loved her more than anything in the world, and it ended, I love you, I love you, love you. . . ."

Peter's hands gripped the edge of the cabaret table. A floor show was going on through the haze of smoke, and amid the gusts of laughter, Mario and Peter were hard put to it to hear one another.

"That was not my note."

"I know," said Mario. "But Kathi does not know it. I can see now that your note was full of despair; I know too that Tania destroyed it . . ."

"She told you?"

"No, I guess it. She destroyed it and wrote the other. That was intelligent. Kathi still loves you. She alone is unruffled by this little storm. So now we can go back."

"I . . . I can't."

Mario knew he had won. "We cannot stay here. If one has no permit one must not frequent low-class cabarets, only the better ones. The police sometimes raid these and check all papers. Me, too, I am not registered. In Germany I do not like to meet the police."

Mario rose with an air of confidence knowing that Peter would follow him. Outside in the dark of the early morning hours they walked along together.

"The drama," said Mario. "That is one thing. Vaudeville, that is another. In vaudeville an act is over and one laughs and goes to the next. In drama

one act follows another to the inevitable end of tragedy or of love, complication following complication until it is unbearable unless it resolves itself. Believe me, Peter, it is better that life is like vaudeville. To-day is an act finished. To-morrow is another act. Kathi knows nothing, only that she loves you. You must forget everything; only that a mistake has been made. As a lover you are hurt, but it is more important that as an artist you have passed through an experience; you will understand life better to paint it."

Peter's voice was subdued and quieter. "Where are we going?"

"To my room. I have no room because I am not registered; in Germany if I do not sleep with someone I love, I sleep with the Arabs. We will sleep there to-night because in numbers there is confusion. To-morrow you will find a room and register with the police. Then you are safe."

A clock struck two. Confession to Mario had lifted a tremendous burden from Peter but, in its place, a desire to sleep and to sleep and to sleep had come over him. By noon to-morrow, thought Mario, he would be a different boy. As for himself, the night was early and he was intrigued to discover the rest of the story. He went to the Scala café, discovered that Pappy was giving a party in his rooms, and that Tania was there.

Mario was greeted at the party with a shout of welcome, but he eased himself towards the drinks and food and while he was helping himself he crooked a beckoning finger at Tania. She approached him warily.

"I have news for you, my little one. I have found Peter, I have soothed a troubled soul and put a tired body to sleep. You have some money, yes? Then we will go, you and I, to a quiet café. It is very important that I speak to you."

"He has told you?"

"He has told me he has helped you to throw some garbage into a canal. I am glad for you, very, very glad."

A short while later seated opposite Tania in an intimate booth his eyes seemed to be digesting this child who in these past few months had been thrusting herself up through the mass of the girls. He had seen the type before. They either went far or they burnt out in a flash as their power lines crossed other stronger power lines.

"Yes," said Mario. "It was a good thing; it was managed intelligently. There will be no trouble if there has been none by now. But, little one," Mario's eyes held Tania's firmly, "there is yet something. Peter wrote one note to Kathi; you destroyed it and wrote another."

"He knows?" Tania's green eyes met Mario's without flinching. Her dark hair around the pale face seemed to throw up the high cheek bones and accentuate the sharp planes of her cheeks. Her lips, Mario decided, were warm but too firm to be passionate. There was nothing loose about Tania. Inside her own citadel she was sure and completely self-contained. If she were so at sixteen, what would she be at twenty?

"Yes, he knows. First you destroy him, and then you try to save him. Why?"

A smile moved slowly over Tania's lips. "I do not destroy Peter."

Mario leaned forward, a favourite attitude of his. His eyes widened, another favourite mannerism. "My little one, I have lived a long time, I do not know everything, but about love I know very, very much. I look at Peter and I know."

"What do you know?"

"When I saw him before in Hamburg he loves, but of the heart only. When I see him to-night I know he loves, but also he has loved of the body. You understand, no? There is a line. One crosses it; I, Mario, I have seen it so many times; the shadow of maturity, it crosses the face and I, Mario, I know it."

Tania still met his eyes, but she knew that he knew.

"You will tell no one?"

"Me, I do nothing that will hurt the heart. Maybe perhaps you should learn that."

"I didn't mean it . . . it happened." Tania felt her muscles lock with the echo of the tenseness of that experience spiced by murder. She, too, had crossed a line. Nothing ever again could exceed that experience.

"I am sorry," said Mario.

His reaction seemed to surprise Tania. Her eyes showed it.

"You learn much, but you have much to learn," continued Mario. "Listen, my little one, for us who live for the theatre love comes and love goes, but always it comes again. It is like the show, one act follows another —twice to-night I say that—but there are some women to whom love comes only once, who only love one man; Kathi is like that. Some men there are, too, love comes like a flash and they are changed; if two people are like that, they love for always. Peter and Kathi were like that."

Tania's eyes, staring at the table top while Mario was speaking, turned up to meet his, and he saw that the light of them was a sheen over hard steel. She tapped her bosom with her hand as she spoke.

"So I am wrong. Always it is I who am wrong. I cannot lov'. Men can do what they like to me; my uncle can track me down to destroy me, they can feast their greedy eyes on me every day, every night . . . oh, yes, I know how they look at me, how their hands would reach out to drag me down. But no, because I want one man, I am wicked."

The hardness in her eyes broke into a laugh that was both mocking and defiant. "All right, Mario, yes, I made Peter lov' me, and, Mario, you are right, he was new, so that it was like the spring comes in my country after the winter, like the stream flooding down from the mountains, like the warm, winds blowing from the plains, and the grass and the leaves and the flowers they can't wait, they must push up through the earth all new and clean to see the white clouds blowing across the sky, and the sky so blue. . . . Ha, Mario, you know the spring in my country, so swift and so beautiful . . . and you talk to me of lov'?"

She laughed again.

"You talk to me of Kathi, you talk to me of Peter, and I, it is only I, who know that you and the others think of them as a pretty picture, a picture of lov', like a wedding cake, sugar, and icing. But me, I want lov' that is hot like a flame; it burns, Mario, it burns and always it will be fresh and new."

Mario nodded. "I know that, my little one. With you, love will always burn. You will be the flame and men will be the oil that feeds it. The other love, the love that is still, like a deep pool, you will never know."

Tania brushed aside his words. "You say I hurt Peter. I do not hurt him, I only wake him up. And I give him back to her."

Mario smiled slightly. This Tania was deeper than he suspected. Could it be that she was in love with Peter? Tania stared her last statement at Mario and then thrust her bright eyes nearer to him.

"Listen, Mario. Always I live with Kathi and Peter and, me, I lov' Kathi, she is beautiful, she is like a doll, but does she speak, does she laugh? No, always she is there, and she looks at Peter and smiles and she sews her dresses while Peter fights with me and we talk all the time. But when Peter is with me alone, does he talk, does he laugh? No, he is always thinking of Kathi. They are . . . oh, they are, like the Babes in the Wood, Mario. But I

tell you, Mario, if Peter lov' like that he will be nothing; never, never will he be great artist. He will go more and more fast asleep."

"Kathi", said Mario gently, "is the best ballet dancer in all Europe, and the most beautiful."

Tania shrugged impatiently. "It is because she dances as one in a dream. She lives as one in a dream, and she dances the same."

"You touch a profound problem, my little one," said Mario. "There is one kind of beauty that can only exist uncontaminated by the world; there is another kind of beauty that can only grow in the mud of the world. One is of the eyes and the other is of the spirit. In your way, my little one, you have seen them both in Kathi and Peter. Rest assured, my little one, the world spares no one. You have been impatient; that is all; and I, for one, am sorry; I like fairy-tales."

"Me, I know only life," said Tania. "I am not sorry, I am glad."

"Be careful, little one. This passion which pushes you up can also pull you down."

Tania shrugged her shoulders and rose from the table. Her face broke into a sudden smile, as bright and fresh as her own youth. "Me, I shall be very, very good now; work very, very hard. You tell Herr Direktor I am very, very good and work very, very hard, yes?"

"It's a bargain," said Mario, "if you leave Peter to Kathi."

"You see," smiled Tania. "He better artist now. Better for Kathi, too. I go home now to bed."

"Sleep well, little one," called Mario.

Tania turned and smiled at him, a disarming smile. Then she came back to the table.

"Tell me, Mario, what happen when Kathi wake up from little girl and see life like you and me?"

Without waiting for his answer she left him and Mario shook his head slightly as he watched her. That little one would go far.

# Chapter Thirty-six

The members of the Continental Revue sat in the garden of the Scala Theatre on a hot June afternoon, all in costume, all made-up ready for the matinée performance at four. Once more the show was well launched for a successful run. The opening night had been a spectacular success, and the revue was playing to packed houses. Herr Direktor was delighted, everyone was happy. But the summer was hot, very hot. Fortunately there was the garden. The garden behind the Scala Theatre was large and completely secluded. It was flanked on one side by great doors opening from the back of the stage to the garden. The other sides were shut from the world by the high windowless walls of pensions. No street noises could be heard, not even through the deep-set gate on the fourth side through which lorries could drive to the stage door. The garden was large and even the three hundred members of the revue did not seem to crowd it. This was where they spent their time, morning, noon, and night, sitting in the shade of the great trees.

Under the pension walls were big lorries fitted as dressing-rooms because there were not enough rooms, even in the Scala, for so many artistes. The lorries had lost their workaday appearance; costumes, properties, pots, and pans hung about them, and their occupants sat lazily near on the steps and on chairs. Under a row of trees stretched long tables and benches where the artistes could eat without changing costumes. Sunlight and shadow lay on the close-cut grass in large sleepy patterns, lighting or subduing the colours of costumes. The smaller patterns of the garden were thrust into the background by the larger patterns of groups of players lying, sitting, leaning, laughing, talking, working, snatching a few moments of sleep.

The Rastellas were together as usual; Papa snoring on his back; Mama, working on her Russian cross-stitch, sat on a stool far too small for the expanse it had to hold; Rita was writing a letter to Claud.

Friedl was working on the life-sized puppets which appeared with her on the stage. Dressed like herself in Hungarian peasant costume they sat around her, sagging in their frames. Friedl had seen her little daughter Julie come out of the stage door and her face lit with happiness. Julie had joined the show for the summer run; she was dressed in a cellophane ballet skirt to her knees; she had already scored a success in her toe dance on top of the big

black Bechstein piano. Julie ran to Friedl and Friedl touched her costume here and there adjusting where there was no need for adjustment.

Madame Rastella looked up from her needlework, watching the gate as Mario came through. She raised her arm and waved to him.

"Mario, Mario!" Her husband sat up with the shock of waking. "Mario, you took so long. Did you get my hair dye?"

Mario wiped his wet brow. "Ja, ja, mein Gott! I walked all over Berlin before I could find that dye."

"Ha!" she exclaimed. Her face was sad because poor Mario had had to walk so far in the heat of Berlin. "But you got it?"

"Of course I got it."

He handed her the parcel. Papa Rastella relaxed into cool sleep again.

"Ha!" sighed Madame again. She was very fond of Mario, he loved her cooking and her coffee. She opened the bottle and examined it to make sure he had brought the right shade. Then she opened her big carrier of food which she had brought for the meal after the matinée. She took out a bottle of wine and a glass and set it on the table under the tree.

"Come, Mario," she said. "Come, you must have some wine. You are so hot, you are so tired. Come, drink."

The English boys had brought a dart board with them and had set it on the wide trunk of a tree. Herr Direktor was demonstrating his skill with English darts for the benefit of the Japanese agent who had come from Tokio to book the show for the Tokio Exposition.

Peter Kyrle sat in the shadow of a lorry, watched by several of the girls of the company, as he sketched the garden scene. The serenity of the garden, mingled with the colour and vitality of the artistes all waiting around for the matinée to start, was a picture that had caught him from the first moment he had seen it. He knew he might never see another like it, and he had plunged into it with a fervour that had burnt out any thought of his black week. He painted it for what it was, a peaceful yet teeming core of unreality in the heart of a noisy and hot city, large masses of sun and shadow, shot with groups of people of all ages, and of every colour, in costume, all against the background of the open stage door of the theatre through which, dimly in the sunlight, the back of the scenery was visible.

Then suddenly Pappy was at the head of the runway from the garden to the stage calling, "Places, places, everybody."

The colour melted from the garden into a multi-hued stream and from the back of the stage came the strains of the orchestra. After the opening act players drifted back into the garden, grouping, changing, as acts came off and others went on.

It was time for the leopard act. Pat came through the garden from the low shed where the animals were kept in the open for the summer. He raced with big Rex on a lead.

"Stop that, Pat!" cried Herr Direktor. "Rex is a wild animal. You must see that there is no one sitting close by when he passes. The weather is so hot he might do something bad."

"Naw!" said Pat, sitting on the runway to the stage and putting his arms around Rex's neck. "He wouldn't hurt anyone, would you, Rex?"

"All right, Pat," shouted Herr Direktor. "Some day you will have an accident."

He turned to bawl at Bert, the Irish property man, who was starting a race with the hyena on a leash.

"Bert, keep that hyena away from Rex. They are not kittens. They will get in a fight with the garden full of artistes."

"Good," laughed Bert, as he sat down with his pet at a safe distance and began petting it. The hyena opened its jaws and howled.

"Mein Gott, mein Gott!" Herr Direktor raised his arms in despair. "It is a crazy company I have got."

He turned and went up the runway to the stage. Hearing the music of the preceding number, one after another the animal trainers led a leopard up the runway and in through the big folding-doors which were open to the garden and the sunshine. In a few moments, because the act was short, one after another the leopards ran down the runway again dragging their trainers behind them. Rex this time was with Anna who always took him back to his cage herself. She was far from being strong enough to hold him if he had decided to bolt for freedom, but she ran ahead of him holding his leash. Running like a wild thing in a leopard skin herself, she raced across the garden still excited from her act. Suddenly Rex, resenting being pulled by a female, sat down. He always developed a male coyness when Anna was with him. Anna tugged with all her strength and Rex yawned. The animal trainers returned and, after all their combined efforts to move him had failed, Rex jumped up and loped to his cage.

“Could you imagine us running around in the open with these leopards in England?” asked Bert.

He wiped the perspiration from his brow and watched Bill Hardy bringing his mule Maud across the garden to the runway. The two were fooling like a pair of lovers.

“I certainly could not,” answered Jack. “Look at all these kids playing around, too. The London County Council would never allow this. They’d close the show up if we allowed these leopards loose like this.”

“I can’t figure it out,” said Bert.

“Can’t figure what out?” chuckled Bill Hardy, pushing Maud’s nose from his ribs.

“We were just talking about these wild animals. The German police are so strict and yet in this country we get away with almost anything.”

Bill buffeted Maud, affectionately pushing her away from his ear. “It’s simple, gents. Once you get the formula you can figure it out any time, I know, and I’ve travelled the Continent for seventy years.” He held out his hand, palm facing the ground. “Now here’s the line. Anything above that is the bosses, anything below that is the people. Now in England if you do anything likely to hurt us folk below the line, then the police step in. In this country if you do anything likely to hurt them above the line, then the police step in. You figure that out and you’ll find it works every time.”

“I never looked at it that way,” said Bert.

“Sure, you didn’t. You’re dumb like the rest of ’em. You let ’em work you twice the hours, and tax off half your pay, and so long as they let you kill yourself drinking in cabarets open all night you think you’re having a fine time. You’re suckers, my boy, just suckers.”

Jack winked at Bert. “Seems to me we see you around the bar at sunrise.”

“That’s because I’m in love with Maud, but I can’t go to bed with her. She kicks me out. That right, old girl?” Chuckling, the old man went up the runway with his mule behind him pushing its nose in the small of his back.

In a pen near the leopards the Shetland ponies played around in the open. A new one had just been born, a tiny black thing no bigger than a dog. It stood beside its mother and the children were jumping with excitement over the new pony. Little Myrtle, Biji, Snowball, Ching Ching, they were all hanging around the side of the pen. Herr Direktor had told them they could

christen the little pony, and he would have a card made with the name on it to place over the stall. After a great deal of noisy debating they had settled on a name. It was to be called Scala after the theatre where it had been born. They raced back to his office in the theatre to tell him what the new name would be.

The interval was on. One after another, the artistes having made their changes came out into the garden, until it was filled with costumes, and people of every country walking up and down to cool off. The garden looked like a gypsy encampment. There was none of the lazy serenity that had characterized the scene before. The tables and benches were filled with artistes in costumes drinking beer bought from the canteen under the stage. In the murmur of sound that rose up from the enclosed garden laughter predominated. The big family was happy. The sun was shining, and they were together, shut off from the world to which they did not belong.

Around one of the tables the English girls of the company had managed to make tea and Peter Kyrle and the Nichols were with them. The English members had an arrangement with Meg, Dick's wife, to have tea ready for them during the interval. Near them the new baby of the little Chinese woman in the new Chinese act slept peacefully in its pram. Its mother smiled as she looked down at him and then moved his pram so that the moving shadow of the sun would not leave him exposed during the second half of the show.

Mario sat on the steps of one of the vans tuning his guitar. He was in deep conversation with Shantoya, the new Javanese dancer and his wife. Shantoya was a special friend of Mario's. Shantoya had taken twelve years to perfect his Javanese dance. He danced in his bare feet turning his toes back in a manner no one else in the company could copy. But dancing was not Shantoya's chief interest. He was a linguist, a master of many difficult languages. He had been teaching Oriental languages at the University of Berlin. The University had paid him only forty-two marks a week, while Herr Direktor paid him twenty marks a day. Shantoya and his Dutch wife were old friends of Mario's. The three of them were insatiable readers, they were always well-informed and conversation never flagged. Madame Shantoya was not a professional artiste. She had accompanied Shantoya everywhere and was a good Bohemian, very much in love with him. The three of them were very happy and gay.

Under one of the great trees an elderly man sat on a stool with a young girl sitting at his feet with her arm across his knee. Herr Grun was a Swiss. His bushy grey hair framed a thin, intelligent face. He was the oldest

colleague of Herr Direktor. He had been a partner since the formation of the show twenty years before. He had come from Switzerland with his daughter Marguerite who had joined the show for the summer to please him. He also audited the company's books, adding to Pappy Newman's many troubles.

Marguerite was an attractive girl with soft brown curly hair, serious grey eyes, and a slight figure. She looked too much like a student to be a dancer.

"Marguerite," he said, "I would like you to attend more rehearsals, attend all of them all of the time we are here, whether Herr Direktor tells you to or not. I want you to learn as much as you can."

"But, father, you know I am not going on the stage. I am going through college."

"There is so much that you do not get in the books at school, much about living, that you can learn from these people. They are all so happy; they are not serious like you. See them, even the old ones. They are always lighthearted, they play and sing and dance."

"But, father, they are . . . they are such children."

"That is right, liebchen, children. They are fortunate. There is plenty of time to be serious, yes!" He looked away into space. "Plenty and plenty of time to be serious. Enjoy your youth while you can . . . for this long summer anyway. None of us knows what is ahead of us."

"Father," said Marguerite, smiling at him, "you are always thinking of the war."

"It will come," he replied. "It will come."

There was a short silence, then he spoke again.

"When it does, we cannot tell what will happen. When it does there may not be any great need for what you have learned in your books, but people will need more and more to laugh, so these people here will go on. The world will always want to see them play, when the world does not care if we others starve. Remember, liebchen, wisdom is not always intelligence as we see it."

Just then Rosine and Sandra dashed down the steps of the caravan on the other side of the great tree. The caravan was filled with new girls from Munich and Vienna, brought to augment the chorus for the summer. Rosine was fourteen; this was her first engagement, and she enjoyed every minute of it. Sandra was seventeen with Oriental eyes and a laughing mouth. She looked all around for Mario, then ran to put her arms around his neck and

began to whisper in his ear. Mario was known to be able to work wonders for anyone who needed a favour.

"Mario," she coaxed, "you will make Mundi come to the dance tonight?"

"Perhaps," he said.

"But, Mario," her eyes filled with tears. "Please, Mario, I want him to come."

"All right, all right." Mario could not resist tears. "All right. He will come."

Sandra was in love. Very well, Mario would see that Mundi went to the dance, even if he had to drag him there himself.

At the English tea table they were discussing Moritz, the new balancing act.

"I believe that he has signed for a year with Herr Direktor," said Eileen, one of the chorus girls.

"He's crazy," said Connie. "They say he left a big engagement to come in the show, and now Herr Direktor has submerged him so much that he has no chance to show what he can do. He does that with every new act."

"Naturally," said Dick. "He does not want any act to stand out too much from the others. That's fair."

"I wonder why Moritz stands for it," said Connie.

"I know," laughed Dorothy. "He only joined the show so that he could get to England to get married."

"Why can't he marry here?"

"She is Polish and only pure Germans can marry in Germany."

"He must be very much in love with her then," said Connie.

"Sure," said Dorothy. "He refused a contract with Hagenback's circus just to get to England."

"Well, they have been in enough countries, why couldn't they get married somewhere else?"

"On the Continent it is the same everywhere," said Dick Nichols. "My grandmother had to wait a full year until all the papers were signed, it is so complicated."

"Why didn't she go to England?"

"She couldn't; she was always working in Germany or the Balkans; she had no money to go to England for a wedding. None of us have, and Moritz is just the same."

"You'd think he would be ashamed to talk about it," said Connie. "They have two children already, Patri is six and the baby is in Budapest. Why, she only looks sixteen . . . his wife, if that is what you call her."

"Don't be so hard, Connie."

"So you approve of it?"

"When anyone loves a person so much that they cannot live without them . . . then I can understand."

"Places, places!" cried Pappy.

There was an immediate dissolving of the kaleidoscopic elements of the scene into a stream up the runway to the stage.

All through the hot afternoon the artistes continued to pass in and out of the big stage door, up and down the runway in every kind of costume, standing at the doors for a few minutes to cool off, going out into the limelight to do their acts, down the stairs to the dressing-rooms to change and then back to the garden again to laze until they heard the music of the act preceding theirs, running up the runway, through the in-between world back-stage and out into the limelight again. Applause, music, laughter floated out into the garden while other artistes sat under the trees. Across the garden the animals for the different acts ran back and forth, the prancing white Arab horses, the graceful Borzoi hounds, the excitable Shetland ponies, Pat fooling with his little monkeys; tiny Gretchen carrying the parrot for the jungle scene.

Rita came out of the shadow of the stage, her sequin brassiere and ceinture glittering in the sudden sunshine. She stood, unconscious of the startling effect, and shaded her eyes looking towards the arched entrance. It was time for the postman. She saw him coming and ran to the porter's lodge, flying across the garden with her lovely black hair streaming behind her.

"Poor Rita," said Rastella, sitting up on the grass. "It is the love sickness she has."

Rita came back smiling. She had a letter from England.

Rita stopped as she passed Mario. “Come, Mario.” She caught his arm. “You must translate it for me. Tell me if Claud is coming to Berlin. I have asked him to come.”

They went under a tree and sat on the grass.

“Read it, Mario. You can tell me in German what he says. It is his first letter and I cannot read English.”

Mario read the letter, but did not hurry to translate it as Rita watched him impatiently.

“What does he say? Read it, every word.” She was afraid there was something wrong.

“Dear Rita,” read Mario. “I could not write sooner, I have been very busy.”

“Go on.”

“I hope you have had a successful opening in Berlin, and that Mama and Papa are well. Tell Mama I would like to have some of that good coffee she used to make for us when we came back from our drives at night.” Rita’s face broke into a slow happy smile at the recollection. “Why were you always afraid, Rita? You are too good for me; you deserve someone better. I shall always think a great deal of you, but I hope you will marry some nice boy on the Continent. You are much too good for me and I mean it. You see, if you had not always been afraid, things might have been different. . . . Sincerely, Claud.”

“Is that all he says?” Rita’s voice was slow and her eyes were staring across the garden.

Mario did not look up. “It is all he says.”

“Mario, you are my friend. What does a letter like that mean? Does it mean that he still loves me? I think if he does not love me I shall die, I love him so much.”

“Well,” said Mario cautiously. “Why does he repeat about your being afraid?”

Rita flushed. “You see, Mario, when I first went to England I could not speak English. He asked me to marry him. I thought that meant we would be engaged and he would give me a ring and then we would have a wedding. When we went for drives he would kiss me . . . it is so hard for me to explain . . . but, Mario, I could never do anything I knew was wrong, and he

would laugh at me, and say I acted like a baby, that I was silly, that I was just afraid. Sometimes he got angry. I could not help it, I can never do anything I feel is wrong. I loved him so much that when I was with him I almost did what he wanted . . . but I shall always be glad I was afraid . . . as he says in the letter."

"You were right," said Mario. "Always what you feel in your heart, that is right."

"But, Mario, if I have lost him?"

"Rita, if he loves you you have not lost him; if he does not love you, you have lost nothing."

He gave the letter back to Rita who took it and walked slowly across the garden to Mama and Papa.

"Always," murmured Mario to himself. "Always it is love."

"What is it, bambi?" asked Madame. "Was it a letter from England?"

"Yes."

"Is Claud coming to Berlin to see you?"

"No."

"Why not? He has asked you to marry him. Does he not want to see you?"

"I do not know, Mama; he does not say."

"Very well, then," said Madame. She had decided to do something about it. She could not see her baby suffer. "You must write to him and ask him if he is going to marry you, and when." She had no desire to lose her Rita, but if Rita wanted this Englishman then it was necessary to get him for her. Madame had always given Rita everything she wanted so now she must do something about it. She gazed at Rita with a sad expression in her eyes. Rita tried to smile at her mother.

"Yes, you must write to him and ask him when he is coming to marry you."

"Mama, I could not do that . . . I could never do that. If he does not want me, then I do not want him." She leaned down to her mother, put her arms around her neck and kissed her. "It will be all right, Mama. Do not think any more about it."

"Oh, I would write to him if it were me. If I were your age and wanted him, I would go back to England and get him."

Arthur Murray, the new English organist who had just arrived from England that same day, stepped out into the garden, dressed ready for the stage.

Kaspar, the midget, was sitting with his wife Gretchen under a tree.

"Think I will go over and speak to that guy," he said, reverting to a nasal American accent. "He takes one look at this gang and gets frightened."

Gretchen laughed. "No wonder."

Kaspar crossed to the runway. "Thought I would say hello," said Kaspar. "Guess you feel rather strange."

"Thanks," said Arthur. "Nice to hear you speak English. I don't know a word anyone is saying."

"Well, you aren't missing much," said Kaspar. "Like to have a cognac? We can get a quick one at the café in front before I go on the stage."

"Sure," said Arthur, beginning to feel at home already.

"Let's run," said Kaspar. "I haven't much time."

They began to race across the garden. Gretchen sat up and dropped the dress she was making for the Chinese baby.

"I bet that new Englishman is just another soak."

Dorothy and Nancy arm in arm were going up the runway as Pat came to go to the stables.

"Say, Pat, was that the new organist, just going out?"

"Don't know," said Pat. "Haven't seen him yet. Getting so many people around here I can't keep track of them. Remember me telling you the old man had something up his sleeve? I'll bet you ten marks he's working up another company."

"Not for Kathi," said Dorothy.

"Maybe not. Keep your peepers on young Tania."

"She's got nothing we haven't got," said Nancy, who didn't care anyway.

"Says you!" laughed Pat and was gone.

# Chapter Thirty-seven

The matinée was nearly finished. The new signs of activity in the garden showed it.

The wife of the Arab chief, tall, dark, and aristocratic, came through the gate. She was carrying in each hand big bags of food. Behind her, Snowball, her adopted child, black as ink, staggered with more bags of food.

The animal trainers came in from the dairy across the street, carrying litres and litres of milk, brotchen, pumpernickel, pastries, and butter. The Irish trainers, never at a loss for blarney even in Germany, had coaxed out of the fat lady in the dairy far more than she had wanted to give them. They did it every day.

The curtain fell just on the stroke of eight. There was one half-hour interval to empty and fill the house, one half-hour in which to eat and re-touch make-up. Costumes were quickly changed ready for the opening scene and there was a stampede to the little canteen under the stage opposite the orchestra room. It was a small room with three gas rings, and a couple of the stage cleaners superintending the making of the coffee. Coffee was becoming scarce in that year. They crowded into the little room, members of the orchestra and members of the company, watching the pots and saucepans boiling.

One after another the artists came up the narrow stairs carrying coffee and beer. They crossed to the tables where their bags of food, sandwiches, cold meats, fruit were spread out. They set their drinks down and began to eat.

The theatre was still emptying. One exit emptied into the arch by the entrance. The people of the audience saw the artistes sitting at tables and eating, so instead of going out of the gate, they flooded into the garden and crowded around the tables, staring in silence as though they were watching a zoo. The lovely garden suddenly became vulgar. The stage crew and the attendants came out and ordered the people away, but they stayed, hundreds of them, and, as they became used to the scene, they began to pass the usual personal and crude remarks about the artistes, their clothes, their make-up, the food they were eating. Manners were surface polish which always deserted the Germans in a crowd.

Bill Hardy sat with the animal trainers. “Look at them,” he said. “Get the leopards out, Pat, that’ll send ’em running. A man can’t have a private life in this bloody country.”

Gradually the attendants shepherded the people towards the gates. At last the gates were shut. The intrusion was forgotten. Finished their evening meal, the Arabs decided to rehearse and began building pyramids in the centre of the garden directed by the Arab chief. They scaled higher and higher catching little Biji, and passing her up, an eager flash of white teeth and wire-like hair, amid the applause of the other artistes. Dropping to earth they charged with excited cries at the heavy base man and scaled again.

“Up, up,” shouted the chief. “Bravo,” cheered the crowd, as if they had not seen the act day in and day out for months and years.

Yogi sat at the stage door wrapped in his shawl. Even the windless warmth of this Berlin evening did not always take the chill from his old bones. Kathi sat beside him. Kathi was already dressed for the opening scene in a South American costume of red and gold satin. She held the wide-brimmed hat on her knees. She had a quiet happiness that touched all who came near her. Peter had changed since his return to the company, quickly matured by Continental life and the constant contact with men who had been all over the world, men who had little use for a settled life, each one absorbed in his own enthusiasms. Peter had been able to stand apart at first and wonder at the teeming life of the Revue, but now he was absorbed into it and was part of it. He was working harder than ever, painting in the big studios above the theatre a complete new set of scenery and snatching time to work at his picture of the garden.

Kathi sat with Yogi looking towards Peter. The sun was now high on the windows of the Krankenhaus, and the windowless walls of the pensions and the great back wall of the theatre were cut with shadow. Soon, when the evening show began, darkness would settle in soft waves over the garden.

Yogi had three new friends in the show and they came running to talk to him now. Anna, Julie, Cecile, aged fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen, were three charming little girls who had come from Finland with their parents. They, unlike the other young girls with the show, were still childish. They belonged to the new cycle act. They were fascinated by Yogi and his face lit up when he saw them coming. The little one brought him flowers which he took and held in his brown hand.

It was nearly half-past eight, the meals were all finished. With the knack of people always on the move and used to living under all kinds of

conditions, they finished with little litter and what there was, was quickly cleared away. Then the artistes began to drift to the theatre for the opening number of the next show. Lubichov came hurrying through the arched gate and ran down the stairs to the orchestra room. Tania came to the stage door in a cerise satin evening dress. It was strapless and skin-tight. Her hair was beautifully coiffured and she looked at least twenty. Tania was a world away from the little gamin who had gone with the show to London. She looked for Peter. She had an implicit faith in his taste and she wanted to know if he approved of her appearance. Where Kathi stood still in life, Tania ran. Kathi's English had relapsed as Peter's German improved, but Tania punished herself and Peter to learn English with exactness. It would be useful.

There was no sign of Peter. Tania looked disappointed.

"All on . . . all on," shouted the theatre stage-manager. The members of the company raced to the stage, as they were off for another four-hour non-stop performance.

Rosana came to the stage door. She was ready for her appearance in the Ave Maria scene. In the cool of the evening she came out into the garden, serene in her robes of a nun, looking like the part she was playing. Then she heard her music cue and she moved slowly towards the runway to the stage.

Herr Direktor wandered out to sit under the trees in the moonlight for a few moments. He had had an idea. From the window of his office he had seen the dim colours of costumes wandering in and out of the moonlit shadows and he had had an idea for a ballet scene. Here was the very setting and he could open with it in Paris.

Rani, seeing him come out, went over to talk to him.

"Herr Direktor." It was easier to tell him in the moonlight. "I want to tell you I am leaving the company."

"Yes, Rani? What is wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong. I am in love. I am going to be married."

"Yes? To whom?"

"It is a man I met here, a Chinese man."

"What does he do?" Herr Direktor had brought Rani from China.

"He has his own act. He is going to New York next month. We are to marry and I will go in the act with him."

"You are going to New York? You think you would like that?"

"But I am in love with him."

"Well, if you want to go, I only hope you will be happy. If ever you want to come back you know you can always come, Rani."

"Thank you, Herr Direktor."

He rose. The beauty of the garden had no quality of time, but Rani had brought to him a consciousness of age. It made one feel old, little children he had taken into the company getting married. Perhaps this insistent thought of marrying Kathi was a sign that he was getting old and wanted to settle down with someone calmer, less restless than these other artistes of his. He surrounded himself with youth, but it grew up, married, and had babies . . . which reminded him . . . Olivia would be having her baby soon. He had better rehearse someone in her parts.

He heard voices and low laughter from the deep shadow of one of the lorry dressing-rooms. He stopped. Yes, that was Anna's laughter and that voice was Carlos' voice. He was very fond of Anna, and if she could find happiness with Carlos so much the better. He must see Peter about some sketches for the Moonlight Ballet. He went into the theatre.

Peter came around from the front of the theatre to the garden. He never missed seeing Kathi's ballet scene from the front of the house, and never tired of it. He knew her true beauty in the hush of the audience as she danced and then by the spontaneous burst of applause as she floated off-stage.

He waited in the moonlight. The full moon was high over the garden, shadowing the walls of the Krankenhaus, and bathing the secluded garden in blue-green light. The shadows of the trees cut great swathes of darkness on the grass, and, in the muted light, artistes sat in costume talking quietly or laughing. A row of lights from the basement dressing-rooms and a shaft from the stage door cut across the grass. Music floated through the garden, muted by the scenery back-stage; after each act applause rolled out from the stage door, with a sound of ocean waves falling lazily on a beach.

Into the moonlit garden came Kathi, fairy-like in her short ballet skirts. Straight to the shadow of her favourite tree she came, and Peter, leaning against its bole, stepped forward to meet her and took her in his arms. Their lips met and stayed close and neither spoke. It was a magic moment. Always after her dance Kathi was in another world, open and defenceless, and she relaxed into his arms, giving her lips without restraint. Her so fair hair

gleamed in the moonlight, her silvery tight bodice, her short frilled ballet skirts, were like the moonlight. Her legs unconsciously taking a ballet pose, she had an airy moth-like quality.

Then she drew her lips away from Peter's.

"My dance, it was good to-night?"

"You were beautiful."

Her lips were on his again and then she was releasing herself, breathless. "I must go to change. I will return."

Peter watched her move across the lawn through the moonlight. He heard a low laugh from behind him and turned to see Tania.

Here was no sense of unreality.

"Were you here all the time?" he asked.

Tania laughed. "No, I came. I saw you and I blew like this . . . pouff! . . . and Kathi blew away."

A slight frown crossed Peter's brow. Tania had a way of saying things that had a flavour of truth.

"Some day," said Tania, "the world will go pouff . . . and then, if you do not watch her, she will blow away altogether. I say that right, yes?"

"You say too much," said Peter.

"You saw me to-night? I was beautiful, yes?"

Peter's troubled eyes stared straight into hers. She did not wait for his answer. She stood in the full moonlight away from the shadow, her face alive with half-mocking laughter. "No, I do not come to steal you away from Kathi." Her eyes, if not her words, reminded him of the dark secrets they shared together. Her voice was husky and low. "I lov' Kathi and . . . that is strange . . . I lov' you. But you do not know that." She was laughing at him in the moonlight as if in the arrogance of her youth and her success she knew that she could steal him from Kathi as easily as she had stolen him once before.

"Sometime I think you lov' only a dream, a very beautiful dream, like this night with the music and the light . . . over there." Her arm pointed to the theatre. "Sometimes I think you are a fool like me . . . I am a big fool to lov' you . . . but I forget . . . I must say it as the English say it . . . I luv you, I

luv you." Then, mocking him with her laugh, she moved away towards the theatre singing in her husky voice, "How sweet is gypsy love".

Peter leaned against the tree, watching her lift her long skirts and run up the runway to the stage. She was callous. She would sell her soul and her body to get what she wanted, but the price would be high. He thrust his hands into his pockets as there surged into his mind the memory of that night in Hamburg. He thrust the memory back again into the depths because what came up even more vivid than the murder was the memory of Tania's body.

# Chapter Thirty-eight

The show finished, and a few minutes later the artistes began to hurry up the stairs from the dressing-rooms, through the garden, past the porter's little lodge under the arch, ignoring the stiff Nazi salute of the severe-faced watchman, and replying with an easy wave of the hand and a smile.

Harry Nichols and Zira, the Persian girl, came out arm in arm,

"We shall have a little supper, Zira, and then I will take you to the pension."

"You will do no such thing. We are going dancing to-night."

"I cannot. I have no money to spare. We have been to a cabaret every night this week. I have to help Dick to make up the cheque for Mother and Dad."

"Mother and Dad, fiddlesticks," said Zira. "We are in Berlin and it is summer. I want to dance."

"But, Zira, the cheque for Mother and Dad . . ."

"Oh, stop it!" They turned to the taxi stand. A door slammed.

Mario with the Rastellas and the Shantoyas, turned in the direction of the Roma Café, the favourite meeting-place of the Italians in Berlin. One after another different groups went in different directions for the night. Most of them went across the street to the theatre café, and joining one another they made up groups at the little tables, calling for beer. Bill Hardy, Ronnie, the Irish property men, Long Tom and the Wagners, all the English boys. The room was bright with lights and music. The walls were lined with photographs, signed and framed, of actors and actresses who had played at the Scala through the years.

Herr Direktor had been waylaid in the garden by the group of English girls under eighteen.

"Can't we go out, just once, please, Herr Direktor?"

"Kinder, kinder, it is not for me to say. It is your Government. You must be in your pensions a quarter of an hour after the show finishes at midnight. That is the rule and I must keep it."

"But just once. We don't have any fun, work all day and night."

"Now, kinder, please listen to me. Soon you will have plenty of time in the mornings to see everything, but at night your Government says you must go to bed. And I agree with your Government. Berlin is no place for young girls to wander around at night. Do I not make the same rule for the German girls of your age?"

"Yes, but just once, Herr Direktor."

He shrugged. "And if I say just once, then your consul comes to me and so I can never get any more English girls for my show. All because you do not want to wait until you are eighteen. It is for the show I am strict; you know that and some day you will be glad you have a Government that thinks of you. I have had much, much experience and I can tell you it would be better if other governments did the same thing."

One of the girls grumbled. "I came to the Continent to have a good time. But the German Government takes half our money and the British Government tucks us in bed."

Herr Direktor looked down at the mixture of eager and disgruntled faces about him and he smiled.

"Now, kinder, listen, I have a surprise for you. In a day or two I am arranging a big picnic at Potsdam. There I promise you shall have plenty of fun. Now you must go with Miss Day."

There was an outbreak of discussion about the picnic as Miss Day shepherded her charges through the gate, checking their number lest one or more should make a break for freedom.

Then he crossed to the café to join Pappy Newman and his company.

Miss Day came in later and sat with Yasmini and Lotus. Yasmini was watching the door with anxious eyes waiting for her soldier. Yasmini was very happy these days. She had met a young soldier from a prosperous family the year before and he had become completely infatuated with Yasmini's dark skin which seemed to attract German men. Now she watched the door hoping he would get leave to-night although he had told her he could not come.

Meanwhile the other groups mingled and mixed, changing tables, joining tables, talking, drinking, arguing, listening, laughing. They were there for the night. Few ever left until at least 6 a.m.

"Woman, woman, woman," said Mario with a sigh. He came up to Peter and lay down beside him on the grass under the pine trees. Herr Direktor had taken the whole company for a picnic. A cavalcade of buses had streamed out of Berlin, through Potsdam and then for miles through thick forest. The pine trees twined their tops into a solid roof of green, making a cold tunnel, exquisitely scented, but eerie with a sense of the lurking life of old German folklore.

The buses had come out into a hot sun where green lawns ran down to an arm of the Wansee. Under the pine trees at the edge of the forest there had been tables with fat waiters to ply the company with food and cold beer. Herr Direktor, resplendent in his gayest Tyrolean jacket and shorts, had waved his company to the food.

"Come to the tables at once," he had called. "After dinner we will spend the afternoon dancing and swimming."

The artistes had spread themselves, three hundred of them, among the tables under the trees, eating, drinking, laughing. After eating they had scattered, the older ones to sleep in the shade and the younger to stream to the water in brightly coloured swimming suits.

"Woman, woman, woman," repeated Mario.

"What is it now, Mario?"

"That Lolita."

"She seemed to be passionately fond of you in the bus."

"True. When she thinks only of love she is wonderful, but when she does not think of love she talks. Always it is the same, in the ointment the fly, on the rose the thorn. But you, my Peter, you are not happy like everyone else? Where is Kathi?"

"With Herr Direktor."

Mario leaned up on his elbow and looked down to the lake. It was a lively scene with colour and laughter. "See, my Peter, how these that wear least on the stage wear most when they come to bathe in the open air. Look, there is Carlos holding Anna up in his arms. Always when I see Carlos' torso I expect to see hindquarters of a centaur. They are simple, those two. They think no one sees how their play is like that of animals in the mating season."

"Mario, do you think there will be war?"

Mario shrugged. “All the time when we are eating, the English they talk of the war, and the Germans they say there will be no war because England does not want a war.”

“But you, Mario?”

“For me, the sun shines to-day; that is enough. But here is an end to peace. It is Tania.”

Tania came running to them, her brown limbs glistening with wetness. She wore flowered trunks and a halter and looked like a wild nymph of the woods full of the excitement of the picnic. She ran up to the two men laughing, and dropped on her knees beside them.

“So funnee. I tell you. We sit with Herr Direktor in the pavilion, Kathi, me, and people from theatre. That big Karl, he make love to Kathi, and that fat Kurt he make love to me. Karl, he take one hand of Kathi, so! Then Kathi take it away, so! Then Herr Direktor he take the other hand, so! and Kathi take it away, so! Both Karl and Kurt they drink plenty, plenty beer. Kurt say to me, every night I look at your picture in the programme before I go to sleep and I give everything I have to buy that big picture of you. I say, why not buy me myself? You should see his face. I laugh at him and I say, you can have me for nothing if you can catch me.” Tania laughed aloud at her own teasing. “Me, before he can move, I am in the water.”

“What about Kathi?” asked Peter.

Tania looked at Mario. “He is jealous, yes?”

She snatched off her bathing cap and let her dark hair fall over Peter’s face. “You don’t worry. Herr Direktor watch her like she is precious doll. And yet she lov’ you. She is fool. Come, swim. It is good.”

With a quick movement she knelt across Peter’s stomach, her wet trunks soaking his shirt. She plucked at the buttons of his shirt.

“Come, Mario, we undress him.”

Peter gasped at the cold wetness and with a sudden twist he threw her off. For a moment their limbs were entwined and then they were apart, both suddenly silent. Tania stood up, her bosom rising and falling, as though the sudden contact had short-circuited deeper emotions than she cared to show.

Quickly she recovered herself.

The faintest smile touched her lips as she looked down at Peter, forgetting Mario for the moment. “When one is a blood brother it is never

the same again, no?"

Then she turned and ran down to the water and plunged in among the other girls and men.

Mario laughed. "So young, that little one, and so old. She will go far."

"Maybe too far," said Peter, angry with her and himself.

"You should be like her, Peter. What is past is forgotten. There is only to-day and to-morrow."

Peter turned to Mario. "I can't forget it, Mario. I wake up in the night and she, Tania, is there with me, hiding in the doorway as the policemen pass. Every time I see a policeman, Mario, I feel like a criminal."

Mario's eyes widened. "It is the same for us all with these German policemen. But you will gradually forget. One death, what is that when all the time they murder, not the wicked, but those who speak what they think. Peter, you are lucky; you love. That is all that matters."

"How can I marry Kathi with that always in my mind?"

Mario shrugged. "Herr Direktor does not like his artistes to marry. It makes artistes like other people and that is not right. You do not understand, no?"

"I don't see what that has to do with Kathi and me."

Mario's hand waved to take in the scene that lay before them, the lawns to the water, the grass bright with sun-drying bathers. "See how happy is this company? That is why our revue is successful. See how careful Herr Direktor is with these young girls, he gives them picnics and parties, he gives them rehearsals and all the rest of the time they work in the show. Then they are happy and they have no time to get into trouble. See the others, how happy they are? Why? Because if they are not, out they go! All the time he works to keep his show young and happy. It is not only the act that the people see, it is the spirit of the show.

"Why is Kathi so precious to him? I have seen all the ballet dancers of Europe and of them all, Kathi I could watch for ever. Why? Because she is a danseuse noble? Because she could be a danseuse assoluta? No, it is because when she dances there comes across the footlights more than technique; there comes the spirit of innocence, of virginity, there comes love. Kathi speaks with her dancing and she is in love, she is young, she is the flower unsucked by the bee. When the audience sees her, they know something they feel on a spring morning when the dew is still on the grass. I, Mario, I know

it. There is beauty in her face, beauty in her limbs, but there is something that moves behind them when she dances, a spirit that puts her on as it were a garment, that lives and moves through her to enchant the eye, soften the heart and renew faith in the soul. She is beauty itself, and because you have fallen in love with it you would steal from us others who need to see it.

"No, no, my Peter, until she loved, she lacked only one thing in her dancing. Now she is perfect. Kathi the artiste is more important than Kathi the lover. You, an artist, must know that."

Peter lay still with the scent of the pines in his nostrils, gazing from the deep shade into the blue unclouded sky over the water.

"Yet for me, Mario," he said at last, "you said it was good that I had . . ."

"It is different for you, my Peter. You were callow and now you are not. The artist must grow through experience, the artiste, Kathi, is the bud opening. Her immortality is that of a flower; another year, another flower, but always flowers. Ha, but I am serious for such a hot day. I must go and comfort Madame Rastella. She also troubles herself about an Englishman, but in him I do not suspect love."

A moment later Peter heard the unmistakable laughter of Madame Rastella through the trees. From the strip of sand at the water's edge there came the strumming of Mundi's guitar. The theatre photographer was running to and fro taking shots of the girls as they lay sun-bathing on the beach and on the grass. Over it all lay the heavy heat of a hot summer's day, and Peter felt he wanted to lie alone away from the crowd. These artistes lived for the moment, they seemed without ties with the past or the future or with world events. He himself felt heavy with intangible thoughts. As Mario said, perhaps they were growing pains.

His reverie was disturbed by Tania's laugh. She was back again, but this time she had Kathi with her.

"See," said Tania. "I have brought Kathi. I stole her from Herr Direktor and the fat ones."

Tania again, thought Peter, too quick to give other people time to manage their own affairs at their own pace.

"See," said Tania. "He does not like me. I will go and make the fat ones laugh."

Kathi slipped down beside Peter and her hand slipped into his as they watched Tania dancing back to the pavilion that overlooked the water.

"You are angry?" For a moment Kathi's so fair face was full of the life that seemed to come to it only on the stage. Peter smiled up at her.

"No, not angry, only jealous."

"I could not come before."

No, thought Peter, Tania could come and go as she pleased. But he brushed the thought away.

"Tania said you had news."

"Herr Direktor has told me that when we go to Munich I can go home to see my father and mother for a fortnight. When we are in Munich it is only a hundred miles from my home."

Peter's eyes lighted up with a quick thought. "Perhaps I can go too?"

A slight frown, like the faintest shadow of a cloud crossed Kathi's china-blue eyes, as though it had never entered her mind that two parts of her life would ever mix.

"I could meet your people," said Peter. "I could ask them about our marriage." He watched her eyes. "You don't want me to come?"

"Yes, but first, I . . . I would like it better to see them alone. Then perhaps in a few days I would tell my mother."

Peter sank back. "The only thing is that if this war comes . . ."

"But everyone knows there will not be a war."

"But I said, if it comes . . . then we could be married and you could come with me to England."

Even as he said it, he had the realization that he was speaking of things that had never entered Kathi's head.

"You mean, I would go with you to England?"

"Yes, why not?"

"I would leave the company? Leave my family?"

Peter laughed. Her questions had the naïvety of a child. But that was the way he liked her. They relapsed into silence. So little time they had alone together and so much of it was spent in silence, as if talking would waste the precious moments when their love flowed between them, filling them and completing them until the next time they were alone.

Herr Direktor was calling his "familie" together again. He was very happy. He loved a picnic with his company. Everyone was happy, and Anna was enjoying herself with Carlos. The girls on the beach were all young and all beautiful, and all happy. He called the company again, and started up the slope again towards the trees. Everyone followed, hungry as ever, for afternoon coffee and cake. Everyone was burned by the sun and relaxed; more and more food began to appear, and the appetites never flagged.

The girls and younger men drifted to the dance floor near the tables, providing their own music with accordions and guitars until someone discovered that Arthur Murray, newest member of the company, was a swing pianist. Half-drunk, he sat at the piano with its several broken strings and beat from it a rhythm which crowded the floor with dancers.

The sun began to dip below the trees, but the evening was warm and still. The guitars and accordions began to play familiar songs and everyone gathered around to sing. At last Herr Direktor looked at his watch and rose to his feet. It was time to go. He counted every member of his company and saw them safely on the buses before he climbed into his car and led the cavalcade back through the dark forest on its way back to Berlin. It had been a happy day.

The morning after the picnic some of the members of the Continental Revue sat in the theatre café drinking coffee. Hula sat with them and called to Jackie, his boy, who was across the café with some of the other members.

"Come, Jackie. We go home to Mama now. She wants to go shopping."

Away they went. Hula lived at the pension only a couple of streets away.

"Olivia did not come to the rehearsal this morning," said Dorothy.

"Hula said she was tired," said Yasmini. "It was so hot yesterday at the picnic. That was a long day, especially with the show following it. I could hardly keep awake myself."

It was only a few minutes before Hula came dashing back to the café in a state of great excitement.

"I have a son, I have a son," he shouted.

Everyone looked up as if he had gone mad.

"I have a son," shouted Hula. "Come on, waiter, drinks for everyone." He took a roll of paper marks from his pocket and waved them aloft. "I am going to treat everyone in the café. I have a son. . . . Hurray!"

Pappy Newman, sitting at the back of the café with Herr Direktor, jumped up. “Yes, yes, we know you have. Little Jackie has been with us five years.”

“It isn’t that,” shouted Hula. “While we were at rehearsal this morning the landlady went out and when she came back Olivia had a new baby in the bed beside her . . . a SON!” He laughed aloud. “The landlady wants to call a doctor and Olivia is angry because she wants to come to the show to-night.”

“She must not do that,” said Herr Direktor. He looked very pleased. What a wonderful little girl Olivia was. Now he would not have to change any of the scenes. He could give her a week off and she would be ready to open in Leipzig.

“Come, kellner!” he called. “Another round of drinks for everyone. Herr Newman, Hula, come! We will go around to the pension. We will see the new baby.”

They left the café and everyone began to celebrate. In a few minutes Hula was back again to join the company. They sat in the café all afternoon. Hula treated and treated again, until the roll of notes was finished.

# Chapter Thirty-nine

The Scala engagement finally came to an end and, at midnight on the last day of July 1938 the curtain fell on the final performance. Much of the company's luggage had already travelled ahead to Leipzig. The animal train had gone several days before, so there had been no animals in the last performance. The private baggage had also gone. All that remained to be done was the loading of the trunks, the scenery, and the costumes.

Big kleig lights lit the garden with a garish glare. Lorries backed through the side gate into the garden. After each scene was finished everything was carried into the garden and quickly loaded. The girls ran in and out in their costumes as their scenes finished, throwing their props into the lorries. Everyone was responsible for something during the moving.

Pappy Newman was around in his shirtsleeves, dripping with perspiration. Herr Direktor hurried back and forth across the garden with a big electric torch in his hand. It was a hot night, heavy and humid with the threat of thunder in the air. Hundreds of spectators crowded into the garden, watching the packing. The show was leaving town and everybody for streets around knew the members of the Continental Revue and had come to see them go. It was as good a show as one which was racing at its usual pace across the stage of the theatre. As each lorry was packed it would drive out through the gate on the side-street and another lorry would back into the garden. Again and again the performance was repeated.

Then suddenly the garden was lonely, forlorn, and deserted. There were only the tables and chairs left standing, some fallen, some awry, under the cold glare of the kleig lights.

Anna and Herr Direktor climbed into the car. The theatre manager bade them farewell, telling them he would be watching for them to come again next summer.

"Auf Wiedersehen," cried Anna. "Auf Wiedersehen."

"Auf Wiedersehen," he waved, watching them drive through the arched entrance.

One after the other, members of the company passed through the arched gate carrying their familiar cases once again to the taxis that stood outside.

They drove to the station and gathered in the station café, making a party until it was time for the train to leave. They were on the move to new scenes, new places. All the people they had met during the summer had come to the station, the shopkeepers from whom they had bought, the owner of the dairy, the waiters from the theatre café, the landlords and landladies of the pensions, the nurses who had nursed the usual casualties in the Krankenhaus. Everyone was sorry to see them go. They had made a bright spot in the heart of Berlin for the past months. Their many friends hung around as if the going of the company meant the end of laughter. The atmosphere in Berlin had little enough humour.

The stage hands from the theatre, the ushers, the cleaners, all the theatre staff, all came to the station restaurant one by one or in groups. When four o'clock arrived the restaurant was packed and loud with singing and laughter.

Suddenly there was more noise and laughter at the restaurant entrance, as Elsa Henn, Dick, and Meg Nichols came in the door. Elsa was in a hilarious mood and the others were laughing. Elsa had evidently had many drinks. She wore a coat, her hair was in disarray and she had no dress.

"We found her on the corner, near the theatre," said Dick.

"Where is your dress?" asked one of the girls.

Elsa laughed. "I don't know. I went with my boy friend to drink, and when I got out on the street to look for a taxi I had no dress." Everyone laughed, even Pappy Newman. Elsa stood swaying on her feet in the middle of the crowded restaurant, laughing helplessly. Then she saw Tania. "Look," she cried. "Tania, she is not a bad girl like Elsa. She is good girl. I lose my dress but she gets plenty, plenty fine clothes."

Tania indeed was a picture. There was nothing left of the gamin of a year ago.

"Look!" said Elsa again. "You laugh at me. Where does she get the fine clothes? She has only one mark a day and her expenses, yet she has fine clothes."

Pappy Newman pulled Elsa down at his table. "Shut up, Elsa. Come here and have a drink with me."

Tania laughed and swung around like a mannequin displaying her new clothes. Tania could carry off any situation with enough nerve to turn it to her own advantage, and enough humour to take the sting of poison out of it.

Everyone knew Herr Direktor was grooming her to understudy Anna and that he had given her the money to dress herself suitably.

There was a sound of the train. Everyone rushed for the door. Soon the windows of the train were crowded with men and girls leaning out shaking hands, waving, kissing good-bye. Sally, the English chorus girl, leaned out of a window holding the hand of a young German soldier. On her finger was a heavy gold band, a German engagement ring. He could not understand one word she said. Sally turned to her friends behind her. "Look, dears, isn't he sweet?"

He asked her to come back, he told her he loved her. He said if he got leave he would see her in Leipzig, Sally nodded her head to everything he said. She could not understand a word of German, but every time she smiled his face would light up.

The conductor shouted, "All aboard, all aboard!"

"Auf Wiedersehen, Auf Wiedersehen!"

"Auf Wiedersehen, Auf Wiedersehen!"

Again and again the parting words rang out. As the train moved out the spectators joined hands and began to sing "Argentina". Then the company took it up. Far out of the station their voices could be heard floating through the pre-dawn air in "Argentina".

Then they were gone.

In her carriage Sally sat down, slipped the ring off her finger, put it in her bag with her other engagement rings and fell fast asleep.

In the intense heat of the summer the company arrived in Leipzig to begin a month's engagement. Leipzig, in the heart of Saxony, was extremely Nazi.

Over the stage entrance of the theatre was a sign, "Heil Hitler, this is a Hitler House."

The rooms of the members were within a few blocks of the theatre, and everywhere around the theatre the shopkeepers were ardent Nazis; they would "Heil Hitler" at every member of the company on every possible occasion. This lit a flame of resentment in the British members. Arguments rose at the slightest excuse between them and the Nazi stage crew. Herr Direktor called the British members together and asked them please not to notice these trifles, the month in Leipzig would soon be over and once they

were in Munich in Bavaria they would find the atmosphere very different indeed.

Herr Direktor was pleased. Business was keeping up well and it looked as though the crisis might pass without upsetting his plans. All the officials he met were convinced there would be no war. England and France would be reasonable, they said. That would be good because he had more offers of engagements than he could fill even if he split the company into two parts. This he would not do until European affairs had settled down. The two companies would play the smaller theatres for the winter and spring and join again in the summer for the Berlin season and then they would tour the East, bigger and more splendid than any show that had ever travelled. Peter and Kasha were designing a new set of scenes. Peter's souvenir programme had already shown a good profit. The nude of Tania was a great success.

With hard work she was coming on well. Her new number with her gypsy song sung in the American manner before the microphone was already a favourite with the audience. The talent of a girl like Tania one moulded as a sculptor moulded clay. Kathi was different, one could not change her and one did not wish to.

Tania was a little devil, yet she kept men at arm's length and did not make herself cheap. One could do much with a girl who kept herself as carefully as a gambler kept his aces.

He watched her from the front of the house as she finished her song. Where Anna would have smiled and gestured and run off the stage and back again to the applause, Tania just stood and smiled and the applause grew. She could stand still and her personality would flow across the footlights. He wondered if he had made a mistake putting the Gold Girl in the nude act in the organ scene. She was beautiful and always brought forth a roar of applause, but she was as impersonal as a statue. It had not been the same with Tania. She had made the audience hesitate in its applause for a moment because she had been a living girl, young, and with a body, beautiful and desirable. Yes, desirable, that was the secret.

During the days in Leipzig, as the world grew more hostile, the members of the company drew closer together. They gathered between rehearsals on the warm August morning in a park which was only a minute from the theatre. Any morning on the benches that lined the tree-shaded walk could be seen groups of the players, laughing, gossiping, impervious to the severe discipline of the park-keepers.

Madame Rastella, having sent her husband and Rita shopping, sat with little Gretchen, Juanita, Nancy, and Dorothy. Madame was eating grapes and making ripe comedy of the disposal of the pips. Near her hovered a park-keeper who was full of suspicion, and Madame, much to the amusement of the others, was torturing him. To dispose of even so small a trifle as a grape pip on the pathway or the grass was a crime and the keeper was just waiting for the moment to order her to pick the pips up again. Madame Rastella calmly ate her grapes and after each one pretended to spit out the pips. Then as the keeper walked past, Madame would ostentatiously remove the pips from her mouth and put them very carefully in the bag. As the keeper passed she would spit again and he would turn quickly to catch her, glaring at her, waiting for just one chance to show her that she could not treat a German park with disrespect.

The girls and women never tired of peeping at Olivia's baby who was doing splendidly. But the favourite was the Chinese baby. It had big black eyes with long lashes and looked like nothing more than a smooth-faced Chinese doll. Everyone competed to push it around in its pram and its mother did not mind. She had so much work to do in the Chinese act that she spent a great deal of time in the theatre.

The Chinese act, the largest on the Continent, had joined the show in Berlin. The act consisted of about thirty men and women. There were several young children who travelled with the act, but none of them was allowed to work in the show.

The men of the act were extremely clever and made a magnificent appearance. Their costumes were heavily embroidered, and the entire setting of the act was scarlet and gold, including the costumes, drapes, and all props. The act lit the stage like a flame when the curtain rose; the Chinese juggled and balanced everything imaginable including themselves; they threw knives and swords in an eye-dazzling barrage of steel through the air. The women were quick and nimble. They played a big part in the act and made all the costumes, doing intricate and elaborate needlework with patience and skill.

Elsa Henn pushed the pram with the Chinese baby past the seat where the others were sitting. She drew it up to them and there was a flurry of cooing and exclamation. Little Gretchen stood on the bench and leaned into the carriage, her face suddenly alight with pleasure.

Then her expression changed. "It's wet and you haven't changed it."

Elsa laughed easily. "It's all right. You can't change them every minute."

"Oh!" Gretchen was shocked. "Here, give me a diaper." She proceeded immediately to take a spare diaper and change the baby, delighted to get an excuse to handle the child.

"Let me push it now," said Juanita, taking the pram from Elsa. Elsa relinquished the pram with her easy laugh, and sat down with the others.

"Never enough babies to go around in this company," she said. "Maybe the next one come from over there." She nodded towards a bench where Peter and Kathi sat.

"No," said Madame Rastella, with her knack for being so serious that everyone smiled. "They love like in a book, very, very beautiful, but no babies."

"Give them a chance," said Nancy.

Elsa winked at Madame Rastella. "Nancy, I think you not nice."

"Say, what do you think they are going to do if this war comes?" asked Dorothy.

"Get married." To Madame nothing should separate lovers.

"I wouldn't like to be a German girl in England married to an Englishman," said Dorothy.

"Why not?" asked Elsa. "Tania, she say if war come she marry Englishman quick so she can go to America."

"Oh, la, la!" Madame Rastella rolled her eyes. "Now I know why all the time she live with them. Maybe she steals him from Kathi and will marry him."

Elsa shook her head. "Tania, she too clever. All the time she think for herself. One day she think too much and pouff!—she find other people think too."

"Anna?" Dorothy's question merely echoed what all were thinking.

Elsa nodded. "Anna, she no fool. Look, there Anna with Carlos, over there. And where is Tania? Rehearsing with Herr Direktor? You think Anna like that?"

Madame Rastella put her bag of grapes aside and took out her Russian cross-stitch. "Maybe Anna like Carlos better. Ha!" She let out a long sigh which, to the others, with the expressive lift of her eyes, told the whole story of Carlos' magnificent maleness. There was a ripple of laughter.

Business in the theatre continued to be good and the enthusiasm of the audiences was an odd contrast to the general atmosphere of hostility to all the foreigners in the cast. As the political situation grew worse the company grew closer together in its own family spirit. A rumour ran around the theatre one day.

"We hear the British Prime Minister is coming to see Hitler to try and stop the war," said Friedrich.

"Never," said one of the English boys. "He will never do that. Hitler may go to see him, but he will never come here."

"Yes," said Friedrich. "I think he will come. Germany is very strong now. Hitler does not have to go to others; they must come to him."

Shortly afterwards the German radio announced that the meeting would take place on the Rhine, and that the outcome would decide if there would be a war. The Leipzig engagement was at an end and the revue was going to Munich which was in Bavaria where the people were different from the Saxons.

Arriving in Munich the company had much trouble finding places to live. Munich, at this season always a tourist town, was full up for two reasons. Firstly, it was near the time of the Oktober Fest, a big fair held each year at the end of the harvest season. Secondly, there was great tension in the air and the streets were crowded with soldiers. Storm Troopers and other officials were in Munich for the political events that were brewing.

Hotels and pensions were filled to capacity and there was great bustle in the streets. The tension in the atmosphere could be felt by the members of the revue the first night they arrived in the city. Walking in groups along the main street of the city, window shopping as usual, they felt the hush, a tension difficult to describe.

"I do not like this atmosphere at all," Dick Nichols said to his wife, Meg, as they walked past the Frauenkirche. "I feel something is going to happen. Can't you feel it, Meg?"

"Yes, I can," she replied. "Look at all the people. It was never like this before."

"I wonder how we can get out of here if something happened suddenly?" asked Dick. "I had better speak to Herr Direktor. I think I had better see the British Consul also."

"We must visit little Alec's grave." Meg's voice warned that no crisis could prevent her from seeing the grave of the baby she had buried in Munich eight years ago.

"I think this war will come, Meg. Let's go, I cannot stand the atmosphere of this place."

They started off in the direction of the theatre. There was comfort in being with the company, and they found most of the company, moved by the same motive, gathered in a café near the theatre. Peter was there sitting with the English crowd in a gloomy group. He was oppressed by the sense of crisis in the air, oppressed by the thought of its implications upon his life. Kathi was away. Travelling deep into the south of Germany from Leipzig to Munich the journey had taken her less than a hundred miles from her home in the Austrian Tyrol and Herr Direktor had given her permission to go home for a few days. Tania, who had as usual chosen rooms for the three of them, had disappeared for the evening. The crisis did not seem to touch Tania, she was excited by it, excited by the crowds in Munich. Peter left early, shortly after midnight, and went out into the cool night air. Here, near the mountains, the September air was clear and crisp at night.

He lay in bed awhile in the darkness with the sweetness of the night air soothing his melancholy. Heaven only knew what the landlady would say in the morning when she knew he had forced the window open. German landladies even complained about the bloodstains of their bed-bugs who had gorged too heavily on English blood and, drunk with ecstasy or paralysed with indigestion, had neglected to escape in time.

He awakened with a start to find his room flooded with light and Tania, laughing, sitting on his bed. She was flushed with excitement.

"What the devil did you wake me up for?" he said.

"But I must tell you. I have some news for you."

"Is it the war?"

"No, fool, it is about me." Her hand found his toe and wiggled it. He snatched it away and she laughed aloud at him. Her hair sparkled with a blue-black sheen carefully falling to her shoulders. She wore one of her best evening dresses from the show, black to match her hair, tight to her breasts and body, flowing away from her hips to her feet in full folds. Over her bare shoulders was a white fur wrap.

Peter brushed back his rumpled hair. "Look at your lips."

She lifted his shirt from the chair and wiped her lips. “Too much, yes? But you have not asked what is my news.”

“I want to go to sleep.”

“You are a pig. Get up to celebrate with me. This is the most wonderful night in my life.”

“It’s three o’clock.”

Her eagerness broke through his pose of reluctance. “I am to be a star!”

He lay quite still. “So you’ve done it?”

“When Herr Direktor splits the company, Anna is to stay with the German company; I am to be the star in England.”

“He said he wasn’t going to have a star with the English company.”

Tania shook him under the feather bedspread. “Oh, you fool, it is because I understudy Anna and I do so many things.” She got up from the bed and danced around the room singing in her low husky voice, “How Sweet is Gypsy Love”. She stood beside him and looked down at his sleepy face and rumpled hair.

“And you do not even say how wonderful.”

“Where have you been to-night?”

“I have been with Herr Direktor.”

“Where was Anna?”

Tania laughed and shrugged and wandered about the room touching things. “I do not know, I do not care.”

“So at last you have got what you want.” Peter’s voice was almost brutal. He was defending himself against the magnetism of Tania. He watched her, liking her, knowing he was, in spite of himself, glad of her company.

“Who pays off this time?”

The tone of his voice shot Tania into stillness. The room was immediately full of the memories of that terrorful night in Hamburg. In the silence Peter almost heard the soft splash of the body as it slipped into the water. Memories so conveniently overlaid by change of scene, now came back into that upper room in Munich, stripped and bare and sinister.

Tania stared at him. Then she switched off the light and was sitting on his bed so close to him that he could sense the warmth of her and see her bright staring eyes in the darkness. Her voice was low and soft when she spoke.

"You remember that?" she whispered. "I thought you had forgotten. Sometimes I dream of it."

"You are human after all?" Peter's voice was wary, uncertain.

"Sometimes I dream and I am trembling all over and I feel the knife go in." She shuddered with a perverse excitement. "Then I am in your arms, your arms, Peter." Her voice dropped to a softer whisper. "And that is wonderful."

"God!" whispered Peter, fully awake now, wondering what new thing would come from this child. Her hands were by his shoulders and her face was closer to his so that her hair fell over her shoulders and touched his cheeks.

"Peter, Peter, you are a fool, you are so blind."

"What do you mean?" His whisper was almost angry.

"You can't see, you never will see."

He was disturbed by her nearness, more disturbed than he had any right to be, but he was not going to be trapped by Tania again. He knew she was playing with him, wantonly playing with her own power to disturb a man, any man. Tania watched his face and knew what thoughts were behind it; knew that he did not trust her, was afraid of her.

Her eyes gazed down at his, holding them in the darkness fixed to hers. It was easy to speak in the darkness. Her voice trembled.

"Peter, you are so blind. You cannot see I lov' only you. I knew it on that night in Hamburg. That was the pay-off, you said. It is only I who pay-off. You paint always and you lov' Kathi, and you forget. But I cannot forget. That which we did together that night. . . ." She drew in her breath as though the twin sins of fornication and murder had a savage ecstasy all their own. "That which we did I cannot forget. All the time when I do something for myself you come into me and I am uncertain. But you do not see, no, you think you are in lov' with Kathi . . ."

"I love Kathi."

"You think so, she think so. . . ." Her mood changed. She lifted her hands from the bed and beat them against her breasts. "But I know it in here. Oh, you dream and you do not see it. You dream, and Kathi she dreams, and you are not awake."

She rose from the bed and walked to the open window leaning on the sill to look at the stars. Then she came back impatiently and sat on the bed again.

"You dream, you dream, and you will not wake."

She heard him laugh and it beat her to anger.

"Kathi has gone home. Why has she gone home? Because there is trouble everywhere and she is a little girl still in her mind. You want her to take you to her home and she would not. Why? Because her home is one dream and you are another. You want her to marry you before the war comes and she will not. Why? Because you are English and she is Austrian. It is nice to lov' a foreigner, but not nice to marry one in wartime. To Kathi lov' is a dream, it does not belong to anything else. To you also it is a dream."

"Nonsense." Peter's voice was crisp.

"I am right. You want still to go on like this . . . lov', only lov'. You are frightened to take her to England if there is a war because you do not know what you will do. I see everything. Sometimes I do not like to see so much. But if you ask me to take you where I have lived, would I care? We did not dream in Hamburg. You and I, Peter, we are awake. Could you take me to England? Would you worry about me? No! Because you know I am awake, I can go anywhere with you. Must you protect me, care for me? No! Wherever you would go I would go with you and be with you; we would be comrades."

Peter felt her presence intoxicating like a strong wine, her voice compelling in its earnestness. But his brain was repeating that she was Delilah. She had broken his strength once and she would not do it again. He must not believe her. Her eyes seemed to be following his thoughts. The darkness about them seemed to grow intense, surrounding them alone from the world. He could see the rise and fall of her bosom above the low line of the black dress, he could see her bare arms, but, startling in such darkness, was the pallor of her face, the sharp-lined jaw, the straight nose, the bright, intense eyes.

The moment wavered in suspense. Tania saw Peter's will sway and bend. She saw it harden again. He had overheard Bill Hardy saying that

Tania intended to marry an Englishman if war came so that she could get to America. She watched his face, drew her lips to a narrow line and plunged a knife in him, metaphorically.

"Herr Direktor has asked me to be his mistress."

It was a lie, but so dramatic to the moment that she could not resist it. She watched the shock.

"That is the pay-off?" he whispered.

"Now I have everything that I want. I am a star. I do not want things like Anna. I do not want fur coats; I do not want bracelets, brooches, rings; I do not want things for myself. I only want now to go with Herr Direktor, where he meets people who know things. Anna did not care about that, she did not care about anything when she was not on the stage, but I know with Herr Direktor I can meet those people who will talk about me; I will get my picture in the newspapers, I will meet those people who will ask me to go to Hollywood."

"Vaulting ambition . . ." said Peter, easier now that she was showing her hand.

But Tania was ready for him. She turned upon him.

"All this I have in my hand . . . I have it now, to decide which way I will take. For you I will give it all up; for you, Peter, I will give it all up and be only your woman. I know you better than you know yourself, better than Kathi ever knows you. I am not jealous of Kathi, I know it is a dream, but the world is not a dream, I know it because I have to fight it all the time and now, when trouble comes, it is a comrade you will want, not a dream.

"Peter, Peter, believe me. I know you are great artist. With Kathi the world will forget you. But, Peter, you and I, we will march together. I will be a star for you only, and you will paint for me. We will go to America, we will be famous, together, we will climb up in the world. It is easy to climb from nothing, do I not know? And I will help you and you will make me happy because I lov' you so much, Peter. Herr Direktor say you are very, very clever. He is sending your picture of the Garden at Berlin to the Oktober Fest Exhibition which is very important. In New York we will be very happy. We will have big studio for you. I will be in a show and every night we will have parties with people for you to meet."

She paused, bright, eager, forgetting herself and even Peter in her enthusiasm for the picture she was creating in her mind.

"Managing, managing," said Peter bitterly. "Always managing." He was seeing her as she had been ever since he had first seen her in the theatre in London; she had been with him and Kathi all the time, always managing their affairs, always cleverly, always getting their rooms and getting better ones than the others of the company could get, always watching the gossip of the company and steering it the way it suited her, always alive and awake, where he and Kathi wandered through their idyllic dream. He winced at the thought. He felt insecure and uncertain. Perhaps Kathi really was unreal, perhaps she did not exist from her dream-like ballet on the stage, her home in a mountain village, her love affair with the English artist; little neat parcels of life all separated from each other like the stories in a book of fairy-tales, and all protected by the covers of the book; there was a blindness in her which refused to see reality anywhere and which made other people protect her from it.

He argued his own thoughts. "You're a devil, Tania, a devil. You think you understand everything, but you understand only your own kind of life, fighting through a jungle until you get everything you want, treading on everyone who gets in your way. If you are like this at sixteen, what will you be like at twenty?"

Tania threw back her head and laughed, but Peter went on. "You want power and money and success. I want beauty, beauty. Do you hear that? To paint what I see . . ."

Tania cut him short. "You want beauty like a doll. Yes, Kathi is beautiful, the most beautiful girl Mario has ever seen, and Mario has seen them all. And tell me this, why do not the men of the company desire Kathi? No, she is a doll for boys to lov', and for old men to remember what they have lost. Oh, yes, I know well . . . you, Peter, you do not grow up. Kathi she holds you back. To be a great artist you must eat life like a hungry man. You will not grow pictures by looking like a big sheep at the most beautiful shepherdess. Oh, yes, Peter, I know much and I understand much. It is I who can lov' you, I can lov' you so that you have fire in your blood. Remember, Peter, how I gave you fire in your blood? I, too, now, I do not want any other man."

Peter writhed with uneasiness under Tania's penetrating eager gaze, and her excited voice.

"Come, Peter, choose now. Take me with you, let us do now as we did before and you can forget your dreams and I will be yours, yours only for now and for ever, never, never any other man."

Her voice was insistent, urgent. She was giving herself to him and yet he did not know which was the truth, Kathi or Tania.

"What about Kathi?" he asked lamely.

"Some day she must wake up. Better now soon. I will arrange it. I know Herr Direktor . . ."

He interrupted her. "There you are, already managing."

She stood up suddenly at the petulance in his voice. Suddenly she saw he could not see things clearly as she saw them.

She dropped to the bed again and her face was near his and her lips were hungry to be drawn to his. But he must take it now, now this moment; for the rest of her life hung on this moment. "Peter, choose. Take me now for ever, or never. Me for ever, with no other man; you for ever with no other woman . . . I will kill any other woman . . . but you must choose."

Peter turned his head from the sudden terrible desire to draw her down to him, with the swift poignant memory of her body surging up in his mind. She was a devil. Even in this moment she made it impossible for him to be strong. She gave him only the choice of two evils. Either to desert Kathi or to make Tania the mistress of Herr Direktor.

Suddenly Tania knew she was losing. She wanted to throw herself on Peter and plead with him. She wanted to be weak and let her tears well up and plead for her. She was a little girl for a moment frightened of a future that she would have to fight alone, wanting the strength she knew to be in Peter, undeveloped but like iron in a pot to be mixed with an alloy, her alloy, and be poured into hard steel. She was frightened of losing the sure future she could see through Peter and frightened of the unsure future alone.

But she had not come so far by being weak; she was a game fighter. She bent near him, her lips not daring to touch his cheek lest she should break down completely. She was fighting with herself not to fall and bury her head on the pillow beside him and weep her heart out. He couldn't see how great a thing she was offering to him or what other things she had denied herself to wait for this one moment. Slowly she gathered her strength together pushed herself up on her arms and then stood up. She had lost. The decision was already made. Now she must go on the other way.

She stood still for a few moments that seemed like hours in the darkness of the morning.

Quietly she went to the door and went out. Peter thrust his head in the pillow to stop the confusion of feelings that rushed through him. But he could not sleep.

Outside his door in the darkness Tania leaned against the wall and fought with the tears that ran down her cheeks.

# Chapter Forty

Business with the revue was for the first time not good. Even though the city was filled with troops and tourists the house was half empty. Every night the rumble of military vehicles outside the theatre was a constant undertone to the music inside. Every day brought fresh rumours of some kind. The artistes sat around the theatre yard a great part of the time. Max Van Huten set up his little radio in the dressing-room and listened in to broadcasts all day and night so that he could report the fresh news to the company. There were soldiers everywhere, on the streets and passing through the stations.

Day and night, from the time the Continental Revue had arrived in Munich, there had been a continuous rumble coming through the walls of the theatre as a dull undercurrent to the music, disturbing everybody at night and filling the streets by day. The army was moving to the frontier of Czechoslovakia, not by thousands but by hundreds of thousands, a never-ending stream of lorries, tanks, and guns. The never-ending procession passed at the end of the lane leading to the stage door. It turned a corner and passed through a little square with a beautiful fountain, one of the loveliest on the Continent.

Frau Schiller sat with Sonia, an English chorus girl, in the square.

Frau Schiller stared and stared. She owned the dog act and was an Austrian, a native of Vienna.

"My God, my God! Must this come again?"

"You have seen the last war then?" said Sonia.

"Yes, and I never want to see another one."

"Was it bad?"

"It could not have been any worse. We starved. If there is another war we shall shoot the dogs as soon as it starts; last night we talked it over and decided to do that. This time we shall not allow them to starve so long. The last time we waited as long as we could. One day my man heard where we could buy some meat so he went with a big bag. He paid a high price even though we had no money for our food. He dragged the bag home and when he opened it, it was half full of stones. He went straight out to the kennels

with his revolver and turned his back and shot until every dog was dead. Then we cried all day, my man and I."

Then she pulled herself together. "Well, as long as the British members remain here I still have hope that all will be well."

Bert, a property man, sat outside the theatre with Peter.

"What do you think of it all?" asked Peter.

"I think we had better get out of this place. As an old soldier it looks bad to me. Look at the theatre entrance. There is no one going in. These people must know something when they stay away like this."

The audience was slim indeed. In the short interval most of the people went out into the street. The evening was clear and balmy. They stood around the entrance in bare heads talking in hushed voices. Suddenly a boy came down the street calling an extra edition. There was a rush from the men of the audience to meet him. They grabbed their papers and crowded round the street lights to read. They huddled in groups discussing the news. It was not good. Some people went back to the theatre and some went home. The show went on as usual until after midnight, as it always did. After the show the members of the revue trooped to the cabaret across the street. That, too, was having bad business until the artistes from the theatre filled it up.

Peter had disappeared with Kathi. She had returned that day and now, on the first night of their reunion, the world was too much with them and they had need to escape from it.

Kathi, fresh from her mountain home, felt the impact of the atmosphere of Munich. Her ivory tower was being assailed by the world. She had decided to go home to her parents if any trouble came. He could almost see Tania laughing at him. The chill that was in the night air and in the rumours drove them back to the warmth of the company and they drifted back to the cabaret.

They sat by themselves, but Anna, seeing them come in, jumped up from her table with Carlos and some others and came to them. She was seething with pent-up feelings.

Peter put it down to the crisis. He should have known better.

"To-day," began Anna, her voice and gestures were tense, "to-day I have been to the Oktober Fest Exhibition with Herr Direktor. I see your picture of the garden at Berlin and plenty people around it. Herr Direktor, he is very

pleased. But I am not so pleased. What is the other picture I see, it is that nude of Tania."

"But I didn't send them, Anna. It was Herr Direktor."

"I know that, too, but when I ask you to paint me in the nude, do you paint it? No. You paint portrait. Why? I know why. You let that Tania fool you like she fool him. She say nice things, make fool of you, maybe other things too, and you paint so she look like . . . like . . . high-class . . ."

Anna looked from Peter to Kathi. Peter knew what she was going to say and saw how the presence of Kathi stopped the vicious word on her lips. It was always the same with the company.

"He did not send my portrait," said Kathi, missing the significance of what Anna was going to say.

Anna shrugged impatiently. "For you it is different. Me, I am the star of this show, and already that Tania, she is going to London and I am to stay in Germany. She does that because she is clever? No, no, it is because while I work hard for Herr Direktor she works hard on him. And why does he push her in so many acts? Because plenty, plenty people see her in the programme nude like . . ."

Again she held, stopped, and looking at Peter shrugged her shoulders as if to say that he at least knew what she meant.

"I didn't know," said Peter, knowing that he did.

Anna leaned forward. "Look at her over there. Think she cares? No, no, no. She thinks only of herself. All right, maybe she better look out. But first, you must paint a picture of me, another one, this time big with Rex and me and I will be nude lying by the side of Rex."

"But, Anna. . . ." Peter stopped. Anna could see only one fact. If Tania's nude had worked to bring her to the forefront, a nude of herself with Rex would be so much better that it would cancel out Tania's.

"But I am no good with animals," protested Peter.

"You have caricature of Bill Hardy and Maud in the programme."

"But that is different."

"So it is. You also are against me. It is you British, always against the Germans."

Anna was about to lose her temper. Kathi laid a hand on Anna's arm. "He will do it, Anna. Nicht war, Peter?"

Peter gave a helpless shrug. "To-morrow we will talk about it."

Anna smiled. Everything was all right now. She patted his hand as though he were a small boy.

"It will be good, yes? I will tell you how I want it."

Peter watched her as she left them, smiling and waving to each table as she passed.

Almost before he had pushed the thought away so that he could turn back to Kathi, Tania was slipping into the seat Anna had just left. Tania looked at Anna's back.

"She was talking about me, yes?"

"Why?" asked Peter. There was nothing simple about Tania. She could read thoughts across half a crowded room.

"Plenty reason. Mario was with them at the exhibition to-day and she was jealous, jealous, jealous. Mario he said watch out, little one. But I laugh."

And she did.

"Why is she jealous?" asked Kathi. "You have done nothing."

Both Peter and Tania laughed. Kathi missed the glance between the two.

"Mario said there were more people looking at my picture than there were at your picture of the garden. But he said there were more people at your two pictures than any of the others. Did I not tell you, Peter?" Tania laughed, and turned to Kathi. "He is a clever one, your artist. You marry him quick or someone steal him from you."

Then making a grimace at Peter she rose and slipped unobtrusively as she could back to her table.

"Damn the girl," muttered Peter to himself.

"Was ist?" asked Kathi.

"Nothing," said Peter.

Herr Direktor sat in the theatre yard alone, thinking. Lines of worry furrowed his brow; the crisis was at its height, and for once he did not know

what to do. He had never, in all his twenty years with the show, come across a situation that he couldn't get around by talking; but this was different; talking would do no good now.

He had sat for days in his office at the theatre planning where he would go in case war started. He had already warned all the members to pack their trunks and leave them at the theatre. He had told them he would get them all out of the country somehow, but that he might have to leave all the baggage, properties, and scenery behind. He would go to Switzerland and build a new show. They would start in a small way and expand . . . and, he assured them as usual, everything would be all right. The important thing was to stick together. He had looked over his assembled artistes as he had told them this, all the nationalities of the world were there, small people all of them, none of them wanting to fight one another. The important thing, he repeated, was to stick together and once the new show was started they would all go to Brazil . . . far, far away from any danger of war . . . he had money in other countries that would be ample to rebuild a new show.

Now he sat alone in the theatre yard. He was sad. There were so many things he loved in Germany, but he would never bring his company back to Germany again. It was the same every time he came, always political trouble, always a morass of regulations. He rose from his seat and walked through the passage from the yard to the street. The street was filled with Italian officers, tall, dark fellows in handsome black uniforms. They had come overnight and it meant a new turn in the political situation.

Then he saw Rani coming along the street smiling widely at him. His face broke into a smile.

"Rani," he said, "you are so happy when you smile."

"I want to talk to you, Herr Direktor."

"What is it, Rani? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"No," she said, with the pleasure of one breaking good news, "I just want to tell you that I shall not be going to New York."

"You mean you will not get married after all?"

"I mean that. I guess I not marry. I don't know where he is. He not write any more."

"Oh, I see. Then you will stay with us, just as always. That is good." She smiled up at him as he patted her head.

The next morning English mail arrived at the theatre. There were letters to most of the English members from their families telling them to return; the war would start any time now. There were letters to Herr Direktor from parents asking him to send their daughters home at once. Telegrams continued to arrive throughout the day from worried parents and relatives.

Herr Direktor called all the British members on the stage. He told them he had received telegrams from their families to send them home. He said he was sure there would be no war, he had spoken to some of the most prominent people in the Party about it, but if anybody wanted to go home, he would arrange their transportation at once in some way, no matter how difficult.

"But you must tell me now, how many want to go."

He waited. No one spoke.

"I have told you that your families feel you should leave, so it rests with you. How many want to go?"

There was still no response. He waited a little, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it looks as if we are all going to stick together, no matter what happens."

"That's right," said a voice from the crowd. It broke the tension and they all began to laugh.

"Very well. We shall wait and see what happens. I have already spoken to the British Consul. He has not said for you to go, but I have given him all your names and addresses, and he has promised me he will take you out in case there is a war."

He walked to the side of the stage behind the lowered curtain and then walked back to the waiting British. It was apparent that he was deeply agitated.

"I do not wait for a war to start to make my plans," he said. "I am always planning to take care of my people. If the war comes I will try to take you to another country, a neutral country, where we shall start another show. Possibly I shall have to leave everything behind, but with your help we shall build another show. We people of the theatre, we always have our talent, they cannot take that from us."

Everyone went out and sat in the theatre yard. There were a great many planes in the sky, big bombers which all seemed to be going in the same

direction . . . to the frontier.

The next morning startling news reached Munich. The atmosphere became magnetic. Max Van Huten, who had set up his radio secretly again, came hurrying out into the yard.

"Mr. Chamberlain is coming," he shouted.

Everyone stared at him, unable to believe him.

"You are sure you heard right, Max?"

"Yes, it is true. He comes to-morrow. Everything will be all right."

Herr Direktor came out of the stage door smiling broadly.

"I see you have all heard the news. Well, to-night we must give a good show and have a party to celebrate. I told you everything would be all right."

Everyone suddenly began to talk and laugh together, shaking hands and slapping backs.

Next morning the streets were filled with people. The Rundfunk had announced that Herr Hitler would go to the railway station in the morning to meet Mussolini and everyone was told to turn out. The streets were crowded along the route he would pass. Hitler passed very quickly in a closed car with Mussolini. There was no cheering or demonstration of any kind. Once the car had passed, the people just turned and walked away.

Then the streets began to fill again with people all moving towards the airport where Mr. Chamberlain would arrive. There seemed a different note in their footsteps, a quicker note of hope. Thousands and thousands gathered around the airport; the streets around the Braun Haus, where the conference would take place, were blocked with people. The British members mingled with the crowd pushing for a glimpse of Mr. Chamberlain. Dick Nichols, the tumbler, jumped on the shoulders of his brother and climbed up a telegraph pole. Bavarians followed suit, climbing up and on to everything that would give them a better view.

Dick shouted down: "They're coming."

The two dictators came out and then Mr. Chamberlain followed. Dick threw his hat into the air and cheered. The huge crowd cheered and threw hats into the air. On him, they had pinned their last hope for peace.

Dick slipped down his pole. “Come on, let’s go to the Regina Hotel and get another glimpse.”

He and the others pushed with the crowd which moved like a stream to the hotel where Mr. Chamberlain was staying. A huge Union Jack hung from the third floor almost to the ground and two soldiers with fixed bayonets guarded the entrance of the hotel. All day the crowds stood around to get a glimpse of the man who meant so much to them. Whenever he appeared, up went hats in the air: “Heil Chamberlain,” they shouted.

Evening arrived and there was no news. The show finished and still there was no news. Something had gone wrong and a wave of nervousness ran through the city.

Morning arrived, a beautiful sunny day. The news was given out. There would be no war. The city broke out into a rash of flags. All day smiling people walked the streets and crowded to the airport to see Mr. Chamberlain. The atmosphere of the city had completely changed. Notice was given that the Oktober Fest was to be extended in celebration.

It was a wonderful morning, that morning after the Conference. Nobody cared what had been given or taken, won or lost; all that mattered was that there was to be peace instead of war. The reaction from the tension of the past days stirred the city to a festive mood and affected individuals in odd ways.

Madame Rastella decided to go shopping. She sat up in bed and looked at the sleeping figures of her husband, Lucia, and daughter, Rita. Outside the September sun was gay, and the streets full of people. Madame had been starving long enough during these months in Hamburg and Berlin, with the Government conserving this and conserving that. To-day she would go shopping. She rolled out of bed and dressed herself for once without the assistance of Lucia and Rita. She took the two shopping bags and went out without hat or coat into the balmy sunshine. She pushed through the crowds towards the little shops, looking into every window.

Here, in Munich, strange to say, the Government was not conserving the food. The Bavarians still had plenty to eat and one could even buy butter. Ha! thought Madame, this is better. This is because one is nearer to Italy. She began to find white bread, butter, Malaga grapes, all kinds of fruits and vegetables from Italy, good meat . . . yes . . . and good fish. There was a gleam in her eyes. She piled the food into the bags until they could hold no more. Half an hour later she turned the corner near the pension. In each hand was a heavy bag, with strings of garlic and sprays of spaghetti sticking out.

She stood under the window of their room.

"Lucia! . . . Lucia!" She shouted at the top of her voice, careless of the people jostling her. "Lucia! . . . Lucia!"

A black mop of curls topping a sleepy face came out of the window. Lucia, heavy with sleep, leaned through the window in his rumpled pyjamas. Then he saw her.

"Ha, mia bella." His face broke into a delighted smile.

She hoisted the bags, beaming all over her face. He lifted them into the window, emptied them and passed them out again. Then he blew her a dramatic kiss, and she blew him one back. Beaming with pleasure she pushed her way through the crowds again towards the shops. For once she was going to have enough to eat. She would have a day of cooking and they would celebrate the peace with wine and feasting.

Herr Direktor was shrewd. Things had settled nicely after the crisis and business was looking up in the theatre, but he was not convinced. The reaction of the crisis on his engagements was a sound barometer on European affairs. He wanted to get his company out of Germany. Booked for Vienna, he could not go because the theatre had gone bankrupt owing to the political events of the past summer. He decided to go to Paris. When he announced his decision to the company an electric current of anticipation ran through the artistes. They were on the move again, going to France. France was wonderful, and Paris in autumn, that was best of all. The old hands retailed theatre gossip of Paris. There was no place in Europe like Paris.

Herr Direktor once more packed his pigskin bags, drove the cream car up to the theatre, had a last minute conference with Pappy Newman and Herr Muller, changed the show around here and there so that Tania could be spared for a few days. Tania sat in the car, laughing and talking to the girls who surrounded her. Herr Direktor smiled and waved to everyone. Tania smiled and waved. She wore a black cossack suit and a new coiffure under the cossack hat. Herr Direktor jumped in the car, slammed the door and drove off with a dash of speed through the busy Munich street.

That same day Anna came with Carlos to her dressing-room which, for the first sketches of Anna's new picture, Peter was using as a studio during the daytime. He was roughing out a large canvas on charcoal from some sketches he had taken of Anna and Rex. She walked in, threw off her leopard coat and took a knife from her dressing-table. Without saying a

word she pushed past Peter and then ripped the canvas from corner to corner with her knife.

Peter stared at Anna. Anna turned to him. Her stage smile flashed across her face, as much an act as it was on the stage.

"You are a nice boy. I do not want this now. Me, I have other ways."

Carlos laughed, Anna laughed and Peter laughed. There was nothing else to do.

A few days later Herr Direktor and Tania returned. The immigration authorities had refused to allow Tania to enter France because she had a German passport. Herr Direktor, being a Brazilian, had been allowed to go through. He had left a disappointed Tania in the frontier town to wait his return. In Paris he had found it impossible to do any business. The theatres would not consider any company that had German artistes. They would not discuss business with him at all.

Never before in all his career had he met with such a rebuff.

He decided he would do the next best thing and play in Belgium while he forced a Paris contract. He drove to Brussels to arrange contracts, this time alone. He did not return for several days, during which the company discovered that Brussels was an ideal place for a long run for several reasons. There would be very little tax deducted from salaries in Belgium; food was plentiful and living was cheaper in Brussels than anywhere on the Continent and the bazaars were filled with things on which to spend the brief wealth of pay day. The stage was full of gossip about Brussels. Nearly all the artistes had played there before. It was their favourite city on the Continent. They knew all the streets, the cafés, the waiters, the galleries and, yes, the churches.

"The music at Ste. Gudule . . . it is so beautiful," said Mario. "There, the High Mass on Sunday morning is so beautiful."

"And the chimes," said Mundi. "Here in Germany we hear nothing like those bells. We must go to Malignes."

"Ha! Germany!" Mario flung his arms up in dramatic despair. "All they think of here is war. I am sick of it. I shall not come back here again, ever."

"That is what Herr Direktor says also."

"They say . . . but what do they do? Every summer they come back."

"Well," said Mundi, "soon we shall be away from this country and I shall be glad."

In a week's time Herr Direktor came back again. The same afternoon he gathered the company in the warm sunlight like a father gathering his many children around him, sitting on the grass while he told them the gossip of his travels.

"First I went to Brussels," he said. "I tried very hard to make a good contract there, but the theatre we have always played, the one you know so well, went bankrupt in the crisis. I went to the manager's home and we talked all one night to see what we could do to reopen it. He felt so disappointed that he could not have you all with him for a few months as he had always done in the past. But it is hopeless; the bank would not allow him to reopen. Everything, I am afraid, is very bad financially from the crisis." He looked so sad. He sat on a box in the yard with his shoulders huddled and a far-away look in his eyes. There was silence around him, for this was something that had not been expected. He continued, "There is a large hall there I thought we perhaps could use instead of the theatre. In Brussels we are so well known that I think we could bring business into any place, but I could not arrange that either."

"Is it because so many of us are German?" asked Hugo, the strong man.

Herr Direktor hesitated. "No . . . I think not," he answered slowly. "It is the financial condition. . . . Still you must all remember, you who are German, that there will be a feeling that cannot easily be forgotten."

"Then, Herr Direktor, we do not go to Belgium after all?" The voice was so disappointed that he looked up and smiled.

"Well, yes. I have done the next best thing. I have booked you into Antwerp."

A clamour of excitement rose from the crowd around him.

"Yes," he said, nodding his head and laughing. "I knew that would suit you. With you it is all right, but I do not know if it is all right with them. I have engaged the theatre, but . . . I have no permits to play in Belgium. They have said they will not allow any more foreign artistes into the country at all."

"What will happen if we do not go there?" asked Ronnie.

"We shall stay in Germany, I suppose, until we can go somewhere else. Here we can go on indefinitely until we go to Japan. I have already made the

contract for a year from now."

There was a groan from the crowd.

"Oh, yes . . . I know how you feel. I do not blame you at all, but it is necessary for us all to stick together until I can get you away to a far country where we shall all be safe and happy. I am already negotiating with South America and Australia."

"Then we shall not go to Antwerp after all?" asked Nancy.

"I hope so. Herr Newman leaves to-night to see the police and government officials to try again for permits. In the meantime we shall pack up because, whatever happens, we are leaving Munich."

Pappy Newman left that night, none too hopeful. All the crates were brought out into the yard and the usual packing began of those things which could be sent ahead to pass through the customs. The Germans in the company were in a nervous mood. The men were afraid they might still be held for military service and the girls were afraid of being unpopular in other countries.

Herr Direktor left Harry Nichols to superintend the packing. He lacked heart for it himself. He could soothe the fears of his family, but he could not soothe his own worries. Never, never in all his twenty years in the business had he felt so harsh a feeling against anything German. His show was not predominantly German, but in the past years he had used his German connections perhaps to too good advantage. Now they were rebounding on him, threatening to destroy him and the show that was his very life.

He sat down heavily. Twenty years he had spent building up his revue until it was the biggest in all Europe, biggest in the world, and it had rewarded him richly; it had given him position, power, and money, all sweet things. It had given him women in love, pleasure, and companionship; all sweet things; and he had never parted from any of them without friendship; that was a test of a man. Yes, his show had given him a full life, filled his pride, vanity, money-hunger, and lust, and yet when it came to losing it, none of these lesser things mattered, because he knew he loved it more than himself, more than any woman, more than money. He loved the odd, gay, childlike people, the youth and beauty of the girls, the innocence of the children, of Yogi, of Kathi, the civilized culture of Mario and the Shantoyas, the comedy of the Rastellas, of Lubichov and his music, the steadiness of the Nichols, the coarse, beer-swilling lustiness of the Irish stage hands.

He heard the door open behind him and there stood Anna, her dark face pouting.

"Come in, Anna," he said softly.

Anna stayed near the door, "I am going to leave the revue." Her face was sullen.

"Come, Anna." He held out his hand and then, as if habit was too strong, she came to him quickly and sat herself on his knee with her arms around his neck.

"I am going. You do not like me any more."

"There is trouble," he said. "Everyone stays with me. Only you leave me."

"That Tania, you like her better than me now."

Herr Direktor's shoulders gave a slight shrug. The world could fall in pieces and women would think of other women.

He looked into her eyes, knowing all about her flagrant affair with Carlos. "You are unhappy with my show, Anna?"

"I have been your lover and now it is Tania. You think I like that?"

Herr Direktor loosened one of her hands from his neck and held it. "You are silly. I took Tania to Paris because she has worked hard for my show and because she deserved a little rest."

Anna pulled her hand away and jumped up. Her forefinger tapped on her bosom. "You expect me to believe that, yes? You think I am a fool? I know different. You make her your mistress. You make her star and she laugh at me."

Herr Direktor shrugged. With Anna one was gentle, just as one would be with a sulky animal. "Anna, listen to me. I have much trouble. I must split my show because there is trouble. You will be the star of one show, the best show, and for the other I must make new stars. There will be Tania and Kathi. That is all. Tania is not my mistress. You know she did not cross the border. I have too much trouble to think of her that way."

His voice had become firm as he spoke, firm and convincing. And Anna responded just like one of her leopards. She became docile. She believed him.

"And I will go with the show to England?"

"Yes."

Anna's face cleared although she did not smile.

"And Kathi?" she asked.

"What about Kathi?"

"You do not like her also?"

A frown crossed his face. She had touched a sensitive spot. He thought he had hidden his affection for Kathi.

"What do you mean?"

Anna smiled slyly. She saw she had touched him. She knew, as the rest of the company knew, how blind he had been to the obvious fact of Peter and Kathi in love. "She can marry her Englishman?"

Herr Direktor took his monocle and screwed it in his eye. "You are mad. Kathi does not want to marry anyone."

Anna knew she had gone too far and she was happy. He had neglected her and she had scratched him. Now she was satisfied. She kissed him impulsively and ran out of his office to find Carlos and tell him.

Herr Direktor let his monocle fall. In his mind he was suddenly seeing a thousand and one things, unnoticed before, that gave truth to Anna's insinuation. He had not thought much about his intentions with Kathi recently. The idea of marrying her had been growing like a warm background to his thoughts particularly in these troubled times. But it had been like something that could keep until the troubles were over. With Kathi there was no hurry. Like an ornament, a lovely statuette, she was there, always complete. One did not associate her with change and restlessness. And now there was something between her and this English boy. He rose from his seat. When one thing went wrong, everything went wrong. He would do something about it as soon as this next move was settled.

Kathi had ceased to worry about the present troubles of the company. She had run away to her own little world, turning on one side to her love for Peter and on the other to the serenity of Yogi. Now, for the first time, Tania turned to Kathi for reassurance. Tania had had a shock. She had entered into the Paris venture still in the rebound from her last offer to Peter. She had thrown off all thoughts of him and was going her own way. If it meant being the mistress of Herr Direktor for a time, then it did not matter. She would get from it the rest of her education in fine clothes and fine living. No more

pensions and cheap meals, only the best of hotels and the best of meals. She would pay the price for the final layer of sophistication . . . and enjoy it.

Then, at the moment of her plunge, she had been thwarted at the frontier and left to cool her ideas in a frontier town. How did she know whether she could make Herr Direktor like her enough to do things for her. When Herr Direktor had picked her up again at the frontier he had been absorbed in larger issues. He was in no mood for the tenderness that was needed for a new affair. There was too much to think about. At all costs the show must be kept together and kept moving and booked. It lived on its momentum. If once it stopped moving, the fantastic overhead expenses would devour its breath of life, money, so quickly that it would collapse only too soon.

Tania was left between two stools. With all the implications of being the mistress of Herr Direktor without any of the advantages of the actual fact, she wobbled on an uncertain pedestal, both in the company and in her own mind. She turned to Kathi because Kathi had no worries, no problems. Kathi drew all things to her. Tania had had to chase after everything. Kathi, placid, unambitious, could have for the asking, and without paying, all the things Tania had ever wanted, stardom, Peter, and Herr Direktor. It was beyond Tania's experience and she was confused and uncertain.

Meanwhile the packing of the show went on systematically. The Munich engagement was running through its last days. Herr Direktor called the company together on the stage. Neither Pappy Newman nor the permits had arrived.

"We have not heard from Herr Newman at all," he said. "There has been no word. But I am sure that, to-day, there must be some news. Now about the final packing . . . I want to warn you as I never have before that you must be very careful, especially the British members who are so heedless and who always take chances. Under no circumstances must you take any money from the country. I am having the few marks that you are allowed to take transferred in a draft from the bank and I will give them to you myself in the next country. If you need money there I will see to that also. But I do not want any trouble with the police. You must abide by the law so do not try to conceal money, either British or German, in any part of your baggage."

At noon that day Pappy Newman arrived back. He was greeted enthusiastically by the company, but he had nothing to say. He rushed to Herr Direktor's office and closed the door quickly. It was not long before everyone knew that there were no permits for the Continental Revue to play in Belgium. The theatre manager in Antwerp and Pappy Newman had pulled

every string, but to no avail . . . no permits would be issued to a company with Germans in it. Pappy Newman was angry. He gathered the company around him.

"Pack up as fast as you can. We are going some place out of this damn country. We shall pack and go to Cologne and wait there until we can cross the border."

Early the next morning, on the day the company was to leave, the German police arrived in the theatre, several pairs of them. As usual the company tried to joke with them, but it was impossible. They were aggressive, domineering, bullying, especially to the girls, and soon they had antagonized everyone. They walked through the dressing-rooms in pairs and watched everything the company was doing. They ordered the artistes to open their bags and trunks and parcels. They pulled things apart and left them lying around and went through everything, even the costumes still hanging on the walls. They were very expert, very rude, and stimulated a boiling resentment.

By the time the police had finished their inspection it was one o'clock in the morning and the artistes were weary.

Pappy Newman assembled them. "Now you will all go immediately to the station and wait for me there. I will come as soon as possible. All stick together. If you have any money left, which I doubt, spend it all at the station because you won't be allowed to take it out of the country."

They all obeyed him, filling the station restaurant and pooling their money for big cups of coffee. Warmed if not stimulated by the coffee, they began to realize they were at last on the move again; banter started, spreading from one table to others, and soon the station restaurant was alive with chatter and laughter. The company looked like a band of gypsies, weary but gay, waiting with their eternal patience, whiling away the time with song.

Other artistes kept coming in. Dick Nichols pushed his daughter Myrtle into the restaurant, asleep in her pram. Myrtle was a little trouper and she could sleep anywhere. She was now nearly three years old and had never known any other life. Little Biji came in smiling, wrapped up in her navy blue English chinchilla coat because there was a chill in the air. In her hand she carried a string bag with the kettle, frying pan, and a few pot handles sticking out of the top. Biji was in a gay mood; she was on the move again, leaving Germany for a new country.

Pappy Newman came in and was greeted with a burst of cheering. His face was red but he was smiling. He took his hat off, mopped his brow, and called for beer. Then he sat down to watch the clock and talk with the rest of the company. Herr Direktor in his car was already speeding towards the frontier.

As the time neared for the train to arrive, the company straggled out to the platform. The night was cold and very dark, and everybody sat around once again quiet and patient, waiting for the train. The last moments dragged, but finally the headlights could be seen in the distance. The train stopped. Everybody climbed in, piling luggage wherever there was room. The children spread their cases on the floor of the long corridor, all in a long line, Biji, Baba, Ching Ching, Snowball, Jackie. They stretched themselves in line on top of their cases, covered themselves with their coats and almost before the train started they were sound asleep, curled up like little balls. There was a smile on Snowball's face.

The train sped quickly across the dark German countryside, a countryside lit only by the eerie bluish reflection coming from the glass roofs of the huge war factories working by day and night. The members of the Continental Revue did not care. They were leaving Germany and they were happy. The train was overcrowded and there was no room for reclining so they huddled themselves together, slept like children, and were unaware of the dawn breaking its cold light on the countryside outside the train windows.

# Chapter Forty-one

The train drew into the big station at Cologne. Everyone was awake, stiff, and in the stupor of uncomfortable sleep; but already excitement was flickering along the train. The train stopped, heads pushed against shut windows to look for a sign. Soon the news flashed all along the crowded train. Harry Nichols was running up the platform to meet them and his face was wreathed in smiles.

Pappy Newman was the first off the train.

"Everything all right, Harry?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes. Just at the last minute they issued the permits."

"Good."

"But you must make everyone hurry. The train is leaving almost immediately on another track. They are holding the train for you. Tell them all to hurry." The company was spilling out of the train, men, women, girls, children and bags, hundreds of bags, cases, parcels getting between legs and mixed up with children.

"HURRY . . . HURRY," shouted Pappy. "The train for Brussels is leaving immediately . . . you have a long walk. . . . Hurry, hurry!"

He started leading off the procession and there was a rush of people and bags downstairs, through a long subway and upstairs again. The train was waiting, officials beckoning, guards waiting to jump on, engine snorting steam. The stream of nationalities split and climbed quickly into the train, throwing bags and parcels anywhere and diving for seats. Almost before the last member was off the platform the train began to move.

Almost immediately the inevitable police appeared and began their search through the train. Every bag was opened again and thoroughly searched. All handbags were examined for money. As the train pulled into the last frontier town of Germany, the police prepared to get off. Everyone felt a sense of relief. The train stopped, the police got off, and the train started again.

The train windows filled with heads that leaned out as far as they could. Hands waved wildly. "Auf Wiedersehen, Auf Wiedersehen," everyone

shouted.

"Auf Wiedersehen," shouted Bill Hardy at the top of his lungs, leaning out of the window as far as his little old body and his fiery eye-browed face would take him. "May we never see your dirty faces again."

Pappy Newman went into a gale of laughter.

Bill Hardy drew his head in from the window, "I've told them for the last time," he said.

Pappy laughed and laughed. "So you are not coming back to Germany with us any more, Bill?"

"NOT ME," shouted Bill. "I may be an old fool, but I am not that crazy."

Once across the frontier, the gaiety of the company took a new note, as though a group of children were suddenly released from supervision. There was no longer the eternal shadow of the German police. The company was in Belgium.

Pappy went along the train chuckling to himself. He stopped to kiss Sophie affectionately. No one had seen him do that for weeks. Mario and Zira, the Persian girl, were embracing one another fervently, not because they were in love again, but because it was an expression of freedom in public. Tania wandered through the train, sitting, talking and laughing wherever she stopped. Peter sat with Kathi's fair head on his shoulder, her hand in his. He felt a great relief that he was across the frontier. The thought of that night in Hamburg had been with him all the time in Germany. Now perhaps he could forget. Tania came past, laughing with Dorothy and Nancy. She saw Peter and stopped, bending down to peep at Kathi.

"She is asleep, yes?"

Peter nodded. Tania dropped to his other side and laughed into his eyes. "We are across the frontier, yes? Now you will not worry any more, no? Is it not as I said? Always I know, only you do not believe me."

Her shoulder was rubbing against his and he could feel the disturbing effect of contact with her.

"Damn you," he whispered.

"She is asleep." Tania bent forward to see Kathi. "She is so beautiful, yes? Just like a doll when she sleeps. I love her like I would love a little doll . . . but you. . . ." She laughed a teasing, husky laugh. . . . "But you, my Peter, that is different." She knew he could not move without waking Kathi,

and she bent to his cheek and kissed him softly. He could feel her lips like a soft enveloping warmth on the skin they touched.

A sharp laugh cut the kiss short. Anna was standing with the handsome dark face of Carlos over her shoulder grinning amiably behind her.

"Look at her, the hungry one," said Anna. "She steals him under Kathi's nose."

Tania jumped up unperturbed while Peter blushed angrily. "No, not under her nose," replied Tania without hesitation. "It is too small . . . not like some."

Anna's laugh disappeared. She answered to Peter. "Don't let that one fool you. She make love to small fish because she needs rehearsal to catch big fish."

Tania did not reply. She knew how to get the sympathy of the two men. Anna had been waiting for this opportunity long enough. "Tania likes to make plenty people think Herr Direktor sleep with her; she thinks she is important that way. But I know different; so does she."

Having said it as loudly as she could over the chatter of the train, she went on, Big Carlos smiling as if nothing had happened. Tania took it in her stride. She winked at those who had turned round to listen. Then she bent to Peter's ear and whispered to him. "You see? Now you know. For you, I refuse even Herr Direktor."

She laughed and was gone. Kathi was still asleep.

Pappy was coming back along the train. "Come on, you gang, get ready to change trains."

Eventually after two changes of train, the company arrived at Antwerp.

At the theatre the artistes were greeted with open arms by the concierge who was an old friend. They stormed into his little apartment under the stage, clamouring for letters. As usual there was a pile waiting. It was now dark, but instead of looking for places in which to live, all went to the café on the corner, leaving their bags behind in the theatre. They sat down to read their letters, after which they began to eat.

There was delicious coffee, real coffee with real cream, whipped cream. Eggs, real eggs and plenty of them being beaten to a froth. Where else in all the world could one see an omelet whipped up before one's eyes to such perfection. Then the pastries, piles of them.

"What is it?" asked someone. "Food has never tasted so good before. I think before I look for rooms I will try every kind of pastry they have in this place."

"It is the eggs," answered Hugo, the strong man.

"Yes," said Friedrich, "but they must have eggs also in Germany."

"Alligator's eggs," answered Hugo. Everyone laughed.

For the next three days while the luggage was being passed through the customs the members of the Continental Revue were at large, free to enjoy themselves. With very little money and nothing to do in the theatre, they clung together. Days were spent in the big bazaars where already the Christmas stocks were beginning to fill the counters. Evenings were spent in the little cafés near the docks of the Albert Canal. The weather had turned cold and the first snowflakes were falling. Under the shadow of the big cathedral, with its beautiful chimes, crowds hurried through the streets . . . everyone seemed so carefree, so gay . . . there was no political talk, no staring from the Belgian people, children laughed and ran with light steps. The steamship offices all along the street were bright with lights, the wind was blowing through the leafless trees in the little Parc Verte, and the tiny red, white, and blue lights dancing on the branches made the park seem full of Christmas trees. Big ships from every part of the world came up into the heart of the city, sailors from all countries filled the little cafés under the cathedral, the tang of the sea lay all over the old city and the sweet wine of freedom ran free, intoxicating the members of the revue. They spent longs days in the open, and long nights in the cafés talking with the sailors. The memory of Antwerp, its freedom and its charms, ate deep into the hearts of Herr Direktor's happy family, so glad to be away at last from Germany. None of them would forget Antwerp. After so much restriction in Germany, so many officials, so many police, here was freedom, freedom to speak, freedom to laugh, no police to frown upon them, no crowds to stand staring, silent and bovine.

# Chapter Forty-two

Three days passed and then the members of the company were back in the theatre for twenty-four hours, delighted to be back, fresh and ready for an opening show that would start them on a run of houses sold out to the door. Herr Direktor in shirtsleeves bullied and stormed at them, told them the show had gone to pieces during the last run and that if they couldn't do better than that he would sell the show and go away to Brazil and buy a ranch and raise cattle which would know what to do when a whip cracked. He stormed and he swore and he sweated; he reduced the girls to tears and the men to despair and then, when the dress rehearsal was over at last, he gave them two hours to eat and rest and dress and be ready for the curtain at eight.

In two hours he was with his company again, immaculate and smiling, wandering through the dressing-rooms telling everybody that the house was sold out and that to-night he was sure it was going to be the best performance the Continental Revue had ever given.

The show was splendid, the audience responsive, and the house rang with applause again and again. Everyone was pleased; the management, who felt it was the turn of the tide; Herr Direktor, who felt he had his old power back again; the company, who felt that now everything would be again as it had always been and that the troubles of the world which had so upset them were now pushed into the background again.

Herr Direktor knew better. His days were spent in a welter of negotiations. The whole of his plans would have to be changed. Trouble loomed ahead with permits. No one was anxious to have a show with so many Germans in it. He had already been advised that for his English engagements the number of German artistes would have to be reduced drastically. There was no alternative but to carry out his previous plan and form two companies, but not as he had planned it, not two bigger and better revues, but two smaller companies, one with the cosmopolitan atmosphere to go to England and the other, predominantly German, to return to Germany. The German company would tour all the smaller cities that could not take the larger revue, and the other company would play a short engagement in London and then play the provinces. Next summer the two companies would join together for the Berlin season at the Scala. By then

the world situation might have settled and he could go with a full company to the East.

So much for the plan, but it was taking him and Pappy every hour of the day and night to get it into shape. First there were the negotiations, then they had the company at the theatre day and night trying to rehearse it as two separate shows, with this or that combination of players.

The weather turned bitterly cold; the water pipes of the theatre froze and there was no heat back-stage. The theatre was very big and the stage was like a great cavern, freezingly cold. Under the stage it was warmer than in the dressing-rooms because the animals were stalled there and generated their own heat. They were housed in stalls between which a long runway led to the stage. Up and down this runway dozens of times during every performance the members of the company would race. The animals watched the runway from their stalls to see who was coming, calling in their own way when they saw their friends. When not on the stage the players wrapped themselves in their winter coats over their costumes. They were in Belgium and it was winter; they could not expect anything different; it had always been like this in this theatre. True, the theatre furnace was frozen up, but it couldn't be helped and the players felt sorry for the management. Later the weather would be warm; perhaps they would go to a warmer country and then everything would be all right again. As long as they were together and had plenty to eat and drink they were satisfied.

Day and night in the theatre rehearsals took up every spare minute. The new sets for the two shows were being built under the stage where the animals were housed and there, during the shows and between rehearsals, Kathi would slip down at every spare minute to be with Peter to sit and watch him work. She liked to watch him. He knew just what he wanted and would swear and be angry, just like Herr Direktor, lost to everything except the final result. Sometimes he would turn and smile at Kathi or sit with her for a few minutes asking her whether she was warm enough.

"You are lucky," he said one night, sitting on a box in front of the cage of the laughing hyena. "You don't get a red nose when you are cold."

She smiled and looked at his.

"I know it is red, and a cold in the head does not make it any more beautiful." He wrapped his muffler one more turn around his neck. "I have written to England. I have made sure that when we go to London we shall have the same room in Peter Street."

"That will be beautiful."

"I have an idea. We will get married on the anniversary of the day we met."

Kathi drew her coat around her. It was cold for such talk.

Players ran up and down the runway beyond them; Pat talked to the leopards; animals barked, yelped, growled behind them; Bert took some of Peter's scene painters to tell them a story he had just heard.

Peter pulled Kathi's coat still closer around her. "You must go. You must not catch my cold."

There was a laugh behind them. Tania had chased Katherina down the runway and had seen Peter and Kathi. She came up glowing with exercise. She had finished her adagio dance with Hugo.

She had heard his last words. "That is not romantic, to have a cold." She snatched Peter's paint rag from his hand and wiped his nose leaving a smear of paint across his nose and face. She laughed aloud and Kathi, too, laughed, because Peter could not see what his face looked like. Then Tania was away up the runway.

The favourite meeting-place of the company changed. Usually in every city the players congregated in the café nearest to the theatre, never farther away if possible than the width of the street. But in Antwerp someone discovered that the upstairs restaurant of a big bazaar was warm. At any hour of the day when their acts were free from rehearsal players could be found eating and drinking around the plain bare wooden tables of the small restaurant, drifting in and out as rehearsals ended or were due to begin. They would allow themselves fifteen minutes for the brisk walk back to the theatre through the bitter streets.

Tiny Gretchen, as fashionable as ever, Kaspar, her husband, and Jimmy Nichols, sat reading their mail.

Another group came into the restaurant. Sandra, Mario, and the Indian girls, Yasmini and Lotus, joined the others. Sandra had been crying.

"What is wrong?" asked Gretchen.

Mario spoke. "She is afraid she will be sent back to Germany."

"Why?"

"The German Consul says her passport is not right. Her father has tried to get her to South America, but it cannot be arranged."

“That crowd of bandits,” said Jimmy Nichols. “Interfering with the lives of clever people.”

“They will interfere with the lives of a lot more people before long,” said Kaspar.

More artistes came as others went out. Elsa Henn came in. Elsa had a full pocket, as usual, and began to treat everyone. She opened several bundles and laid their contents on the table. She had been shopping and had presents for all her friends.

The new bending act came in, two women and a man who had just joined the company. They went up to the bar to serve themselves to the same that the rest of the company were eating, onion soup and vol-au-vent, huge patties filled with cream chicken, both dishes costing only a few francs.

“Did you know that is a mother, son, and daughter?” asked Nancy.

The girls looked away from the shoes. “No,” said Elsa, “they can’t be. Which is the mother?”

“The girl told me,” said Nancy. “I couldn’t believe it. The one who holds the man up in the act is the mother. They are Dutch.”

“Look at Mario sitting alone. That’s the first time I’ve seen him alone.”

“He waits for the new Turkish snake charmer. He played with her once in Paris, and now he is in love again.”

“Why do we want another snake charmer?”

“Charlie is leaving. He says the war will start and he wants to get to Ceylon before it begins.”

“The WAR,” groaned Yasmini. “That is all we hear.”

“I cannot understand how such a nice-looking girl should spend her life snake charming,” said Gretchen.

“You should see her,” laughed Dorothy. “She bathes her snakes in the dressing-room every morning. They follow her around like pets.”

“They say she does a very unusual strip-dance act.”

“With her snakes?” asked Gretchen.

“Look, here come the Russians.”

Kasha, Olga, and the other Russians came in.

“Did you know the wife of the other Russian dancer is going to have a baby?” asked Zira.

“Yes,” said Gretchen. She always knew before anyone else when and from whom babies could be expected. “She keeps right on doing that wild dance every night. And only a few months to go. They ought to stop her.”

“Why?” said Lotus. “She doesn’t show it.”

The Russian group joined the party around the table. Kasha remarked on the beauty of the new snake charmer.

“Yes,” said Gretchen. “I wonder if she will do her strip-dance here?”

“It would not mean anything,” said Kasha. “When we go into Germany again Herr Direktor is going to make spectacular new nude scenes. He is going to do a series of the nude paintings from the Louvre in Paris.”

“Glory be to God,” said little Connie, the blunt, outspoken dancer from the north of England. “He is going to have dozens of nudes cavorting around the stage. I thought we had enough for one show.”

Kasha looked down at her gravely from his great height. Connie went on: “He had better not expect me to do anything like that.”

Kasha’s gravity had a tinge of contempt.

“Nude . . . and naked . . . they are two different words . . . two different meanings . . . the English always confuse the two. The nude body is very beautiful in youth and it has always been the subject of the greatest masterpieces. There is art and exhibition.”

Kasha paused, using the dramatic effect of his own aristocratic presence with the instinct of the artiste. Before reaction could become awkward, his compatriots split into a babel of chatter, laughter broke out again. Outside the windows, the snow fell gently and persistently and lights began to forestall the gathering darkness. Inside the café, the artistes continually changing as one group left and others came in, drifted from one table to the other, comparing their letters, exchanging news, clinging together like a large family in a foreign city, always choosing one gathering place and making it entirely their own and their home.

Tania came in laughing with two of the Englishmen. Tania never missed an opportunity of improving her English, and when she could not use Peter she used others. She saw Mario alone and ran to him.

“Mario, but you look unhappy.”

Mario threw up his hands. “Tania, my little one, look upon me and learn a lesson. I am in love.”

“But you are always in love, yes?”

“All my life I have been in love; but with love; not with one girl alone.”

“It is the new Turkish snake charmer.”

Mario nodded gloomily. “There are two times when it is bad to fall in love. The first time and the last time. And believe me, my little Tania, the first time it is bad enough, but the last time . . . Tania, I do not know what I will do.”

“She will love you.”

“She loves her snakes.”

“Is it true she takes them to bed with her?”

“Even that I could bear.”

“It would be difficult,” said Tania thoughtfully. “Tell me, Mario, about love . . .”

“I know nothing about it,” interrupted Mario.

“I have known you one year and already I have seen you love one, two, three . . .”

Mario held up his hand and then leaned forward. “Only this I know. It is always different, and if any man tells you all women are the same, he is not only a liar but he is a fool; women are a mirror in which he sees only his own shallowness.”

“No, no, Mario. It is not that I want to know. Can one love many with the body and yet love only one so much that it is like one’s own blood?”

“There is everything in love,” shrugged Mario. “As many kinds as people. You, also, you have a problem?”

“The first time, will it pass? And will one fall in love again and again . . . like you?”

Mario shrugged again. “The first time and the last time, they are the worst. Have you seen her face, how her eyes, so black, slant up with the high cheek-bone and then how the cheeks slice so clean a line to the chin. It is the face of a satyr made perfect because it is on a girl. Such exquisite promise.”

Tania laughed at his gloom and pursued her own line of thought.

"Kathi and Peter, it is their first love. If Kathi lost Peter would it hurt and then be forgotten with another?"

"She is a simple child," said Mario. "For the simple ones it is harder. Sometimes they do not understand how it is possible to love more than one."

"And Peter?"

"Him I do not know. He is young, he is clever, he is a serious one. One does not know how life will take him." Mario stopped, and, looking at Tania, remembered the story of Hamburg, the murder and, afterwards. "Does Kathi know of that?"

"Kathi does not know anything. Kathi looks at Peter and sees only fairy-tales."

"My little Tania, did you ever think that she might be simply very much in love. One never thinks of the simplest things."

"That is not love," said Tania.

Mario shrugged. "You want love to be like you, impatient, hungry, all in a hurry, like an angry stream rushing to a waterfall . . ."

"Yes, yes, that is love," said Tania.

"You see?" said Mario. "How can you understand Kathi? With her, love is like a still lake in a mountain far above the earth, always in moonlight."

Tania jumped up. "And with you, Mario, it is always like fruit, on a tree; when you are hungry the plum you see is always the best."

"First you steal my experience, and now you even steal my words."

Tania laughed. She was practising a husky laugh. "I go now. I will tell the Turkish girl that Mario dies for love."

Mario's voice stopped her. "Tania!"

She turned. "Yes?"

"You are not trying to steal something from Kathi?"

Tania laughed, "Kathi, she is one who walks in her sleep."

"Tania, my little one," continued Mario softly, "you must not try to steal Peter."

Tania's laugh mocked him. "Me steal him? If I want him, I have him." She shrugged. "I hate him."

"Ha," said Mario with a nod of the head. "So! There is a serpent in the Garden of Eden."

Tania laughed again and turned her back to him. She went from one group to another. Then she saw Kathi come into the café alone. Tania knew why. Kathi had been shopping for Peter's Christmas present and Peter was out buying one for her. Tania ran and swept the unresisting Kathi to a table.

"What did you buy?"

Kathi gave a helpless shrug and a smile. "No. It is so difficult."

"To-morrow we will go together to buy him something. To-day he told me you are going to be married in London." Tania watched Kathi as she spoke.

"I do not know," said Kathi. A slight frown crossed her brow. "Herr Direktor said . . ."

"That was why Herr Direktor took you out after the show last night?"

Kathi nodded. "He says it is not good for a clever artist like Peter to marry too soon. He said it is better to wait for a year, two years . . ."

Kathi's voice had a way of drifting into the end of a sentence as though she expected interruption.

"You are going to wait?"

"I do not know . . ."

"I wouldn't wait," said Tania.

"But there is no hurry," said Kathi. "Herr Direktor says he wants me to have some new acts for Berlin next year and if I marry, maybe, he says he will have to find some new dancer."

Tania saw how completely Kathi believed him. "It is not true. He does not want you to marry, that is it. He does not like anyone to marry."

"But I would like to wait also."

"But don't you want Peter?"

"Yes."

"Why wait then?"

Tania sat studying Kathi. In Kathi's presence she had a sense of frustration. Here was one who was simple and as transparent as glass, who made no effort, never struggled for anything, and yet everything seemed to come to her, everyone seemed to protect her. There was something unfair about it and Tania could not understand it.

At that moment Pappy Newman pushed open the door. He stood, big and red-faced as Santa Claus, and just as loaded with parcels. He, too, had been shopping, and Sophie, all smiles, was hooked to his arm.

"Come on, gang," he shouted, "time to leave for the theatre."

In a moment the room had emptied and there was a stampede up the street in the direction of the theatre.

Christmas came and with it bitter weather. There was a flurry of parties and then Christmas was over and the show was once more packed, ready to leave for Holland to open in Amsterdam on New Year's Day.

The company gathered in the early hours of the morning in the theatre café to wait for the buses that were to take them to the frontier. It was snowing again. The wind was bitter, swirling the snow into deep drifts in the streets. The players huddled near the stove exchanging tales of every part of the world, particularly the warm parts.

Pappy Newman had gone by train with the animals and baggage. Herr Direktor had driven off in his car after the show taking with him in the car Yogi and Kathi, ostensibly because he thought in such bitter weather they might catch cold in the buses. In reality, Herr Direktor found them soothing to his troubled mind. It had been very hard to get his company into Holland. Everything had gone wrong in the past few days. Having balanced his two shows nicely he was faced with the necessity of re-casting them. The British had drastically cut the number of German permits, there was political pressure from Germany blackmailing him to include certain acts in the English show as a price for permits for the German show. Anna could not go to England and Kathi was not acceptable. There was no alternative but to build the English show around Tania and let Anna and Kathi go back to Germany.

No one realized, thought Herr Direktor, what a drain it was on him to create two revues and to impose his own personality and ideas upon both. He could create such shows if he were free, but with politics interfering at every turn it was becoming impossible. But his mind was made up. He would give one show to Pappy and one to Harry Nichols, and he himself would take Kathi to a ranch in Brazil. They would go by way of India, so

that he could see Yogi safely to his country and then he would travel leisurely with Kathi from Singapore to Shanghai, to Seattle. She would soon forget this boy, who but for him would still be a penniless artist in London.

Meanwhile his company, freezing in Belgian buses, had been delayed at the frontier while there was more trouble with passports. No one, it seemed, wanted any company with Germans in it. But eventually they transferred to luxurious and warm Dutch buses and under an arch of leafless branches the buses plunged through a blizzard alongside the frozen canals. Hungry seagulls whirled through the storm, their harsh calls like the cries of tortured souls trying to warn the troupers that their little in-grown world was no longer safe. But the troupers were fast asleep and did not care.

At last the buses drew up in front of the theatre facing the broad Amstel Canal in Amsterdam. By now the snow was knee-deep. Every canal in Amsterdam was frozen. The porter of the theatre was besieged with questions about accommodation. He said he did not know of any; there were no more rooms available in Amsterdam because thousands of refugees had entered the country within the past few months, legally and illegally, running from Nazi government. All along the Amstel Canal in the knee-deep snow the players plunged searching for rooms. There were none. At every step the members of the revue were stopped by Dutch police, travelling along the canal in couples. "Passports," they demanded sternly.

As the day wore on, the storm became heavier and the snow deeper. Sleet sharp as needles blew across the canals with the fury of a blizzard. Taxis returned to their garages; they could no longer plough through the snow, but the members of the company had to. They continued their long search up and down stairs of the pensions. Never in any country had they seen stairs like those in Amsterdam. The temperature had dropped below zero and there were no furnaces in the buildings; there were small stoves in some of the rooms, but only small oil-heaters in most. All the water pipes in the houses were frozen.

The big café on the square became the headquarters of the company; members went out and returned to warm up to go out again. The Arab boys sat in the café discouraged for once. They had given up the struggle to find rooms, and they sat drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes.

"What are we going to do, Paulus?" one of them asked.

"I don't know."

"Can you find nothing?" asked Mario, who was drying his wet feet near the fireplace.

"No," said Paulus. Then he laughed, showing all his white teeth against his dark skin. "You, too, Mario, you find nothing? It is growing late, Mario. See now, the dusk is coming." He looked through the big window to the square where lights were twinkling in the building all around. "What will we do?"

"Me? Ha!" laughed Mario. He lifted his wine-glass and drained it. "Me, I am always all right. I never worry. If you get nothing you can come with me."

"But where?"

"Like Italy, we shall sleep in the dressing-rooms. In Italy, when we went to the small towns, they think we are all robbers, so they run and lock up all the silver; they say, 'Look out, lock up everything, the troupers have arrived!' They think it is the same now as hundreds of years ago when only thieves and rogues went on the stage in Italy. So when they see us come, they are afraid. When we go to ask for rooms they peek out at us from behind the curtains and keep the doors locked; so for three days we sleep in the theatre."

The Arab boys laughed, forgetting about their troubles. Then Paulus remembered something.

"Yes, but here it is not the same. There it was warm and here everything is frozen; the dressing-rooms are cold."

"Ha, yes," said Mario. "But there are no fleas here. So it is no worse."

Zira and Rani sat at another table. Zira was reading an old magazine as she warmed herself, wrapped in a pastel pink sari with her feet in black satin slippers. Rani, on the other hand, had been out looking for rooms and wore a heavy woollen dress and galoshes. Rani was worried. Mundi was out searching now for both of them.

"Zira, what are you going to do if Mundi find a room for you? How you get there?"

"In a taxi, of course."

"There are no more taxis."

"Well, he can carry me."

"What we do if Mundi find no rooms?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake give me a rest. He found one for himself, so if he finds none for us he must give us his."

Some of the English came in. When the girls had shown the police their passports the police had smiled. “Ha, English!” Then they had tried to help the girls.

“Have you found a room?” asked Rani.

“Yes, and you should see it. There is a big stove in the centre with a hot fire and the room is freezing.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Mario. He stretched his long legs and rose to start out once again on his search.

“Good thing you see the joke, Mario.”

“When you grow up to be as young as I am,” said Mario, wagging his forefinger, “you will see it is all one big joke. Who makes the joke we do not know, but it is better to laugh with him. There are no rooms. Thirteen thousand Jews have come in three days.”

“But where is Zenobia? You have found her a room?”

“Alas,” said Mario. “She has gone with Karl, the Dutch comedian. He has relatives with a warm room. Sometimes even love is not so warm as an oil stove.”

Peter came into the café, muffled up to his ears. He had gone out alone looking for a room that would be good enough for Kathi when she arrived, if she arrived. He had no idea where she was. There had been no sign of Herr Direktor’s car.

Mario looked up from the stove. “Ha, my Peter. You have found a room?”

“No.”

“So you, too, will sleep in the snow?”

“I’ll find one.”

Some of the girls laughed. Mario turned to them. “See? The innocent one. He thinks he will find a room.”

Peter sat down at a table dispirited. He knew only too well that he had no chance of finding a room now, and he did not know what to do. He had an uncomfortable feeling that Tania would have found one for the three of them had Kathi been there. It was dusk now outside. As he looked at the door it opened with a swirl of cold air and Tania came in, muffled up, and glowing

with warmth and high spirits. She threw off her coat, unwound her thick scarf.

"Did you find a room?" asked Zira.

"Why, yes," said Tania. "I found one this morning. It is very, very nice and by the stove it is warm . . . and in bed."

"In bed?" asked Zira, with an acid note of jealousy in her voice.

"Why, yes," laughed Tania mercilessly. "I have been in bed all day, dreaming of . . ." She went into the first bars of her song, "How Sweet is Gypsy Love."

"But how did you find a room?"

"It was not hard. First I go with Sally. Everybody here likes the English and it is easy to find room for Sally, although it is not very nice. Then I borrow her passport and I go out by myself. I go to every policeman and I ask if he wants to see my passport. I say I am English and I look for a room and I am very, very cold. Then I smile, everyone tries to help me and they are very, very kind. So very soon I find room in a nice house."

Her eyes were looking round the café. She saw Peter, and fresh from her day of warmth and sleep went to talk to him.

Mario watched her with admiration. "That little one, she learns so quickly. Even me, I did not think of that."

Tania sat by Peter. "I am hungry. I must eat. You have a nice room, yes?"

"No, have you?"

"But yes. You have not looked for one yet?"

"All day long."

"Oh, but you are stupid. You know so many things except how to live in this world. When you love, that is nice, but it does not make your bed."

Her eyes flickered over Peter's gloomy face. "I know what to do. You must come with me. I have plenty, plenty room and big bed." Tania looked around. "Only you must tell no one. That Anna she looks for things to tell Herr Direktor."

Peter had a tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "You are careful of your reputation these days."

Tania ignored the sarcasm and laughed. "It is very important. Herr Direktor likes it that way."

"Herr Direktor, Herr Direktor, always Herr Direktor."

Tania's eyes showed she could not understand his outburst. "But why not? Is he not the one who decides everything? But you are jealous!"

"I am not jealous."

"Then you are angry with me because I give you my room?"

He was angry because once again she was managing his affairs better than he could himself.

"I don't want your room."

"So you will sleep on a hard floor and all last night you sleep in a bus. You are afraid of . . . me?"

"No."

Tania laughed and leaned towards him, half-child, half-woman, seeing a risk and taking it because it was her nature to do so. Suddenly her fingers were hungry to run through the dark hair that tumbled so carelessly over his forehead. She stood up. "Here, I will write the address. You will never find a room to-night. One must be sensible, yes?"

Then she was gone to join a group that was going to a cabaret. Gradually the café emptied. Group by group the artistes went out into the snowstorm. The snow was heavy, the night was growing colder, and the drifts were high and undisturbed. All traffic had ceased and there were no taxis.

Peter rose and went out. The blizzard picked up a blinding cloud of snow to greet him and he knew, without any doubt, that he would not have a chance of finding a room.

Tania opened the door of her room quietly and slipped inside. She smiled. It was warm, the only warm place it seemed in Amsterdam that bitter night. In the glow from the stove she saw Peter uneasily asleep, his head on his rolled overcoat. She smiled. Now because of him she could sleep late in the morning and she would not have to get out of a warm bed to stoke the stove. That was good. Tania stood near the door for a moment and stared at his sleeping face with the tumbled hair. She felt that she understood all men, except only this one. All the time these days men were pursuing her. But she wanted none of them, she could get what she wanted now without them. They were useful for parties and cabarets. They spent money freely and she had a much better time than girls who had taken lovers. Girls who took lovers slipped so easily into complete dependence. She, Tania, could do without men; she could do without Herr Direktor now; she could do without

any man until she found one big enough to help her to climb still further. And yet as she looked at the boy who lay sleeping by the stove she knew that he only had to look at her and she would be his to do as he wished. She moved to him and kicked him with her toe.

"Peter, Peter."

He stirred, opened his eyes and sat up.

"Get up. You will die of pneumonia if you lie in that draught all night. The floor it is cold."

"I'm all right."

"If I let you die what will Kathi say? I have a bottle of schnapps. We will have a drink and then maybe you will be sensible and sleep in the bed."

She crossed to the washstand and took the two glasses that were there, pouring herself a small drink and Peter a stiff one. She handed it to him.

"You are afraid of me that you don't sleep in the bed?"

"No."

"I don't want you. I don't want any man, not like that.

"Not even Herr Direktor?"

Tania sat by his side in the glow from the open damper of the stove. She sipped her brandy. "Sophie she is Pappy's mistress. Everyone forget her. Anna she is Herr Direktor's mistress. Now he is tired of her and she goes to Carlos. After Carlos someone else. Always now she will go down, not up. Kathi she is nobody's mistress. She is good girl and everyone all the time say how beautiful is Kathi, all the time they help her, and if she was not fool for you she could be star any time. That is funny."

"Meaning that you can get what you want without paying the price if you play your cards right."

Tania laughed and Peter, still sleepy, wondered whether it was just her very youngness that made laughter come so easily or whether her vitality would always seem to spill like an overful glass of wine. "Mario, he tell me that. Mario knows everything."

"Mario is teaching you things now."

"Not only Mario. Everyone in this company knows something."

"And you learn it all." Peter sipped his drink and the warmth dissipated the frustration of the day in the blizzard.

"Why not? Many, many things are happening now, and one should know them. You know the news, yes?"

"What news?" asked Peter.

"So you do not know? Everything is changed for England?"

"What do you mean?" asked Peter, wide awake now.

Tania laughed again, low and husky. "I am to be the star of the English show."

"What about Kathi?"

"Everything has gone wrong for Herr Direktor. Everywhere it is the same, they do not want the Germans any more. The English will only let him take a few Germans. And the German Government they decide which Germans go to England or they will not give Herr Direktor permits for next year in Germany."

"How do you know this?"

"I find out everything," said Tania simply. "Pappy and Herr Direktor are very worried. Always these days, it is the Government who worry them."

"But these Germans . . ."

"I know about them too," said Tania. "The Tyrolean boys go to England and the new singer, the fat Nazi woman. So Anna she cannot go. Kathi she cannot go. But me, I am Hungarian, I get new Hungarian passport, so I must be the star for the English show. That is good, yes?"

"But Kathi . . ." said Peter, hit hard by this sudden news.

"She goes in the German show with Anna." Tania laughed aloud. "Anna she is with the show that goes to the small towns and I, I go with the big show to London."

Peter was quiet. "You didn't work this?"

"Me? No, I want for Kathi to be with you; then you are happy and not like a bear."

"I'll stay with the German show."

"So?"

The tone of her query stirred Peter's suspicion. "What do you know?"

"I find out everything. You go to England because Herr Direktor he has much work for you to do with Kasha on the big scene for Berlin next

season."

"My God!" muttered Peter.

"It is only for a few months, Peter. And if you lov' very much it does not matter."

"They can't stop Kathi and let these Germans go to England, they are nothing more than spies."

Tania laughed aloud again. "Innocent one. You do not know anything. Pappy says that it is all right because everyone knows it, even the English, and when it is known it does not matter because Herr Direktor and Pappy will not have anyone in the company who is secret spy."

Peter rubbed his brow with his hand. Again the spectre of nationality was coming up between him and Kathi. He spoke bitterly.

"You know everything. Where is Kathi?"

"With Herr Direktor."

"But where?"

"You are fool. Kathi she loves you, and at her neck always she wears a little cross. Those Austrian girls are not like the other Germans. If it were me I would make you jealous, so jealous . . ." She broke off and laughed. "Come, we will go to bed. But never, never must you tell Anna we go to bed together. She only waits, that one, to make the scandal."

"We are not going to bed together. We'll make two beds from the bedclothes."

"It is too cold. Why you worry? I don't want you."

She laughed teasingly and he looked at her, not in the slightest perturbed by the situation. Tania laughed again, "It is very cold by the wall. I do not like to freeze. We put a little pillow between and then you will pretend I am not the other side, yes? And we will both be warm."

Peter gulped his brandy and began to unlace his shoes.

"Did you get your bag from the theatre?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I suppose you are the only one who did."

"You have yours, no?"

"No."

"I have so pretty a nightdress. I will wear it for you. I crush it and it goes in my hand, one hand."

"I'll sleep in my underwear."

Tania laughed. "It is long, it is wool." She shuddered. "And so ugly."

"I keep warm."

"For me, if I have beautiful things, that keeps me warm. Look how lovely are my things."

She slipped off her dress. In the dark shadows of the room, lit only from the glow from the stove, she looked distractingly provocative and she knew it. Then she collapsed into laughter as Peter revealed himself for a swift moment in long woollen underwear. He protected himself from her laughter by jabbing his pillow into the middle of the bed and ducking into the bed. She laughed and laughed, then suddenly stopped. "Kathi would not laugh like that, no? But maybe she has not seen you in your underwear. Maybe it would be great shock."

"Leave Kathi out of it," snapped Peter, his feelings exposed like a bare nerve by the teasing of Tania.

Tania slipped off her flimsy under things and stood with the glow of the stove striking up on her limbs and body. The satin smoothness of her skin glistened. She rubbed her hands down over her breasts, over her slim waist to the undulating line of her hips.

"See, Peter, I am still beautiful?"

Peter did not reply.

"See. I am bigger a little. Just right, nicht war? Not hard like Anna; not soft like Kathi; me, I like me."

The bed was cold and Peter had the bedclothes drawn up so that only one eye and his dark tumbled hair could be seen, the one eye catching the swift picture of light and shadow on Tania's tan skin.

"Put on your nightdress," muttered Peter angrily.

"Poor Peter. But you are strong. You lov' only one."

"You're a devil."

"Because I lov' you?" said Tania.

"Get into your nightdress."

"Ha, look Peter. How lovely it is." From her case she took a flimsy transparency.

"My God! Don't you know it is below zero everywhere except near that damn stove?"

Tania slipped the transparency over her head and stood laughing at him. "For this I would freeze. It is better to die being beautiful than to live warm in your ugly wool."

Her nakedness he saw every night on the stage, but this provocative transparent vision was suddenly a fire in his blood, a blind impulse making him mad before destroying him. She stood between the light from the stove and the bed, standing over him, for a moment serious.

"Peter, it is such a pity."

"Meaning I do not want what you offer."

Tania bent over the bed, threw back the covers, and laughed at the pillow between. "I offer you nothing any more. When you came to this company you were a new little dog with eyes shut. You open them and see Kathi, very, very beautiful. Then you are blind again and you see nothing else."

"One wouldn't expect you to understand."

Tania kneeled on the bed before getting into it, knowing that Peter's eyes had no power to look away from her. "You think I do not understand you. I know that in your hands, in your eyes, you have something none of these others have, something big, big, and you waste it. Everybody uses you; Herr Direktor uses you; Kathi uses you . . . oh, yes, she does, my little Peter. You think she is so quiet, your little white mouse, but she uses up all your will, sucks it like a sponge and then spends it all when she dances. You think you are happy, but in the end it would destroy you." Tania leaned over him. Through the shadowy lace her breasts were near him stirring a wild unreasonable madness in his blood. "I see you different from that, Peter. You do not laugh enough. You are not gay. First you must be angry, then you must laugh. You must be hungry for life and then you will be impatient like me, wanting everything, everything. When you want everything, you must have love that is fierce, that puts fire into your blood, that gives to you life." Tania laughed suddenly and, satisfied with the tension she could see in his face, slipped down under the bedclothes. Peter lay quiet. The sudden silence was unbearable.

"Peter, you have forgotten the stove. It will need more coal."

"Damn!"

"You speak already like husband."

Peter sat up angrily. Then he remembered his long woollen underwear and he pulled the cover of the bed to wrap around him. Tania, with one sparkling eye watched him and laughed. Peter stoked the stove. He returned to the bed and sat by Tania, leaning over her. His hands gripped her shoulders.

"You think you know me like a book, don't you? Well, all right, I read you like a book too. You're doing your damndest to make a fool of me. But you won't; not again. Damn you!"

Her eyes faced his. She could feel them burning down on her in the darkness. Her voice was a whisper.

"You want me, Peter. I can feel it, I can feel your hands tremble."

"Damn you, yes." Peter's voice was hoarse. "I do want you. I want to crush you in my hands; I want to hurt you; I want to bruise you. But you trapped me once before, I know you for what you are, Tania. You think only of yourself. You would destroy anybody to satisfy your own lust for conquest. I've watched you fool Anna, I've watched you play up to Herr Direktor, I've watched you work for Pappy until you dropped. But you never did it, like these others, for the show; you did it only for yourself; and when it suits you'll drop the whole show overboard, me, Pappy, Herr Direktor and the rest. . . . You don't know what loyalty is, you don't know what art is, you don't know what really makes me work; something where self doesn't matter. But I know you; you're a selfish, lustful, torturing little brat . . ."

Tania thrust his hands away from her and sat up. "Let me go, let me go! I hate you, I hate you." She faced him in the darkness, her bosom rising and falling with her quick breathing, her dark eyes burning at him. "So you know me. You think I want you. You are fool. You think you know what lov' is. But me, I am girl and I know what is lov'. Only I try to make you see and you are blind, and you will not see. I, I am a gypsy and I see what my people see. I tell you now, you walk so high, but you will fall so low; when I am star in America you will be nothing and all because you are blind, blind, so blind. . . ."

Peter stared back, but he could not face the fierce thrusting of her eyes. He climbed over her and slumped down into the bed, turning his back upon her and drawing clothes about him. Tania lay down quietly, pulled firmly for her share of the bedclothes, and smiled quietly to herself. She knew that

with one move on her part she could have him fiercely passionate in her arms. But she was not going to make that move. Let him lie awake tortured with desire. Let him see whether Kathi could cool his hot blood. Let him see which face would appear in his dreams.

# Chapter Forty-three

Morning came as the sun rose through a haze over a bleak and frozen city. Penniless and cold, the members of the Continental Revue woke to the sound of crying seagulls.

For three days the company wandered in Amsterdam with empty pockets. There was no news of Pappy or Herr Direktor. The artistes sat in the long hall-way back-stage and talked to the porter and his wife. Had they been left completely stranded they could not have been more forsaken. The theatre was dark, the stage was a great, black, freezing cavern. The hall was cold and all the water in the dressing-rooms was frozen. Outside, the boats were still all frozen solidly into the ice. Seagulls beat their wings against the dressing-room windows. Amsterdam was crippled; so was the Continental Revue.

On the afternoon of the third day familiar sounds were heard in the alley leading to the stage entrance. There was a stampede down the stairs as everyone rushed out into the snow.

Herr Direktor stepped out of his big cream car and opened the door for Yogi who was wrapped up in his shawl and Herr Direktor's fur coat. Kathi stepped out behind Yogi, and Anna pushed her way through the crowd and stared at Kathi's new fur coat. Herr Direktor caught Anna's hands and kissed her affectionately. Tania, in high spirits, ran to catch Kathi's hands and draw her away to Peter who was standing glaring in the background.

"Where is Pappy?" shouted the crowd around Herr Direktor.

"He is coming in a moment. The first load of luggage is coming along the canal now. We were lost in the storm. All the trunks fell off the load in Rotterdam in the worst of the storm. Many trunks were broken, many private trunks also. There is great destruction everywhere. It will be bad for our business, this storm. The people have lost much money."

"It is beautiful though," said Lubichov, with a dreamy expression in his eyes. "The snow . . . I love it . . . it is like Russia. Do you not think it is beautiful?" He spoke to Herr Direktor.

"Yes, very beautiful, of course. But we cannot eat it and we must pay salaries."

The first load of luggage turned into the theatre entrance and Pappy Newman climbed down from the first lorry. All through the night the artistes worked. The theatre furnace was started and the building became warm. Scenery and costumes appeared. The animals were stabled underneath the dressing-rooms. All the dressing-rooms were open to the hall, and the walls hung with the brilliant colours of costumes. Everyone was singing and dancing, rehearsals were in action in every part of the building. The orchestra could be heard tuning up, musicians had arrived for the all-day rehearsal. Sun poured through all the dressing-room windows; the storm was over.

Music floated up from the stage below. The girls were arranging their costumes and shoes in the big koffers all along the hall where they would make their quick changes. The new bending act was rehearsing. The Arabs were flying around limbering up their cartwheels. The Nichols were practising a new trick for their tumbling act. The music from the Bali Bali scene drifted up to the hall between the dressing-rooms. Mario pirouetted out of his dressing-room in his underwear with a length of gas-pipe around his neck giving an imitation of the snake dance. There was a roar of laughter from the artistes who gathered about in all stages of dress and make-up. They were already working up to the excitement of an opening night, determined to make the Dutch public like them whether they wanted to or not.

The Dutch opening was over. The public had flocked to the theatre. People wanted to forget the cold and bad business, the influx of refugees, and the dark political situation. They had need to laugh and forget their troubles; they had need to see scenes of different lands far away where it was warm and there was peace and plenty. They applauded the opening act, Argentina; they cheered Bali Bali and the South Sea Island scenes; they sat quiet at the beauty of Kathi's ballet; they responded to Rosana's religious mood in Ave Maria; they laughed at the rollicking comedy and gasped at the dangerous skills of the tumblers, the Arabs, the Chinese acts. At the back of the house Herr Direktor smiled. Now, even more than ever, his instinct for the times was exact and sure. The people in the audience drank his show like a draught of wine that made them feel warm and happy, sentimental and gay, that made them feel that life held colour and light and movement, that gave them the illusion of glamour and the freedom of the world. The opening night was a great success; his "familie" had excelled itself once again, and the Revue was off to a good run.

He was satisfied, and now it remained to arrange the farewell party. He was taking the English company to England himself to get it well started on its run, and then he was returning to take the other company back to Germany. When he returned, Pappy Newman would go to England to manage the English run.

The second night, after the performance, all the artistes, after changing, hurried from their dressing-rooms to the big café on the first balcony over the entrance to the theatre. The Amstel Canal across the road was still frozen, but the artistes had already forgotten completely the bitter experience of their first three days alone in Amsterdam. They sat at little tables arranged round the sides of the room. Herr Direktor came in and sat at one of the little tables. He looked very sad. The music started, but only a few couples rose to dance; the party had no life. Herr Direktor moved from one table to another, talking to the different members of the company who were remaining on the Continent. To-night he was like an old man; he had no vitality.

Little Gretchen watched him like an anxious mother. "Are you not proud, Herr Direktor, to be starting another great company?"

"I do not know. At first I was enthusiastic and also proud because we had been such a great success that we could not fill all the bookings. But now I feel I have made a mistake."

"A mistake?" exclaimed Gretchen. "But why should you say that? It will be a great success; you will make twice as much money."

"Yes, and have twice as much expense. No, I have made a great mistake; I should never have done it. We were happy as we were and now we are all going to be separated; we are dividing. It is like when a home breaks up and the family all goes in different directions. No matter how much they love one another, they are never again as united as before. I should never have done this, I have broken the family up. The Continental Revue is the mother; she was very good to everyone; the new company is the daughter; perhaps the daughter will not be as good and as happy as the mother has always been."

The company tried to cheer him up, but it was not possible.

Pappy Newman came in. He was in good spirits. He gave one glance around the room.

"Come on, girls and boys," he shouted. "What is this? A morgue." He clapped his hands. "Come on, waiters, wine, wine, plenty of it. Fill their

glasses and keep them full." He turned to the orchestra hired for the occasion. "Come on, you fellows, give us a good hot rhythm number there."

Before long spirits began to rise. The band played well and the floor was filled, but groups kept gathering to talk quietly. Lottie and Rani sat at a little table with tears in their eyes. They were going to be separated in the morning. They had toured together for five years, shared the same dressing-room always, worn one another's street clothing and stage costumes, and had quarrelled like sisters. Now the first parting had come. Lottie was going with the English show.

Sandra rushed over to their table. Her face was feverish, her cheeks flaming and her eyes bright. She had a half-empty bottle in her hand.

"Here you are, Lottie and Rani; here, drink," she cried, pouring their glasses full. "Come on, drink."

"Sandra, Sandra," called Auguste. "Sandra, dear, do not give them that. You know it is very strong." Auguste saw the tears in Sandra's eyes. "Sandra . . . my darling Sandra." She got up and put her arms around her. "Don't cry, dear."

Sandra pushed her away. "I'm not crying," she shouted feverishly. "Come, Auguste, drink."

With a wild laugh on her flushed face she picked up another glass and filled it for Auguste, and another one for herself. She danced around the table, the bottle in one hand and the glass in the other. As she laughed recklessly and swayed, there was something inexpressibly tragic about her, a desperation. Poor Sandra, born of an aristocratic family with a German mother and a Russian father, she had talent, beauty, and charm . . . but she was trapped. She had no proper passport. Her father had tried to get her to South America and safety. Herr Direktor had tried his best to help her, but Sandra was trapped, and she knew it. She drank up her glass and picked up the new fur coat Auguste had bought in Holland for her mother in Germany. Sandra put it on, and leaving it open she put her hands on her hips and laughed wildly.

"See! Am I not just like a good German Hausfrau? I am smuggling this through to Auguste's mother to-morrow."

"Shush," said Auguste, suddenly terrified.

"Sandra," said Rani, "you are not leaving the company?"

"Oh yes," said Sandra loudly. "The German consul is sending me home . . . I have no proper passport because my father is Russian." She laughed hysterically. "They have rounded up thirty thousand German servant girls in Holland and are sending them home and I am to go with them."

"But why, Sandra, but why?"

"They have taken all our passports and they send us back to Germany tomorrow to have babies because the war is coming."

Sandra swayed, her bright eyes wide and staring. Then the bottle dropped from her hands and she slipped into a seat; her head fell on her hands and she sobbed. Her dark hair spread over the table swaying as her head moved as though her mind strove to escape the fate that had caught up with her. She was trapped and, for her, it was the end of youth and hope. Who ever of her generation might escape to love and happiness, Sandra would not be among them.

Auguste, now crying herself, lifted Sandra's head, lifted her from her chair and led her away.

The floor was filled with dancers and the air was thick with smoke. Those who were not dancing lined the walls, filling the little tables, drinking and laughing.

On the far side sat Peter and Kathi. They were on the eve of their parting. Peter's jealous questions about her absence with Herr Direktor and about the new fur coat had received such simple and ingenuous answers that he knew jealousy was futile, and with the knowledge came, illogically, a slight sense of frustration. They had not had much time together since Herr Direktor had arrived. Rehearsals for the changing of the shows had taken most of Kathi's waking hours, and Herr Direktor had taken the last ounce of effort out of Peter to plan and make sketches of the new acts for the new programmes for each show. Peter and Kathi had seen one another for brief glimpses between work. Now, they too, like so many of the others of the old company, were forlorn at the thought of parting.

In contrast, the Kobankos, a new coloured act of several men and women, were very gay, and Yasmini and Lotus sat with them. Yasmini was fascinated by one of the men who was very handsome.

The Arab boys were making merry, looking very picturesque, all dressed in white. They were going with the English show and the Arab chief had ordered new costumes for them, white suits and long flowing white capes to show off their golden skins.

Herr Direktor leaned over a table with Pappy Newman and Herr Muller in closest conversation. All three men appeared very worried and serious. The children of their big family could give themselves up to the mood of the moment, but they had to steer the family from the past through the present into the future.

The new French comedians sat at another table surrounded by girls. They had just come from a long engagement in Paris. They had an unusual ladder act which drew all the artistes of the revue to the wings whenever it was on the stage. There were three young Frenchmen in the new act. On the stage they were irresistibly funny, but off-stage they were quite serious. Since the Munich crisis, they all three had the coming war on their minds, and they were discussing future bookings with the others at their table. They were all planning bookings in countries far away from Europe. There was another group around the new Italian comedy acrobatic act. Tania was with this group, and, as usual, holding the centre of interest. There were three people in the act, two brothers and a Hungarian girl, married to one of the brothers. The girl, in complete contrast to her compatriot, Tania, was tall, slim, and blonde. She had lived most of her life in Spain and spoke German, French, Italian, and Spanish fluently. Her husband treated her with an extravagant courtesy; they were so much in love that their eyes kept wandering from their company to half-smile at one another.

At the moment the girl was discussing seriously the question of passports. She was Hungarian by birth, but she had an Italian passport.

"I am Italian," she explained. "The consul has taken my passport and put me on my husband's, so he has made me an Italian."

Everyone around her realized how serious this was. In the Continental Revue everyone was judged and classified by the passport he or she carried; it was the one thing common to all which no one could destroy or disguise, or exist without.

Tania laughed, a low husky laugh. "I would not let them do that. They take your nationality away from you just like that." She snapped her fingers. "Then you must get it back just like that too. They fool you, you fool them."

"But how?"

"Wait. When we join the companies again for the big season in Berlin, I will tell you. If one knows a Communist it is easy to get a passport, any passport for any country."

"But that would be forged."

"But yes," said Tania, not seeing why that should be any objection.

Anna was sitting at a table with Carlos and a group of Germans. She was drinking too much. She was genuinely sorry that the company was splitting. It had been all of her life for several years. But other thoughts were rankling. She knew why she could not go to England. That Rothberg woman, the new soprano, had too many friends in high German circles, but to Anna it seemed that Tania had had some hand in it, had neatly cheated her at the last moment.

She watched Tania enjoying her triumph. Others could be sad at parting, but not Tania; Tania was never sad. Anna rose unsteadily from her chair and crossed the floor to where Tania was sitting with the Hungarian girl. She picked up a glass of wine from the table and drank it off in one draught.

"It was different last time in Holland, Tania, yes?"

Tania sensed a scene and said nothing.

"Now you are big star. Then you were just a nude poser."

Tania's companions were uncomfortable.

"Maybe when we get back to Berlin you will be nude poser again."

Tania thought swiftly. Her eyes caught Herr Direktor and Pappy absorbed in their worries. A scene would be dramatic, but it would not please anyone, and the sympathy of the crowd might easily swing to Anna. She saw too that Anna was swaying, almost drunk, unbalanced between tears and temper.

Tania blinked some quick tears into her own eyes and stood up. "Anna," she lied in a small voice. "I am so sorry. I do not want to go to London. Let us go to Herr Direktor and Pappy, let us tell him you will go to London. I will be only a nude poser again."

Anna swayed, taken aback by this flanking move. Tania was now in front of her, holding her hands.

"But he won't. I asked him. He doesn't love me any more."

"He will, we will ask him again."

Anna's head shook sadly. "We have been together so long, and now we part." The thought was overwhelming and, her eyes full of tears, she turned away. Tania sat down promptly, laughing as if nothing had happened. Sometimes one should make a lover angry, but never a rival.

Madame Rastella had broken in upon Herr Direktor and Pappy to make one last plea to go to England for the sake of Rita. She talked rapidly and with quick gestures, fighting for her daughter's happiness. Herr Direktor passed his hand over his forehead. He had had all he could stand. Everyone wanted him to change his plans.

He stood up. "Love, love, always it is love. So I will go to the British Government and say everyone in my company is in love and you must give me more permits. I will say there has been no crisis in the world, no crisis in Munich. There is only a crisis in my company where everyone is in love; where no one thinks of me but only of love." His voice rose to a shout. "It drives me crazy. No, no, no!"

Madame Rastella subsided, looked at Pappy and gave a slight shrug of her shoulders.

But the clock was pointing to 6 a.m. and it was nearing the time for the one company to depart for England. Herr Direktor grew more and more depressed. He began a round of the tables, going to each of the old members who were staying on the Continent. He shook hands with each one, forcing a smile. Each one wished him luck with his London opening; he tried to find words but for once could not and he moved on from one table to another.

The big buses which were to take the English company to the boat drove up in front of the theatre. The members of the English company wrapped themselves up and gathered their bags; the artistes who were staying behind helped them downstairs with their luggage. They passed through the front entrance out into the cold. Sleet-like snow bit into faces which tried to smile. The artistes slipped on the frozen road surface and beat their hands to keep warm while Pappy Newman gave last second instructions to the bus drivers. Herr Direktor climbed into his car with Tania. Tania was already looking forward to London.

Kathi stood outside Peter's bus, looking up with tears in her eyes, as Peter looked back at her.

Herr Direktor jumped out of his car again. "Auf Wiedersehen, kinder," he called. "I will see you all again."

Suddenly he straightened up and he was business-like again. "Do not neglect rehearsals. I shall be back soon. If the performance is not good I will fine every one of you."

He jumped into his car again and then, just as suddenly, he jumped out. He could not bear the separation.

He shouted at the top of his voice. “I am taking you all to India. I will cable to-day. We shall leave after Leipzig. We can go by way of Italy.” There was a rush to his car and a babble of excitement. Members tumbled out of the buses. “Herr Newman,” he called. “HERR NEWMAN!”

“Yes, yes! What is it?” Pappy came sliding and slipping on the ice as he tried to run.

“Herr Newman, go to Thomas Cook and Son this morning. Arrange for transportation for both companies to sail to Bombay the first week of September 1939. I will join both companies for the Berlin summer season and we will start rehearsals for the Far East; we will make an entirely new show, the biggest ever to travel as one company, the best show in the whole world. Arrange transportation for all the animals and five hundred artistes for . . . let me see . . .” He screwed his monocle into his eye, drew out his little notebook and turned over his bookings. “Yes . . . for September the eleventh 1939 . . . that date will be perfect. We shall need a large ship. We shall probably remain in the Far East a long time, three years at least. I have always wanted to go to the Far East again.” He turned to his company. “Will that suit you, kinder?”

“Hurray, hurray.” His cold-nosed family broke into wild war dances, whooping and yelling like school children.

Herr Direktor beamed. “Auf Wiedersehen,” he called. He seemed to drop several years from his face. His smile broadened. He jumped into his car, and it fairly leapt away from the kerb, whizzing past the long line of buses which lurched into movement behind him.

# Chapter Forty-four

Towards the end of May 1939, in a clear dawn of the early Continental summer, a train rolled into the Zoo station of Berlin and had hardly stopped before a miscellaneous collection of artistes and their inevitable bags poured out on to the platform. It was the English company of the Continental Revue returning to rejoin the other company for the gala season in Berlin. There was an eager looking up and down the platform for the welcome they had expected, but there was none. If the other artistes were not at the station they would be waiting in the café opposite the Scala. There was a concerted rush towards the exit.

They had forgotten about the doubts and qualms they had had about returning to Germany. Only the day before Pappy Newman had read them a message from Herr Direktor telling them that all arrangements for their departure to the Far East had been completed and that, in September, the two companies, joined together, making the biggest revue ever known, would sail away from troubled Europe.

They passed under the scaffolding of the new station that was being built and out into the street. The first thing that greeted their eyes was a column of moving troops. All other traffic was stopped. Hundreds of lorries, tanks, and cannon, all camouflaged, were rolling past the station. There was nothing to do but sit down on their bags and wait as usual.

"Oh God!" groaned Bert. "Is all this starting all over again? I suppose it will be the same old thing all over again. Thank goodness we have only three months in this country."

At the theatre the porter greeted them with a Nazi salute, "Heil Hitler," which everybody ignored. But he was glad to see them all and confided that it was a good thing they were back. The previous show had been no good and now business in the theatre would boom, because Berlin was full of troops. Soldiers liked a lively show with plenty of beautiful girls.

There were eager questions about the rest of Herr Direktor's company. The porter told them they were expected early that morning and the artistes trooped across to the café to eat on credit and to await the arrival of the others. It was now nearly six o'clock in the morning and at half-past six someone shouted that the buses were coming and everyone rushed to the

doors. Peter, standing with Tania, waited for Kathi, but Kathi did not come. She was coming in the car later with Herr Direktor. Tania saw Mario and with her arms spread wide, cried his name. Mario stopped dramatically, his arms also outspread. "My little Tania!"

Then he embraced her, kissed her, and set her back on her feet for inspection.

"Ha, but you are chic. Is it true all that I have heard, that you have been great success in London?"

"Come, Mario, we will have breakfast and then I will tell you all the news and you will tell me. It is no longer Zenobia, no?"

"Alas, no. It was the snakes. Have you ever waked in the night to a kiss on your cheek cold as the first sip of water from a mountain spring? And then have you ever felt the kiss slide over your cheek, one kilometre long? No, you have not. It is an experience, my little Tania."

Tania held his arm and, leaving Peter uncertain on the pavement, she steered Mario in a royal tour through the restaurant, nodding and smiling, waving and greeting on every side until she had him at a table by himself.

"Tell me," she said. "Kathi, is she the same?"

"Always," said Mario, "More the same than before. Every morning I look at her and I know whatever the trouble that falls upon the world, there is beauty, there is poetry, there is virtue . . ."

"Still?" Tania's swift question made Mario's eyes open wide.

"But yes."

"But the gossip about Herr Direktor and the general?"

Mario shrugged. "No, not Herr Direktor. He takes Kathi always in the car, but he sleeps with Anna. His eyes are on the stars, but his feet are on the earth."

"Anna does not like that?"

"Anna? She also has Carlos. He is very faithful that one."

"The general, who is he?"

"Everywhere the show goes, there turns up this one. He sends her flowers, he takes her to cabarets, but Herr Direktor has told her she must never, never go out alone with him, and so Kathi never does. Always she

takes someone, to make a little party, Juanita or Rosana." Mario shrugged. "The general slowly goes crazy. One day he will be desperate."

"And Kathi?"

"Ha, quelle danseuse! Every night I watch her. A Russian Ballet has tried to steal her for America."

"See?" said Tania. "She does nothing, she plans nothing, she asks for nothing, she says nothing, and everything comes to her, America, New York, Hollywood."

Mario leaned forward. "There you see, my little Tania, is virginity, in its very essence, not only of the body, but of the mind. Like the egg in its shell it is perfection of form, blank but yet full. Listen carefully, my little Tania; this is profound. Do people bounce an egg, do they bruise it? No, they wrap it in cotton wool, they handle it carefully, they treat it gently. So with our Kathi. Herr Direktor, he wishes to blow the egg and keep it in a glass case.

"But alas, my little Tania, that is not life. Someone breaks the egg and all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot do a thing about it. Before, everyone is very, very careful. Afterwards, nobody cares . . . afterwards . . ." Mario shook his head tragically as he thought of the egg.

Tania laughed.

"Tell me, Tania. He still loves her. You did not steal him for mischief?"

"He is a fool, Mario. In London I am good success, Mario. I meet many, many people, have many, many parties. All the time I meet people who can help him, tell them how clever he is. I take them to see his work and there come many, many chances for pictures to paint. Two men, one is an American, he knows all the people in Hollywood, he wants a nude of me, like in the programme. And Peter, what does he say? He says 'Go to hell'. All the time like that in London. He work all day for Herr Direktor, then the rest of the day he paints a picture of Kathi. Four months, he takes on one picture." Tania's English slipped badly when she was passionate. "Four months, Mario."

"Ha," said Mario. "I must see it. Is it good?"

"No, no! It has no life and he miss plenty, plenty chance. Then after the theatre he can go to big parties in nice places because people ask me. But no, he goes to art parties with artists with no money and he gets drunk and he laughs. He can get drunk and laugh at other parties with people who can help him." Tania paused and then laughed as if to herself. "Mario, there is a

wild one underneath Peter. Me, I think Kathi hypnotizes him. Maybe that is it, maybe she is so beautiful people stare at her and they are hypnotized, like your general."

"You also, my little Tania, become very striking."

"Me? It does not help. I always have to fight for everything. And Anna?"

Mario smiled. He could see Tania's mind was already on the next problem; who was to be the star of the Berlin show?

There was a clamour from the crowded restaurant.

"Ha," exclaimed Mario, "here is Herr Direktor."

Herr Direktor came into the café beaming, monocle in eye, at his reunited family. On his arm was Kathi. Tania seemed to catch her breath as though the sight of Kathi was unexpected. Kathi's hair was like spun silk, gleaming in the morning light. Her eyes, transparently blue, were searching the café for Peter, and her cheeks were faintly flushed with excitement. Herr Direktor left her and went around shaking hands and laughing with pleasure. Kathi continued her way smiling as she passed the tables, but making straight to where Peter was waiting.

"Peter," she whispered, holding out her hands. Peter took them, looked up at her, stared and was lost.

"See," said Tania to Mario, "he changes. He is hypnotized."

Mario's shoulders went up expressively. "But is not love always like that?"

"Come," said Tania, "let us join them. No, let us go to Herr Direktor's table."

All through the café the groups of players had thickened, talking of the shortage of rooms in Berlin, blaming it on the foreign workers who were flooding the city, exchanging gossip of the food in England and Germany, talking of the towns they had played in, and the gossip about fellow-members. Through it all ran the gossip of Tania's success in England, not only on the stage, but off-stage, with many men coming to her dressing-room or sending expensive cars to wait for her after the show. She was the first one of the Continental Revue who had splashed so exultingly into a social pool wider than that enclosed by the theatre. Rumour was that after she had completed her year's contract with Herr Direktor she was not going to India with the show, she had someone who was arranging for her to go to America. Anna, delighted as any of the others at the reunion, found the story

of Tania beating at her until she sat alone with Carlos, her eyes staring with suddenly re-awakened awareness of her own insecurity.

# Chapter Forty-five

No sooner had the members of the company returned to the garden behind the Scala Theatre after their search for rooms than they saw a notice posted by the porter's lodge.

REHEARSALS EVERY DAY IN THE STUDIO ON THE TOP FLOOR OF THE THEATRE FROM 9 A.M. UNTIL HERR DIREKTOR DISMISSES YOU.

Next morning promptly at the appointed hour every member of the company was ready waiting. The girls, under the influence of a Hollywood film, were all in black satin trunks and white silk shirts. The black skin-tight trunks cutting off the utmost length of leg gave a long-legged uniformity to groups of pretty girls. The younger men were in flannel slacks and short turtle-neck sweaters, while the old-timers, in any old street clothes, had thrown off their jackets and rolled up their shirtsleeves and loosened their collars. The morning was already hot.

The studio was high-ceilinged and so large that four hundred people did not crowd it. Along the front, facing the Martin Lutherstrasse, the sun poured through the tall windows. Wide window-seats ran under the windows and these were filled with artistes laughing and talking. Gretchen and little Kaspar, Emil and Sara were in argument. Elsa and Albert Henn, her quiet husband, were fixing new white ropes for their act. Lottie and Rani were laughing and joking. Rani had met a new friend, they had become engaged. This time she was going to be married for certain, but she must first learn to read and write Chinese. Her boy came from a good family and it was necessary for her to show his people when she met them that she was educated. She was very happy; Lottie, only half-Chinese, was trying to show interest.

The whole room breathed an expectant gaiety. The companies were happy to be united again; the artistes felt secure now that they were in the theatre and together again.

The back of the room was filled with seamstresses working on costumes for the company. New costumes hung everywhere. Great daubs of brilliant-coloured fabrics stretched out on tables; on hangers in rows at the side of the room were whole sets of costumes; other sets were being cut, pinned, and

hung. At one end of the great room women were sewing frantically on the new totem costumes, sixty of which were being rushed to completion for rehearsal. Their vivid colours caught the eye.

Laughter, colour, filled the room.

Herr Direktor stood holding his typed programme, a long, long programme. Piles of artificial flowers tumbled from a big box in one corner. The hum of sewing machines came from a side room; the morning sun sent long rays further and further across the floor catching white legs and black trunks against a shadowy mass of coloured silks. Peter Kyrle sat with a sketch-book; a picture was there before his eyes and there was not enough time in the world to catch it in all its brilliant variety of humanity, of light and colour. Pappy Newman, in his shirtsleeves, his face already wet with perspiration, was worried about the new taxes. The police had just been to see him.

"How will the company live?" he asked Herr Direktor. "If they take so much off them it is impossible."

Herr Direktor shrugged his shoulders. He did not know and he was in his creative mood with an enormous amount of work before him and many new scenes to whip into shape.

Reginald, the new organist, pushed the small upright piano into the middle of the room as Lehmann, Lubichov's assistant, brought the musical scores up from the stage.

"Where is Looby?" asked Herr Direktor.

"Gone to the police station," answered Pappy. "They sent for him this morning. Passport trouble."

Herr Direktor began to consult with Herr Lehmann while the company sat around in groups, chattering. Dick Nichols pored over a London newspaper, decidedly worried.

"What is wrong, Dick?" asked Bill Hardy.

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing ever looks right in this paper. I wonder if we were foolish to come back here?"

"We have time to spare yet. They must wait until the Poles put the crops in the barns for them. We'll be in India before the war starts."

"RUHE! RUHE!" called Herr Direktor, who had overheard the conversation.

"Ja! ja!" called little Frau Kramer, the wardrobe woman. "Alles gegen Deutschland."

"No, no!" said Herr Direktor. "No, they are not against Germany."

"Ja, ja," she shouted.

"RUHE!" he yelled, his voice flattening her into silence. "I want no more conversation about politics. Here we have just arrived and you British have started that all over again. Come, we shall begin. Herr Lehmann, the opening number, bitte. We must do Rastella's song."

"We cannot."

"Why not?"

"The music is lost."

"LOST?" bellowed Herr Direktor. "LOST? Who lost it?"

"Rastella."

Rita sprang up from a group of girls like a spring released. "WHAT?" she shouted. "How dare you say my Papa lost the music."

"Keep quiet," screamed Herr Direktor at Rita, who stood long-legged in a shaft of sunlight, her beautiful blue-black hair tumbling in a mass of curls about her shoulders.

"How dare you say that?" shouted Rita at Herr Lehmann. "You lost the music, not my papa."

"KEEP QUIET!" shouted Herr Direktor.

"You lost the music," shouted Rita.

"I did not. Rastella lost the score."

"It is a lie. It is a lie," screamed Rita. "You were drunk when we packed up to come here. You lost my Papa's music. You lost plenty more music." She shook her fists in his face and stamped her feet on the floor. "You say my Papa lost the music again and I kill you." Once more she shook her fists in his face and her eyes flashed anger.

"Mein Gott! Mein Gott!" Herr Direktor walked to the window and threw himself into his big swivel chair and held his hands over his ears. "Mein Gott! Even the war would be quiet compared to this."

Rita stood her ground. "Just say once more my Papa lost the music!" She shouted as she stood, a slim virago in the centre of the room, flinging her

mass of black hair back with a violent shake of her head. “Say it! Go on, say it!” All the hatred of the Germans that had been brewing in Rita’s system for weeks past now showed in her face. They had stopped her from going to England to see her Claud. No one spoke, the whole room was in silence. Herr Direktor still held his ears, head bowed. Herr Lehmann, flustered, embarrassed, pretended not to hear. Rastella himself, quite unconcerned, paid no attention as he turned over the pages of a new score, singing to himself. From far below in the street the hooting of Berlin taxis floated up; a heat haze spread across the roofs below the windows of the studio.

Herr Direktor rose from his chair. “Very well, we shall begin. Pass that number . . . it is finished for the time being. Looby will make the new score when he comes from the police station. Now, Phyllis,” he called to one of the girls he had brought from England, engaged sight-unseen on one of his flying visits, “you have your accordion, yes?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. Reginald has a part here for you. Get the accordion, please.”

Phyllis, an attractive girl, tall, dark, and vivacious, unpacked the accordion and slung it over her shoulder.

“If you will come over here,” called Reginald from the piano, “we will show you what we want you to do.”

Phyllis walked across the room with her beautiful new Horner accordion, picturesque in her black satin trunks and white silk shirt.

“This part here,” said Reginald. “We want this bit of harmony on the accordion for Rita’s song.” He began to play it on the piano. “It is very simple. You can memorize it in a few minutes, then we will show you the routine and we can go ahead with the scene.”

“But I cannot read music,” said Phyllis.

Reginald and Herr Lehmann turned and stared at her, thinking they had misunderstood. “Read it, you will see it is very simple.” Herr Direktor came over to the piano.

“I just told you I cannot read music.”

“But I engaged you to play the accordion,” said Herr Direktor. “You came from the Radio Wonder act. That is a big act with a big name. I did not think it was necessary for an audition when I engaged you.”

“I did not play the accordion,” said Phyllis.

"Well, you have one, and I saw you on the stage with it."

"Oh! I just held it. I cannot play a note." Phyllis was completely unconcerned.

"Mein Gott!" Herr Direktor ran his hand through his hair. "I bring you all the way from London to Berlin! What can you do, then?"

"I am a tap dancer," she answered indifferently. Herr Direktor made no comment.

"Very well," he said at last. "Put the accordion away and when the girls rehearse you must work with them. Pass that number. It is finished for the time being."

Frank Sumner came in.

"You look tired," said Harry Nichols.

"That pension I went to last night," Frank answered. "I had to wait so late until I could get into the room, had to wait for someone to check out, and then they robbed me for the balance of the night. If prices go any higher we shall not be able to live here on our salaries. I have just paid fifty pfennigs for a cup of bitter coffee."

"We are going to have a hard summer to get by."

"We'll be all right when we get to the East."

Herr Direktor walked to the middle of the room. "Rita! Where is Rita?" He had the new programme in his hand. "We shall try Rita's new song here. She must be very gay, very vivacious, because she follows a slow number. Come, Rita."

Rita came from the wardrobe-room at the rear followed by her mother and by one of the seamstresses with a tape measure across her shoulder and a package of pins in her hand. Rita wore nothing but a jewelled brassiere and matching trunks glistening with jewels. Her black hair framed her face and shoulders and her skin was as white as snow. Herr Direktor walked over to her as the woman knelt on the floor and pinned the waist seams tighter. Everything was too loose on Rita.

"Hmm! Hmm!" Herr Direktor fixed his monocle in his eye and looked again. "Was ist los?" he asked the woman.

"Too big," answered Madame Rastella.

"Did they not measure her? It looks like a bag. Look at her ribs . . . she cannot go on the stage that way . . . she is too thin."

Madame Rastella shrugged. "If we had gone to England it would not be this way. Poor Rita, she has the love sickness. Every day she is thinner, she does not eat. The heart . . . it is the heart."

"She must see a doctor. Here, there is a very fine heart specialist. You must take her there to-day. I am building Rita up for India. She cannot go on the stage that way."

"If we had gone to England she would not be that way."

Little Gretchen stopped by them. Plump and bright she looked at Rita, she shook her head. "Oh la, la! Poor Rita." She turned to Madame. "You see how important is love."

Everywhere in the studio the company was working in groups. Reginald, at the piano, played softly the harmony of a new number to some English girls. They were to harmonize it before the microphone. Miss Harrison, ballet mistress, worked in a far corner with another group. The Arabs were practising a new spin while the little Arab chief with bright eyes laughed at their antics. One of the boys picked Biji up and swung her high in the air; there was nothing Biji liked better than being tossed around. Dick played with his tiny daughter, Myrtle. Myrtle wanted to be a tumbler like her father, so Dick had placed the mat on the floor for her to try her tricks, and everyone around applauded as she stood on her head.

Kathi and the German ballet mistress were with some technicians from an English pantomime who were explaining the mechanical tricks of a new fairy ballet scene that had been a sensation in London. Tania, idle for a few moments, was looking over Peter's shoulder as he sketched odd things that took his fancy. Already a picture was forming in his mind, but it was destined to be still-born. After a full day of rehearsals Herr Direktor was going to spend the night with Peter planning the new programme and a dozen other things.

Kasha at one end of the studio was rehearsing a line of new English girls in Russian dances.

"We must have more dancers," Herr Direktor had said. "There is not time to get another Russian troupe to join us, so you must train the girls we have here. The Russian scene must run thirty minutes. Russia is very popular this summer."

Nancy and Dorothy, maids-of-all-work in the company, were leading the Russian chorus. Kasha was trying to teach the girls the difficult Kamarinsky dance and he obviously regarded it as an impossibility at attempt to mass-produce a dance of such individuality. The girls were squatted on their heels, their arms folded and held at shoulder level. At Kasha's signal the girls kicked out the right leg, then the left, then the right; then Nancy overbalanced against Dorothy and the whole line toppled over like a row of toy soldiers.

The Arabs nearby collapsed with laughter. Kasha stood tall, slim, always impressive, regarding the row of disentangling legs with utter contempt.

Herr Direktor came up, "What is it, what is it?"

Nancy got up, flexing her stiff legs. "We're half dead. We've been rolling around this floor for half an hour now."

"Ruhe!" shouted Herr Direktor. "You must get the routine if it takes all day and night."

Kasha threw up his arms and shrugged and stared at the ceiling.

"It's too hot," said Nancy.

"Very well, very well," said Herr Direktor. "Let them take an hour off."

He turned away. The girls became a stream of long legs, black trunks, and white shirts, weaving a hurried path through the other groups and down the stairs to cool off in the garden. Herr Direktor looked around the big studio. Great shafts of sunlight cut across groups of artistes rehearsing every kind of act under Pappy, Roger, Herr Muller, Herr Lehmann, and Reginald, or by themselves. They worked against a back-drop of seamstresses worrying like ants among their bales of brightly coloured materials, splashed here and there with vividness as the sunlight from the tall windows reached over to the farther wall.

Herr Direktor was happy in rehearsal. Here at least he was his own master away and free from all the countless restrictions and interferences that were dogging him this year in Germany. It seemed it was no longer his own company, and the sooner he could get away to the East the better. For the moment he was happy and with his company, resolving this mass of talent and beauty into the biggest and fastest show that the world had ever seen.

Ha, there was his coffee coming through the door, brought by Frau Kramer. He sat down in his swivel chair and sipped his coffee, made from

his carefully conserved supply brought with him from England. He looked across the room where Tania was being fitted for a strapless evening frock in gold lame for her American song. Tania had grasped the American torch song with remarkable ease. Her voice, useless for any other type of singing, was good behind a microphone and Tania knew how to make an audience look at her as well as listen. Tania had developed well.

He looked from Tania to Kathi who was sitting trying on the apparatus for her new dance. A slight frown crossed his brow. During the past few months he had enjoyed the companionship of Kathi. She had driven with him everywhere. The impersonality of her companionship had been a refreshing change and, with her, he was conscious of a sense of rest as though he had gone at last beyond passion and needed only a quiet companionship that would settle his thoughts among the many problems that surrounded him during these troubled times. There was much about her that he could not understand. Moving and living with such a varied and earthly company of people, she was seemingly inviolate, as a precious stone is inviolate even if it is strung among common beads.

Yes, he had enjoyed her company. For the gala opening in Berlin he had planned a special scene for her, and Peter had designed the setting for it in London. But on Peter's return to Berlin, Herr Direktor realized, Kathi had flown from him just as a bird perched on a branch takes off without a thought and settles on another.

How different was Tania, shrewd, calculating, cutting her own way through life, using everything that came to hand to further her own ends. She had played her cards well in London.

Herr Direktor set down his empty cup. Lubichov came into the studio and walked across to the piano. Herr Direktor called Looby aside and they went into a long conversation. A frown of worry crept across Herr Direktor's brow. The police had traced Jewish ancestry in Looby's papers.

Lolita, Rosana, and Chiquita came into the studio, and there was a chatter of Spanish. Lolita, excited as always, was telling a long story to a group of the girls, waving her arms and slipping from one language to another as words in each failed her.

"Come, come," cried Herr Direktor. "We must fit the costumes for the girls in the orchestra scene."

The wardrobe women stepped forward with dozens of men's tail coats across their arms.

"Here," cried Herr Direktor. "Fit them. This is what you wear this year."

The girls crowded around, pulling the coats on.

"Now where are the hosen?" he asked.

"Wir haben keinen hosen," replied one of the women.

"No trousers? Then how do they wear the costumes?"

The woman shrugged. Once more Herr Direktor sat down in his chair and began to laugh. Sixty girls to wear men's full evening dress with top hats . . . and there were no trousers.

Lolita stepped into the middle of the room and took charge.

"What does it matter?" she asked.

"What does it matter? Here, Chiquita, walk around."

Chiquita walked around with an air. She wore, like the other girls, the inevitable black satin trunks and white silk shirt. "Look, Herr Direktor. Look how well she looks that way. She could not look better."

Herr Direktor sat up and began to laugh.

"Very well, pass that number. It is finished for the time being."

Anna came, glistening from her work-out with Carlos. "You are cutting my Loop-the-Loop?"

"It is out of date now," said Herr Direktor.

"My adagio dance, that is not cut?"

"No."

"Tania's is cut?"

"There is room for both."

"But it is before my leopard act. It must be after."

Herr Direktor shrugged and looked at his programme. "It does not matter."

"You think so, but that Tania she arrange that to spoil my act."

"I arrange my programme to please my audience not to please my artistes."

"But you make her the star."

“I have many stars, my show has all star performers. There is no one above anyone else.”

There was a rising note in his voice. A moment more and he would be bellowing. Anna saw the familiar signs. She had told Carlos she was going to walk out if Herr Direktor did not decide between her and Tania. But she had seen the whip beginning to crack and like one of her own leopards she relapsed into obedience. She was too near her own animals in temperament to face out her master. But some day he would not be looking. She went back to Carlos who met her with his wide, white-toothed smile. Nothing ever worried Carlos.

# Chapter Forty-six

Herr Direktor was writing in his office a few feet away from the Rastella's dressing-room. He lifted his head as he heard an unaccustomed note in their voices. He rose from his chair and crossed to their dressing-room. Their faces, all three of them, were wet with tears.

"Well?" he began. "You have seen the heart specialist? What did he say?"

Madame did not answer. Rastella looked up at Herr Direktor. "It is the heart. He says the heart with Rita is very bad. He says she must be very careful, and that is why she is getting so thin."

"That is not the heart," answered Herr Direktor impatiently. "That is because she does not eat."

"But that is the heart," replied Rastella firmly. "It is because of the heart she cannot eat. She has the love sickness, it affects the heart."

"Bah!" answered Herr Direktor. "The love sickness! To have the love sickness that is all right; but she does not need to die."

Madame Rastella looked up, dabbing the tears on her cheeks with a wet handkerchief.

"So!" she said. "Here is another one! He sends us to a doctor; a very, very clever doctor. He is the best doctor for the heart in the whole world, he knows everything about the heart. Yes, he know everything about the heart and he know nothing about love. I say it is the love sickness she has; he say the love sickness, pouff!"

Even in her tears Madame could not help but touch her sorrow with comedy.

"Pouff! he say, just like that. The heart it is a pump not a puppet of love. He say, she do too much work; she must go to bed at nine o'clock. I say, every morning she go to bed at nine. Then he say, Madame, I mean nine at night.

"So! I say. She is of the theatre and she must go to bed when the show it starts, because her heart it is a pump.

"Never, never, never has she any trouble with the heart before and she work from when she is a baby. Many, many years she work and all the time she is never thin, never tired. Then she is in love and he does not write to her and she grows thin, she is always tired. She eats but it makes no difference, she only grows more thin. Then I come to you, I say: I come to the best doctor for the heart in the whole world because it is my daughter who is unhappy. I tell you she has the love sickness and you tell me there is no such thing. Only all the people in the world can know about love; but you, very, very clever doctor, you do not know. Pouff! I say to him. Pouff!

"And that cost me one hundred marks."

Madame dabbed at the tears on her cheeks. Herr Direktor turned to Rastella.

"So! I send you with a personal note to a very famous doctor and Madame gives him a lecture about love."

Rastella shrugged. The case was so simple to him. "If you could get her the visa to England it would be all right. She could marry, then she would eat again and her heart would be better."

"And my show, while you go to England for the wedding, that must wait?"

"She cannot go," said Madame. "He does not write." She swayed her head from side to side with worry.

"Then," said Herr Direktor, "that is bad." He patted Rita's head. "You must forget, Rita. Soon we shall go far away. There are other nice boys."

"No, no," said Madame. "She cannot go to India with the heart so bad. We know, you and I; we have been there; we know what the heat is like. She cannot go there. So far away from him and so much heat, she will die." Madame broke down into a spasm of violent grief. Already she could see it all happening.

"Mein Gott! Mein Gott!" Herr Direktor threw his hands up in despair. "MEIN GOTT! My troubles will never end. The war it is nothing; business it is nothing; always, always in this company there is trouble and always it is love. Love sickness, BAH!"

He turned and stamped out through the door to his office. The Rastellas, all three, looked up at this sudden burst of temper and then began to laugh. They laughed helplessly, and the tears still rolled down their cheeks.

Herr Direktor had been to the Zoo and now he was returning on foot. Perspiration streamed down his face, but there was a smile on his face. He turned into the theatre garden and his company gazed at him and his two companions. All his entrances were spectacular, but this was startling. In his right hand he held a cord attached to a tiny lamb which trotted along beside him, and in his left hand he held a rope attached to a big but emaciated camel.

The children of the company with shrieks of joy raced over to him. His face broke into a wide smile as he handed the cord with the lamb to Julie.

"There you are," he said. "It is for you children. You can play with it all day long, but you must be good to it."

He daubed at the perspiration on his face.

"May we take it on the street like a little dog?" asked Julie.

"Yes. I will get you a collar and a lead for it."

He led the camel over to where Pat and a group of the English artistes were sitting. Throwing the rope down on the ground, he sat down and wiped his wet brow again.

"There you are, Pat, a present for you."

Pat stood chewing a piece of straw as he eyed the camel. The camel eyed him also. "By God!" said Pat. "You are about the saddest-looking beast I ever saw. What's wrong with his hump?" Pat went over to the animal and tried to straighten the hump up.

"You can't do that, Pat. It needs a lot of grass."

"Glory be to God! Whatever made you buy such a wreck of an animal?"

"I felt sorry for it, and for the little lamb also. They are not getting enough to eat, the food is so scarce. I cannot see an animal go hungry. It will be all right. Pat, but you must get everyone to gather grass for you and then the hump will stand up and you will be very fond of it, Pat. Camels are as affectionate as any other animal."

"What's the matter with this damn country?" asked Pat. "The animals in the Zoo are all so thin this year."

Herr Direktor nodded. "They are conserving everything for the war. There is no food for the animals." Herr Direktor looked at his new camel which waited with dumb patience. "Take good care of him, Pat."

"Sure I will. Come on, pal." Pat picked up the rope and led to the stables the camel whose hump was to become the daily concern of all the members of the company. Everyone, two or three times every day, visited the camel to see how his hump was filling out.

But this year the garden was no longer the same. Night after night the theatre was packed, but behind the scenes the company was no longer the same.

The Nazis had stepped in and had insisted that Herr Direktor include acts in his show chosen by them. Herr Direktor had threatened to close the show, but he knew he would jeopardize his whole Eastern tour if he did not compromise. There were too many permits involved, and political pressure could ruin his show before he left the country. He bullied the new acts unmercifully until he whipped them into the pace of his revue. But the result was that the company, behind the scenes, was divided into two parts. The original members of the company kept together, while the Nazi acts kept to themselves.

Mario watched the members of the new strong man act.

"I cannot understand what those fellows are doing here," he said to the others. "There are thirty of them, all pure Germans. I have never seen such muscle. Yet Germany is on the verge of war and nearly all the men are in uniform. So why are they here? Is it that they want Herr Direktor to take those men to India? I do not like it at all."

"This new porter at the gate," one of the English girls said, "he is so rude. To-day I brought a girl friend to see the garden. She was Jewish and as soon as he looked at her he yelled 'Aus!' The poor thing, she nearly wept and I was so embarrassed."

The new magician joined the group. He was reading a letter he had just received at the porter's lodge.

"Good news?" asked one of the girls.

He unfolded a contract. "Yes, good news, if I had a passport." He showed them a contract for a year's booking in Paris.

"You will take it surely?"

"I cannot. I have no passport. I come from Austria and, since Germany took over Austria, they will not give me a passport. They say first I must prove I have no Jewish blood in me. The police ask me if my grandparents

had any Jewish blood in them. How do I know? I never knew them. So I can prove nothing and I am confined to Germany for the rest of my life."

At that Madame Rastella began to laugh helplessly, her fat bosom shaking. The world was mad, so very mad.

"The passport, the passport," she said, wiping her eyes. "With us now, it is always the passport. Once we could travel where we liked, but now it is always the police, the visa, the passport."

"If we only had a good cup of coffee now everything would be all right," said Pat.

"Ha!" said Madame Rastella. "We miss those parties under the trees. It does not seem the same garden any more."

"I forget," said the magician. "There is a letter for Rita at the porter's lodge . . . from England."

Madame jumped up. "Quick, quick! Rastella run and get it and take it to Rita. Oh, la, la! . . . A letter, perhaps it is from Claud. . . . Oh! Oh!"

Rastella ran, Madame collapsed to fan herself.

The Russian dancers came under the arch. The Russian act lasted over half an hour, but every night it was wildly encored.

"Vera is not happy this year like she was last year," said Pat. Vera was the little dancer who did a wild Russian folk-dance. "She was always smiling and dancing last year, but now she never smiles. Yesterday I saw tears in her eyes."

"No wonder," said little Gretchen angrily. "Her baby was born dead in Holland. She should not have continued to dance the way she did. That is the trouble with this company, they never think of anything but the show. They never stop long enough to think about themselves."

At that moment Rita came flying from the stage door and across the garden to her mother. She was in her colourful Italian peasant costume, her skirt and her long hair flying behind her as she ran with a letter in her hand.

"Mama, mama," she cried. "It is from Claud. His sister is dead and he is very sad." She laughed with delight. "He says his sister she like me very, very much and say she want him to marry me. He say he is sorry he does not write to me, but he is waiting for me to come to England. Mama, mama!"

She embraced her mother, losing words in her excitement. Her mother clasped her and rocked to and fro. Tears streamed from her eyes. Then

Madame had an afterthought.

"But we do not go to England. The passports!"

"It does not matter. He says if we do not go to England he will come and fetch me."

"When will he come?"

"In September he says. In August he is in training, he says. He is a reserve for the Air Force."

"Oh, la, la!" said Madame, "In England too they think of the war!"

"But it will not come," said Rita. "No, no. I know it will not come."

"Come," said Madame, "now we will eat."

Lubichov was sad. He was to be replaced by orders from the Government by Herr Hoffmann, a Nazi State Musical Director. It appeared that somewhere back among Looby's grandparents there was a suspicion of jewish blood. The Continental Revue had never raised a curtain for the past twenty years without Looby's smiling face, raising his baton in the orchestra pit.

Now he was under orders to leave Germany at once.

He stood on the steps leading down to the orchestra room giving the new musical director last minute instructions about the music of the show he loved so much.

"Always wait for the harp glissando," he said. "That is very important. It stamps the opening. Herr Direktor is very particular about that. Give the harp plenty of time . . . it is always very loud."

Herr Hoffmann, tall, blond, and slight, listened to him earnestly. He was anxious to please.

"The music for the new nude pictures also, to-morrow Herr Direktor will rehearse . . . that, too, is very important . . . we want to create the atmosphere of the Louvre. You understand what I mean?"

"Ja."

"La Gioconda . . . very pianissimo . . . soft, soft. It means much to me to have that music correct. Without the dynamics the stage picture will not have the proper atmosphere. Those pictures are being prepared for the gala performance; they are to be a part of the big show in India.

"They must be perfect here, however, for that gala performance . . . ha, too bad . . . too bad . . . too bad I must leave before then . . . Herr Direktor is nervous about that."

"Too bad, too bad," answered the blond director quietly. "Yes, too bad."

"Then there is the music for the new desert scene where Herr Direktor will use the camel. I have not the time to arrange that. You must find some excerpts to give the proper atmosphere, something to create an atmosphere of Egypt. You must remember that what happens on the stage does not matter; it is the music always that the audience feels; it is the music that gives the impression, that etches the atmosphere. Be sure to have plenty for the string section always . . . and the harp and the oboe . . . that is what you need there. What the camel does means nothing . . . that is for the eye . . . the music is for the heart. Herr Direktor realizes all this . . . you will try to help him, please! Do not mind anything he says. Just go on as we all do. We know he becomes nervous. Sometimes he does not know what he wants himself when he tries to convey something to the audience. But we, the musicians in the pit, we always know what it is he wants, and we know how to create it."

"Yes," said Herr Hoffmann. "I know how you feel . . . I know how it is. Twenty years, that is a long time, I will do my best . . . I am sorry . . . believe me."

"Yes, yes, you cannot help it, that is not your fault. . . . Do not mind if he shouts . . . you understand?" Lubichov spoke wistfully.

"I understand."

"Just try to help him. That is all I ask. He has much to worry him at present."

"Ja, ja."

"Very well." Lubichov braced himself and forced a smile. "I leave my baton in your hands. I feel that all will be well. I give you my child. Auf Wiedersehen."

"Heil Hitler!" answered the new director, raising his arm in salute.

Lubichov ignored it and, turning, he ran up the steps without looking back. The blond director went back to the orchestra room.

Lubichov walked out into the garden to a group of his old friends sitting under a tree.

“Hullo, Looby,” said Bill Hardy. “That new fellow is not going to be very popular with this show.”

“You must not feel that way,” said Looby. “It is not his fault. He is a musician, and a musician is a musician always, no matter what his nationality.”

“Looby,” said Bill, “you are a good sport.”

Lubichov smiled gently.

“What time do you leave?”

“I am going this minute to the aerodrome. I shall be in England before many hours have passed . . . England and freedom.” There was deep emotion in Looby’s voice.

“Bon voyage . . . Auf Wiedersehen, Looby. We won’t forget you.”

“Auf Wiedersehen, Auf Wiedersehen.” He went through the arch to a waiting taxi.

# Chapter Forty-seven

The great studio at the top of the theatre was hung with the back-drops and set with scenery for the spectacular tableau for the gala performance. A group of girls around Tania were waiting in their dressing-gowns for the rehearsal to begin.

Peter, Kasha, and the electricians were standing in front of one of the settings. Peter had spread on the floor the large colour prints of the pictures in the Louvre from which he had painted the drops and he was explaining to the electricians the importance of the lighting.

Tania watched Peter with a slow smile on her face. She was not the only one who had grown many years in a year and a half. Peter spoke and gave his instructions with sureness. His dark hair tumbled over his brow as it had always done, his grey flannels were as uncreased as ever, and his painting smock was spattered with many colours, but the lines of his face were clearer. His dark eyes were the same as ever; but underneath his eyes were lines of tiredness.

He was a fool, Tania thought. He let Herr Direktor wring the last ounce of his talent from him without thinking of himself. He was wasting his time now to be with this company. He was too clever; he should be growing away from the company and not losing himself in it. Soon he would be like Lubichov, his own talent swamped and lost in the service of Herr Direktor. That did not make sense to Tania; but he was infatuated with Kathi, and loyal to Herr Direktor.

A slight frown crossed her brow. She could have the choice of a hundred men, and with them money and luxury. Yet she wanted this intense untidy Englishman. It did not make sense.

Herr Direktor and Pappy came into the studio. They were both absorbed in talk. They had just said good-bye to Lubichov, and to both the parting was like a curtain falling on an act of their lives.

"I have decided." Herr Direktor was abrupt. "Lubichov will wait for you in London. Immediately after the gala performance we will split the company again. You will take one company to England and take the boat for India from there. You will see how many permits you can get for the artistes to leave Germany and enter England, and we will make the show from them.

Do not bother about the English. We will keep them here. It is easy to get them out and if there is any trouble their consul will look after them. It is always so."

"The rest of us will go from here to Leipzig and from there to Italy. Your boat will pick us up at Naples. Here, if we stay, it is no longer our company. From England we will send back those acts the government has forced on us and, in Italy, we shall leave the others behind that we do not want. One cannot have politics and art. Never again shall we come back here."

Pappy nodded his head slowly. Then Herr Direktor turned to the scenery and screwed his monocle in his eye.

"Schon, schon! Das ist gut!"

He surveyed the drops and other scenery scattered throughout the big studio. For an act that would last six minutes he had spent thousands of marks and months of work.

Peter handed him the colour prints of the pictures and Herr Direktor and Pappy took them and compared them with the scenes, all set up with their background, middle-ground, and foreground separated, with hidden rostrums for the nude figures of the girls.

"Ja, ja!" nodded Herr Direktor. "Schon, schon! It will do, Peter. You have done well."

Peter flushed with pleasure. That was all the reward he wanted. "Peter," he said suddenly. "Peter, for the gala performance we shall have an exhibition in the foyer. In the centre we shall have your portrait of Kathi, the one you painted in London. I shall send for your picture of the garden and of Tania. You must bring your sketches for costumes and your designs for scenery. You, too, Kasha, we shall exhibit your designs . . . yes, and Friedl's designs for her puppets." The idea began to grow in his mind. "Yes, and Rosana's lace, Madame Rastella's Russian cross-stitch . . . yes, we have many, many artists among our artistes. We shall show them."

He turned to the waiting girls and clasped his hands. "Come, we will rehearse."

Once more the rehearsals were working up to a crescendo. The climax of the Berlin season was to be a gala performance which at the same time would be the premiere of the new non-stop revue for its tour through India and the East. Everyone worked hard as if to forget the uneasy atmosphere of

the city and the crosscurrents that this year were disturbing the smooth surface of the company. Pappy Newman was always bellowing into the garden to break up arguments between the British and the Germans. Bill Hardy was as stubborn as his own mule and the Irish wouldn't leave politics alone.

Peter and Kathi caught between the conflicts of the two groups escaped more and more into their own little world and mixed less and less with their own compatriots. Kathi practised her ballet routines and Peter painted scenery, and their happiness was poised intensely on a pinnacle from which, piece by piece, the supporting rock was falling away.

Every night the streets were noisy with the heavy rumble of tanks and guns and lorries going always to the East, and every morning as dawn came up the rumble ceased. Young men were disappearing from the streets. In the garden there was less mingling among the groups.

In the garden the sun was hot. Suddenly a violent quarrel flared up between Hans of the Tyrolean troupe and the Englishmen. Hans had changed very much lately. After the gala performance he and his troupe were going to England with Pappy. He had boasted of it.

"Where did you get the permits?" Bill Hardy asked.

"From the police."

"I cannot understand it," said Bill Hardy. "Healthy fellows like you being allowed to go off in a dancing troupe and the others being drafted into uniforms. It looks damn funny to me."

"It doesn't matter what it looks like to you," sneered Hans. "When the war starts we shall finish it off in two weeks. We will go to England with our air fleet and bomb and burn London to the ground, so that it shall never rise from its ruins again."

"You son of a bitch," shouted Bill, his wrinkled old face red with rage. "You are a dirty spy. That's why you're going."

Voices rose, wild shouting crossed between members of the company who had been the closest of friends.

"I tell you again," shouted Hans. "We will bomb and burn and destroy England to the ground."

"You bloody bastard," shouted Bill, "There will be no peace on earth until you and all your kind are dead."

Just then the air-raid sirens sounded. Herr Direktor rushed up the basement steps from his little office.

"You must go in," he shouted. "Everyone must go in. It is the Government orders. Come in, girls." He shouted to those sitting under the trees. "Schnell, schnell! It is one hundred marks fine if you stay out. The police may come any moment."

The sound of airplanes high in the sky could be heard as a thick smoke screen appeared in the sky.

Everyone piled down into the long hall-way under the stage where all the dressing-room doors were open. They were none too soon. They could hear the motor-cycles of the patrol police race into the garden.

"Too late, boys," said Max Van Huten. "You won't get any fines from this crowd."

"Would they really fine us, Max?" asked Sally.

"You bet they would. They need the money for the army."

Sally twisted her latest engagement ring. "Think of all they rake off our salaries. I'm sick of it."

"So is everyone else."

Just then the orchestra came down the stairs. The musicians passed through the hall on their way to the orchestra pit, each one holding his instrument. The French girl of the new roller-skating act came out of her dressing-room. She had a slender figure and her head was a mass of light chestnut curls. Her eyes were very blue, her skin white and soft, and her features small and perfect.

She stood at the door of her dressing-room smiling, with nothing on except the small triangle of her blue satin trunks. The big concert master stopped, startled by her sudden beauty. He lifted his violin to his cheek and played a little serenade to her, speaking the verse of a German love song. She did not understand German but she smiled. She held up her hand for the fiddle and, thinking she wanted, like a child, to hold it for a moment he gave it to her. She laid the brown back of the violin against her small white breast and flowed softly into a Brahms waltz, playing the double stops with perfect intonation. The members of the orchestra stared at her in amazement, because even the finest violinists considered this particular passage a feat. The concert master stared at her. He spoke French.

"You play like that . . . and yet you do a skating act, risking your life at every performance . . . why?"

She smiled and shrugged her slender white shoulders.

"You are an artist," exclaimed the concert master. "Du bist verruckt, crazy." He passed on to the orchestra pit.

"Such a beautiful girl," said Rita to Eileen. "She is so pretty, so talented . . . she is also a ballet dancer. She has so much charm when one talks to her . . . but she has no brains."

"I think she has plenty of brains," said Eileen.

"Well, yes, brains," agreed Rita, who sat in her jewelled trunks and brassiere. "But I mean she never wants to keep any clothes on."

"She has the French way," answered Eileen. "She has the habit, that is all."

Through the afternoon and evening the alert continued. The members of the company were confined to the basement all through the matinée and the evening show. The police provided an escort for those who had to cross the garden to the caravans to change, which everyone thought very stupid and childish.

"What are we supposed to be doing down here?" grumbled Mary.

"Why, you are in an air-raid shelter," said Pat. "Didn't you know that?"

"I thought they were never going to have any air-raids in Germany."

"There will never be an air-raid in Germany," said Frau Schiller in a loud voice.

Mary turned on her. "Then what is all this rehearsal for?"

Frau Schiller shrugged her thick shoulders. "There will be no foreign planes over Germany."

"What will stop them, Frau Schiller?"

"It is all fixed," she answered. "There is no danger of that for the German people."

"How can it all be fixed?"

"It is fixed," she shouted with a red face. "It is all fixed. They have a magnet that will draw them from the sky; they cannot come here."

The English members roared with laughter. The conversation had once more reached the dangerous stage when Mario ran down the stairs. He was greeted loudly by everyone, and Herr Direktor, hearing the noise, came out of his office.

"Mario, what is wrong? Where have you been? You have missed the matinée."

"I was caught in an air-raid alarm on the other side of Berlin. I was with a friend and we raced the car to get me back to the theatre and we were fined a hundred marks. Now I have just managed to get here between alarms."

"So!" Herr Direktor stuck his monocle in his eye. "So! And who paid?"

Mario shrugged his shoulders dramatically.

"She did, of course."

Everyone laughed, including Herr Direktor.

Yasmini came running down from the stage. "Mario, Mario! You are back."

"Yes, Yasmini, and I have news for you."

"Mario, you have seen Anton?"

Herr Direktor frowned on Mario again. "So that is what you were doing. Always there is love, and my matinée does not matter."

Mario smiled. "But it is not for myself."

"Mario," cried Yasmini. "Tell me what he said."

"I have seen him, Yasmini, at the barracks. He is going away in the morning with his regiment. He will come at midnight to the café for a few minutes to say good-bye."

Yasmini's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Come, do not cry." Mario put his arm around her shoulder. "You are a good trouper; you must not act this way."

"But the war will come and Anton will be killed."

"No, dear, you must not talk that way."

"But I cannot bear it, Mario!"

"It is life, Yasmini. Life is like the weather. It cannot all be nice."

# Chapter Forty-eight

The day of the gala performance, the climax of the Berlin season, dawned with a clear sky, and progressed through the morning to a blazing heat. There was an air of anticipation throughout the company as for any opening show. The show had already run for many weeks in Berlin, but this evening's show was to be both a beginning and an ending. Half the company would be leaving at the week-end for a short run in England on the first lap of the journey to the East, and the rest of the company would finish the run in Berlin.

The British artistes and their friends sat around the garden with nothing to do all day. There was a day-long military parade passing through the streets, and all Germans had been ordered to stand and cheer until the finish. It was the greatest parade of its kind ever staged, presumably to frighten the world, but ostensibly to welcome back the Foreign Legion from Spain.

The gala performance was to be in its honour.

"Can you imagine that?" said Roger. "Remember how Pappy Newman went on last year in Hamburg because we dared to say there were German soldiers in Spain?"

"There are German soldiers everywhere you go if you ask me," answered Bert. "We've got a couple of troupes of them in this company, and the old man has to pay their board and lodging and transportation."

Just then the wind blew a shower of yellow leaves across the heads of the group under the trees. The leaves fluttered away in every direction and were followed by another shower as a gust of hot wind swept down into the shaded garden.

"Look at that," said Bill Hardy. He was in a quiet mood. "In all my seventy-five years I don't remember seeing that. It is only July and it is like autumn. I call it gruesome . . . leaves falling off the trees in midsummer. Here comes another shower of them . . . a few more days and there won't be one left. It is real war weather. Can't you feel it in the air?"

"You are right," said Rob, one of the property men. "It is like electricity. One can feel the war."

Pat sat on the grass chewing a bit of straw as he played with the little lamb. “How about us all seeing the British consul?”

Conversation dragged on aimlessly from one person to another, and from one topic to the next without stirring much excitement or feeling. The members of the theatre staff returned, beaming after watching the might of Germany on parade. The orchestra returned tired from marching in the parade. The German members of the company returned, hot and weary from standing on the kerb. Herr Direktor drove in, deep in thought. The British members crossed the street to the café in a group. The old comradeship was gone.

The time for the gala performance arrived and the members of the company strolled in and out of the stage doors, all in costume and make-up ready for the opening number. Inside the theatre the orchestra sat in the pit, instruments tuned up, books open on the stands in front of them. The body of the house was packed tight with soldiers, but there were several empty rows in front.

Time dragged on, but the show did not start. A news reel was flashed on the screen. Reginald played a few organ solos. There was another long pause. No one knew what was the matter, why the performance did not begin. Herr Hoffmann grew restless; he had been standing for an hour with the baton in his hand; all ready to break into the Nazi anthem, but nothing happened.

Outside in the garden, the artistes lolled around; huge spotlights were brought out from the stage and placed round the high walls that surrounded the garden. Finally the light of the hot summer’s day faded, the sun set across Berlin and the sky grew dark.

The English acts and Irish stage hands lounged in a group near the stage door from which yellow shafts of light were cutting across the darkening grass. All day Berlin had been thick and hot and dusty with endless parades of war equipment and the troops from Spain. The British did not like the look of it at all.

Out from the light a girl came running to them, looked for Peter, saw him in a moment, and took his arm.

“Peter, something about our act I need to tell you.”

It was a device to draw him from the others and Peter knew it.

Tania looked up at Peter with excited bright black eyes. “Peter, let me be with you for a minute. I am too excited. I need to be with you. It will make

me be still."

Peter was quiet as he replied. "Well, this is it. You're the star to-night. You've got what you've planned for."

She smiled up at him quickly. "Not everything. Only one stupid Englishman will not believe I would give it all up for him alone."

"Didn't you tell old Bill this afternoon in the garden that you would marry an Englishman in case the war broke out so that you could be English?"

Tania laughed and with one swift gesture pulled down his lips to hers for a brushing kiss. "It was, what you say, a joke. Always I tell you I lov' you, and always you lov' someone else."

"You're a star now, why should you care?"

Suddenly Tania put her hand to Peter's lips and drew close to him as a figure passed them in the dusk. "It is Anna," she whispered.

Peter knew why Tania drew close to him. Anna, until this opening, had been the star of the revue. To-night for the first time Anna knew she was finally displaced by Tania. She had a snake act in the Eastern scene with a six-foot python whose sinuous grace mated with her own. Her acrobatic dance with Hugo the strong man was dangerous and clever, while her spectacular act was still in the programme, the act where the curtains rose on five great leopards seemingly unleashed on the stage, while under one of the leopard skins, Anna moved, playing with Rex, a magnificent six-hundred-pound male beast. But these were her only acts. Herr Direktor was keeping Anna to her animal acts in the new show and had given the starring acts to Tania.

"Look, she is going to her leopards," whispered Tania.

"That's bad," said Peter. "It is always a sign that she is angry."

"It is not my fault," said Tania defensively.

Peter lifted her chin to challenge her eyes. "Of course not. Everyone knows you haven't been working for this for the past year."

Tania drew him from the darkness back to the light as if for reassurance. The company was restive. It was long past the opening time of eight, but there was no call to places.

One hour passed . . . two hours passed. The orchestra still sat in the pit ready to play at the flash of the baton. The company walked in and out of the

stage doors, growing more restless every moment. The clock reached ten-thirty . . . a murmuring was heard at the porter's lodge in the arch under the pensions at the far side of the garden . . . the gates were flung open . . . applause rolled in from the street . . . a burst of cheering . . . a car swept under the arch . . . another and another, magnificent gleaming cars in an unbroken procession. . . . Heil Hitler . . . saluting at the porter's lodge . . . a rush of lackeys in uniform . . . HEIL HITLER, . . . HEIL HITLER . . . the garden rang with HEIL HITLER.

The kleig lights flashed on and the quiet garden was ravished into a military camp; car after car raced around the wide drive, each glittering with polish, each flying a swastika pennant on the bonnet. With military precision each car turned sharply towards the animal quarters, flashed to a grinding stop, spilled out uniformed orderlies who opened doors to ease out stiff and glittering uniforms encasing generals and high officers. Chauffeurs and orderlies clicked their heels and stood like ramrods. The directors of the theatre hurried across the grass, stopped short, raised their arms . . . HEIL HITLER!

HEIL HITLER! saluted the officers. Everyone stood at attention as if made of steel . . . the officers, the theatre directors, the stage crew, the porters, the artistes, everyone except the British who lolled in a group with deliberate indifference.

The last car dashed in and swung to a stop. Out of it came an enormous fat man in a white uniform coruscating with decorations, and a little limping man in a plain uniform but a very large cap.

HEIL HITLER! HEIL HITLER! The salute echoed from wall to wall of the big garden. The lights glared, everyone stood frozen, waiting for the highest to make the first move. The sparkle of decorations, the polished perfection of uniform and trappings made the troupers tawdry in comparison, their dazzling costumes out-dazzled, their picturesque caravans around the walls shabby in the background.

Suddenly the stillness was broken with a mutter of guttural German and the officers began to move, following the two important figures. The theatre director advanced to greet them; they smiled, he smiled; it was the proudest moment of his life. He led them across to the garden entrance to the theatre, and like troops on parade the officers stiffly followed.

"Places, places," shouted the stage manager to the overshadowed troupers. "Schnell, schnell!" he ordered sharply.

Inside the theatre Herr Hoffmann, hearing the movement from the door, straightened himself. The audience rose, his baton whipped the air, the orchestra broke into the Nazi anthem. High from the gallery, spotlights played on the stalls. Voices roared out . . . HEIL HITLER! HEIL HITLER! There was a louder roar as the spotlights picked out the two notorious figures. Spotlights picked the generals as they took their seats. They turned to the audience and saluted with outstretched arms. The audience cheered madly. Again and again the generals rose in their seats and saluted. They were heroes . . . they had accomplished a wonderful victory . . . they had sampled all their new techniques of warfare upon a people torn within themselves . . . they had annihilated a little village called Guernica to show the world what their war would be like . . . and now they had come home to receive the adoration of a people who had been told that they were the liberators of a downtrodden people from foreign intervention.

The theatre behind them was filled with the officers and men who had come back with them. All were burnt with the sun of Spain.

The applause subsided. The generals were seated; the spotlights were turned off and the house lights dimmed. Stillness settled on the audience. One comedy act had ended and another was about to begin. On one side of the curtain the steely formality of a conquering soldiery had stolen the show from the players and, having had its triumph, it was waiting, glittering and cold, to be entertained. On the other side of the curtain artistes of twenty nations were forgetting their resentment, stirred by the stillness of the house, waiting to show that by sheer artistry and the loose freedom of their hundred skills they could stir men's hearts with emotion, laughter, and enthusiasm, and melt even the fishy coldness of that house into the semblance of human warmth. It was a challenge to their art.

There was a loud fanfare from the full orchestra as the curtains parted. An English girl stepped to the microphone.

"We welcome you to our performance and hope that you will enjoy our show."

The audience stared. Few understood the words.

Then Yasmini, in a peach sari bound with silver, spoke the same message in an Indian dialect.

"Schon, schon," muttered the audience.

Then Rita came speaking in Italian. One after another girls followed, each in the costume of her country, giving the same message in twenty

languages. At last Tania, who stood before the microphone in German peasant dress and gave the message in German. Someone began to applaud. The curtain swept down.

Without a pause it swept up again on the full stage. A sunlit Spanish square was alive with movement and colour. Toreadors, Spanish beauties, Spaniards of every type mingled in a vivid impression of mantillas, flowers and shawls of every colour. Spanish hidalgos galloped across the stage on spirited steeds, children ran among the crowd, girls danced and laughed; all were on their way to the bull-fight.

But the audience was cold as the curtain fell and went up again to show a screen. On the screen a bull-fight was in progress. The orchestra played a toreador score with a throbbing undercurrent of tension. Then a gasp came from the house. In full view on the screen the toreador was gored by the bull. The film was cut off, the drop went up, and from the centre of a bull-ring on the full stage Rastella, the Italian tenor rose, bloody with tomato ketchup, singing the toreador's dying song.

The audience was shocked by this realism. The generals did not like this. Death was their business and they were in the theatre for relaxation. Rastella staggered, singing magnificently, but there was no applause.

Now Rosana of the Spanish trio was in the centre of the stage. She gave one glance at the box where Herr Direktor sat appalled by the failure of the scene. Then sweeping her fan high she raised her voice in a brilliant interpretation of Carmen. Rosana was singing as she had never sung before, fighting to save the scene, taking the hold after the shock of the bull-fight. Herr Direktor wiped his monocle. She was pulling from him a surge of deep emotion buried beneath the loves of a dozen other women; she was stirring memories of long-gone days. For a moment he thought he alone was caught by the illusion. Then he saw Chiquita, Rosana's daughter, in the wings gazing in astonishment at her mother, while Lolita was spellbound by the exultation of her sister's singing.

Rosana, finishing the aria, broke into an impetuous Spanish dance; Chiquita and Lolita carried to a high pitch of excitement by Rosana, dashed on-stage to join her.

"Bravo, bravo, bravo," cried the audience. Then the entire company was on the stage whipped by Rosana's genius to a frenzy, fighting to melt this chilly audience. The pace swept faster and faster. The audience began to cheer.

Herr Direktor, up in the artistes' box, wiped his brow and settled back. One never knew what his company could do when the spirit settled on it.

But the curtains were already down and then apart again for the shadow pictures for which each member of the audience had red and green cellophane spectacles. A huge tarantula spider with long hairy legs swept across the screen and then seemed through the three dimensional spectacles to be rushing down out of the screen into the audience. There was a gasp of horror from the audience. Herr Direktor watched the generals. They were still stiff and unbending. Each one had the spectacles to his eyes. Each one of them followed the instructions given through the microphone telling them what to do. They did just as they were told. Herr Direktor looked back to the stage. He did not care for people who obeyed orders to the letter. He liked people who like Rosana could take a crisis and meet it with a brilliant surge of spirit. A company of obedient puppets would never melt an audience like this.

But the next act was already on-stage, the French skating act speeding up on a revolving stage under the glare of spotlights. Celeste, the French girl, a picture of loveliness in silver and blue trunks, raced madly round with her partner. They, too, were fighting the cold audience. One after another they flaunted the riskiest of their stunts and then the two of them broke into their whirlwind finish. The stage beneath them revolved quicker and quicker. The man picked up Celeste, swinging her at arm's-length, spinning faster and faster until her slim body flew around so fast in the glare of the lights that she seemed fused in one continuous image. A fraction of a slip and her helpless body would have flown far above the audience to death.

"Wunderbar, wunderbar!" shouted the soldiers, cheering wildly. Here was someone who also flirted with death, albeit her own.

"Schon, schon!" Loud murmurs rose from the officers as the pace slowed down again and Celeste glided lightly to her feet, smiling, and bowed. Then the curtain was down and swinging up again. The French burlesque ladder act was holding the centre of the big stage. A small comedian with red cheeks and a dress suit much too large was balanced in a precarious position near the top of the ladder, grabbing, just missing, toppling, just getting the next rung. He kept the audience breathless between gasps of shock and roars of laughter as the ladder swayed over to the audience and back again while he played every trick of clowning suspense. His partner, in clown make-up, ran up and down clowning intense agitation at each hazard. The generals sitting so stiffly in the front rows began to

smile, then they laughed, then they rocked and their eyes ran with tears of laughter.

Herr Direktor looked down over the edge of the box into the house and saw the soldiers, so stiff an hour before, holding their sides as one comical little Frenchman held them helpless in his power.

That was good, he thought, that was a good joke. It was laughter they needed to make them human. Laughter, that was the secret. Make the world laugh, you fools, and it will forgive you everything else. His company had already beaten the generals and that was good. Now they would rout them.

Out in the garden Pat prepared for his African scene, as the full moon rode across the sky, bathing all Berlin and the Scala garden in its half-light, softening the polished glitter of the generals' cars, mingling naturally with the team of Shetland ponies munching hay in their pens.

"Here, Bill," called Pat to Bill Hardy, who had just taken Maud, his performing mule, back to her pen. "Help me to get wrapped in this damn thing."

Bill took one end of the snow-white sheet and Pat revolved until he was wrapped from head to foot. "Begob," said Old Bill, "I've been all over the world and never seen anything like you. The camel must know though; here he comes to cuddle you. He's as bad as Maud."

The camel came slowly across the garden to Pat, blinking his eyes. It came, as though there were all the time in the world, and nuzzled him.

"Get away," said Pat. "You think I've got nothing to do but pet you." He heard the music cue from the stage and saw the Indian boy, Kahn, perched on his elephant going up the ramp to the stage door, with the smaller elephant holding on the bigger one's tail. "Stoop down," said Pat. The camel held his head high, gazing thoughtfully at the moon. "We'll miss our cue," cried Pat. "Stoop down, I tell you."

The camel went slowly on its knees, Pat straddled its hump and rode leisurely as if time stood still, through the moonlight, up the runway, through the stage door, and into the hot brilliant glare of Africa.

The audience saw a Bedouin on his camel move leisurely across the stage as the African scene, featuring Tania, built up to a barbaric climax on a stage filled with Arabs and nearly naked savages. Drums rolled and music, hot and heavy with sensual and savage ceremony, beat a deep rhythm over the scene and all eyes were drawn to the top of a cliff. There, high above the stage, a negro was preparing Tania as an offering to his pagan gods. Tania,

naked, with gleaming skin, subtly sensuous in every line of her body, lay inert on an altar.

Herr Direktor in his box sat up nervously. This was the first performance of this act. He wondered if Gottlieb had been careful enough about the mattresses behind the cliff. The cliff was high, and he knew Tania was frightened. He watched her still figure. She was a gay child and a great trouper. Even lying still she had a magnetism that drew every eye to her body.

The music was building up to a climax. One of the Kobankos men from East Africa, bare to the waist, black muscles rippling and black skin gleaming with oil, stepped to Tania. He was a magnificent figure as he picked up Tania, featherweight to his hands, and held her high above his head for a moment. He made his offering to the gods, bent his rippling arms and then to a frightening climax of sound, he dashed Tania over the cliff. In a savage crescendo of music the curtain swept down.

Behind the cliff, in the darkness, Peter ran to find Tania, the breath beaten from her body by the fall, hardly daring to feel herself to see if she were hurt. Peter's hand found her in the blackness. "Tania, Tania, are you all right?"

His hand touched her firm smooth skin, found her hand, helped her to her feet. A smile crept to Tania's eyes. The touch of his hand had made it all worth the risk.

"So you cared, then?"

He pushed her dressing-gown to her, "Quick, they are changing the sets!"

On the stage in front of the drop Madame Rastella, immense and resplendent in paste jewels, was burlesquing grand opera and roars of laughter had overlaid the applause. One after another, one act or several, sped through the routines to the next spectacle, the Russian scene with troikas and galloping Shetlands interweaving around the stage at a furious pace, the village wedding, the dances, and the rousing choruses. The audience roared applause; Russia was very popular that year; then jugglers, tumblers, the English precision chorus, and the bathing chorus of thick-thighed German girls, scene after scene, comedy, dance, and skill, flashed with speed and colour and gaiety, and the audience had its laughter and applause snatched from it by the speed with which act followed curtain. The audience was captured, the generals were clay in the hands of the players, and then, suddenly, came the single intermission and cries from the ushers:

"Eis . . . Eis . . . Schokolade Eis." The delicious Italian ices were also very popular that summer.

Out in the moonlit garden the players, dressed for their next appearance, mingled and laughed in the moonlight, all caught by the intoxication of a gala night which was being successful beyond their dreams.

Franz the gentle concert master hurried up from the orchestra room and stood, dazzled by the darkness of moonlight, looking for Lotus, Yasmini's Indian sister. She was waiting for him and she ran to his arms. They were very much in love. Tall, slim, and graceful, her dusky hair waved down to her shoulders; her dark face above a Nile-green sari was flower-like and delicate. Franz was a dreamer with unusual musical talent, and he kissed her sadly because his call to uniform had come.

"The time is short now. Soon I must go to my regiment."

They clung together desperately in the moonlight. Franz who wanted only to compose music and to marry Lotus could do neither. His lips searched for hers under the shadow of a tree and both knew that whatever of love the world might hold for others, for them it held nothing except this brief and precious moment.

Tania, excited and stimulated by her success of the night, ran past them looking for Peter. She saw Kathi, moth-like in her wispy costume for the flying act, and then she saw Peter holding Kathi's hand. Kathi, the silver-blonde Austrian, fragile as Dresden china—her beauty, her mind, as moth-like as her slender figure in the moonlight—was turning to Peter to draw from him nervous strength to face her act which opened the second part of the revue. It was a new and dangerous act and she needed to still her trembling pulses. Tania stopped and stared at the two. She knew Kathi's love was as moth-like and ideal as the picture under that tree; but her own love was as sharp and real and hot as sunlight. She feared Kathi; Kathi held a side of Peter that she, Tania, did not understand, the boyish idealist.

There came a call from the stage door. "Places! Places!" The nocturne was over and all was quick movement and the streaming of the players to the shaft of yellow light from the runway.

Back-stage the tough Irish property men worked quickly, fixing the new English flying machine for Kathi's spectacular act.

"Come, Kathi," said Roger, the English stage manager. He reached for the pulley and quickly hooked it to the steel-braced, leather corset under Kathi's flimsy drapes. "Don't forget, let yourself go and don't try to hold

back. If you do, you'll strain your spine. We'll take good care of you here, so don't worry."

Roger had a great respect for these girls like Tania, and Kathi, and Celeste, who for a whim of an audience took their lives in their hands, or rather, left them in other people's hands. They were always terrified during the first performance of a stunt, but they never showed their fear to an audience.

Already on the stage was the Moonlight Sonata ballet. The illusion of the theatre had been lost in the interval and the audience sat down again expecting to sit through a flamboyant noisy opening scene. Instead they were hushed by the muted music, the soft light of a garden bathed in moonlight. Murmurs of "Schon, schon," rose from the house as the shuffling and little sounds of a settling house subsided until the waiting was like suspense of bated breath. Then from the wings flowed lines of ballet dancers, fairy-like in flimsy chiffon that floated against the moving limbs of the dancers. The music flowed with the softness of moonlight, each line of girls like flowers in the dusk mingling and parting to the subdued music.

Herr Direktor gazed down from the box. Once more he was hypnotizing these soldiers with a magic they did not understand. Once more something of the spirit of his company had entered a scene and was making it more than he had dreamed. Soft colour, music, and movement had fused into one of those moments of perfection that was the breath of some unseen spirit informing the stage. Then into the loveliness of that moment there flew, caught by the silver moonlight, a vision that drew a sharp intake of breath from the audience. Ethereal, flower-like, slender, Kathi no longer looked human as she floated over the dancers in the garden. Grey chiffon outlined her body like a film of mist flowing away from her. Over and around she floated, her arms outstretched, so perfect in grace and beauty she seemed without weight, without earthliness. Hypnotized in their seats the officers held their breath; never had they seen such beauty as Kathi with her silver-blonde hair, her rapt expression, floating in great arcs of motion, a moth of the night while the music flowed and ebbed with the rhythm of her flight.

Up in his box Herr Direktor wiped his monocle as he invariably did when he was deeply moved. In all his years in the theatre he had never created a scene like this before. In all his years he would never know how or whence beauty came, touching or withholding at will its magic.

He passed his hand across his brow, as if to wipe away the image of Kathi. Now he knew that he could never have her unless she came to him of

her own will, that if he took her as he had taken others he would find his hands and his heart empty. Happiness and love were like beauty on the stage; will-o'-the-wisps, they lighted where they would and could not be captured in a net.

Let this boy Peter have her if that kept her sheltered and happy. If she could give to his revue a scene like this, he would forgo his own love. He thought uneasily of Rosana. To-night Rosana had recaptured the full flood of that first youthful passion. And what had he done with that passion? He had neglected it and let it wither because of his greater passion for the theatre. So, too, it would be with Kathi if he took her to himself. She would be no more than an ornament to his greater love, the theatre.

Kathi was unique. He had always been able to pick girls for beauty and talent, and he had all Europe and the East to choose from. It had always been a mistake when he had allowed his own feelings to intrude upon their talents.

Then the curtain was rushing down and great waves of applause were rolling through the house. Kathi could not hear it because she had fainted and, up in his box, Herr Direktor rubbed his hands because here was the stage again in full bare ugly light and in the midst of it a subtle satire. The Party had foisted on him a German strong man act because he was taking his company to India; taking a few spies was the price he had to pay for the privilege of taking other Germans out of Germany. But now he was having his revenge. The strong man act, coming when the audience was drugged with beauty, lacked all the art of the theatre. The men were superb animals, but their gymnasium piece was coldly precise and dull. As if the stage rejected their presence, they fumbled and the audience tittered. They became nervous and their pyramid combination slipped; the audience laughed. One blond giant fell off the pyramid full on his nose. The audience roared with laughter and the curtain swept down.

Then the stage burst into an exuberance of brilliant muscular action, Chinese jugglers, the Arab tumblers, the Russian Cossack dancers, all together, swift, precise, daring, and flashing with colour. Here was art, here was real theatre. Then once again act followed act, from the intimate to the lavish, at one moment all legs of a hundred chorus girls and then the intimate American tap dance with Mario and Tania before a drop. Behind the drop the trainers were bringing on the leopards for Anna's spectacular and risky act. Each of the five leopards had a trainer to clip his long cable leash to the stage hooks, and to wait ready to pounce on the leashes if anything

went wrong. Anna was brushing Rex, the largest beast, and whispering loving phrases into its ear.

Before the drop, Rastella and Madame, Rita and Mario were playing a comedy act and Tania ran behind the drop to tear off her evening dress for her next act. Peter paused to watch the restless leopards, stirred by the excitement of the players. Tania did not see Anna; she was exhilarated by the success of her every appearance that night.

Flushed and excited by the speed of her change she dropped her clothes to her feet as one of the girls handed her the jewelled ceinture and jewelled brassiere for her next appearance. She took them and stood for a moment stretching herself in the freedom of her young and lovely body. No one saw Anna's hand slip the leash from the collar round the neck of her leopard, no one heard her whisper to Rex or noticed the bared fangs, the slow crouch. But everyone heard the vicious hiss, everyone saw the lightning leap as the great spotted body cleared the whole width of that great stage, everyone heard Tania's shrill scream as she tried to leap away, everyone heard the swift thud as she was slashed to the stage.

The trainers hurled themselves at the great beast's collar and unbalanced him before his fangs could tear at the flesh opening like a bloody rose. Tania lay limp, her leg clawed from hip to ankle, streaming with blood.

Chorus girls rushed on screaming with horror.

"Look!" cried Sally, the baby-faced English dancer. "Look at Anna; she is laughing."

Everyone stared at Anna who stood, her brown face smiling, a wild gleam in her eyes.

"I never dreamed she could do a thing like that," whispered Sally. "Oh, the bloody bitch."

Peter was already picking up the bleeding body. It lay limp and torn and bloody across his arms as he strode across the stage. Pappy ran to him, tears streaming down his cheeks, snatching a dressing-gown from a chair to wrap around Tania. Pappy and Roger, the stage managers, were driving the staring girls from the stage calling for stage hands to wipe up the blood, ordering Pat and the trainers to take the leopards away, calling for the Nichols' English tumbling troupe to take the act. Mario and the Rastellas held their comedy act a little longer in front of the drop. Harry Nichols ran on in his white tumbling tights to check quickly that the stage was not slippery where

the blood had been. And then the show was moving again with its accustomed speed. There were always accidents.

Across the dark garden behind the theatre Peter hurried to the nearest gate. He went out into the street, into the brilliantly lit entrance of the hospital. Then he waited, wet with Tania's blood, pacing up and down.

A doctor came out. "She will need a blood transfusion immediately."

"I'll do it," said Peter.

"Your type?"

"It is the same." Peter did not know why he said that, but the words came out as though some inner truth had spoken. The doctor shrugged.

Inside the theatre the revue had caught its own quick pace again. Herr Direktor was down with Pappy working out the adjustments to be made. Anna had disappeared, Peter could not be found, Tania was gone. But act after act went on in a show that was four hours long with very few acts except the spectacular ones longer than a few minutes. Artistes felt the heavy rush of the curtain cut off their applause and rise on the next act almost before they were off-stage.

At last came the great artistic spectacle, the paintings of the Louvre in Paris lavish with nudes set by human figures in a great gold frame on the stage. Girls hurried from their dressing-rooms in their dressing-gowns. Quickly they dropped their wraps on chairs and stepped to the rostrums to take their poses. As the music cue was heard they froze into their poses, sixty girls in all.

The curtain went up and a gasp ran through the audience. Before the audience could recover from its surprise the velvet drops swung back and forth and, in the moments of movement, the whole living canvas had changed. With lightning speed and precision the girls leapt to their new positions, the backgrounds changed, transforming one great masterpiece to another, each picture enormous in its frame under the shafts of golden light that glowed softly over the stage. Not a flicker of an eye, not a quiver could be seen as the girls held their graceful poses.

Music filled the house . . . Midsummer Night's Dream . . . La Gioconda . . . Air de Ballet de Chaminade . . . Valse des Fleurs. . . .

"Wunderbar! Wunderbar! Schon!" The calls came clear from the house, shouted as the applause rose to tremendous heights. "Schon, schon,

beautiful, beautiful!" cried the audience as, below in the pit, the musicians played as they had never played before.

Herr Hoffmann, with his arms beating like wings poised for flight, swayed his baton on the opening strain of the "Spinning Song", and the orchestra followed him, lost in their music, dim lights from the music stands tracing their absorbed features. They were holding the hearts of the vast audience, hypnotized in the beauty of the scenes on the stage. Their bodies might be chained down by uniforms, but in music the souls of men are free.

Deep down in the corner of the pit, Hans, the bass player, drew his heavy bow across his deep strings; nearby, the flute player, his thin face framed by prematurely grey hair, leaned forward to his stand as he played his bird-like trills . . . the 'cellist who collected foreign stamps from the artistes was now in another world drawing forth a rich vibrato. The gentle concert master who loved Lotus so desperately was far away as he shifted from the fifth to the seventh position on his violin . . . the trumpet played golden notes as the girls in the picture flashed to new tableaux of great art . . . Fritz with his powerful hands, leaned over the great Bechstein as he crashed into the terrific chords. They were dreamers all . . . graduates of the best conservatories of Europe . . . all fitted for the concert stage, but caught by the tide of a world they had never tried to understand, and penned to a theatre pit by these soldiers in the audience for whom they now played like gods.

The act finished in a roar of applause, the curtain swung down and, while the applause still rang, it was up again on the grand finale.

A long line of English girls in brief white satin trunks tapped the latest swing number from America. Line after line of other girls joined in the song, and group by group the entire company rocked into the rhythm until it seemed that the very theatre walls were swaying to swing-time. Every foot in the audience was moving with the infectious patter of tapping feet. The stage was flooded with colour and light as everything and everybody swayed in swing. Gone from the revue were the older rhythms . . . this was 1939 . . . Herr Direktor had said one must always travel a year ahead in show business . . . more swing . . . more speed . . . more laughs.

"We must keep a year ahead, we must have 1940 speed . . . blitz . . . blitz. . . ."

Rastella and Rosana could be heard with their voices soaring above the crowd. The elephants entered swinging their trunks, the Schiller dog act yelped in rhythm, the camel blinked in rhythm while Pat the trainer swore in

rhythm. The audience laughed in rhythm, rocked in rhythm, clapped in rhythm, and the final curtain swung down to burst after burst of cheering. Curtain after curtain followed as the soldiers roared for more. Bows for everyone, smiles and applause, roar after roar for the artistes and then, at last, Herr Direktor, beaming, his troubles forgotten for a night—he had had another brilliant success.

Then it was all finished and the hands of the clock pointed to two-thirty. It was no longer night. It was morning now. The audience rose reluctantly from the seats. The generals filed through the side door to the garden laughing heartily and resting their hands on the swords at their sides. They were no longer stiff and precise, but loosely human in small groups, talking about the show, laughing. The military pomp had been routed completely.

There came the two world-known faces, each surrounded by lesser satellites. They mingled with the groups talking and laughing; gone was the formality and the stiffness. For their little moment a few hundred unknown artistes of all nations had stemmed a tide, but they did not know it.

Herr Direktor was being complimented; the theatre director was being complimented. Then it was time to go. Heels began to click. The harsh spotlights flashed on, the orderlies jumped to attention. The generals stiffened into their steel-cased military frames, raised their arms in the air and, amid the glitter and monocles, saluted . . . HEIL HITLER.

There was a jumping of lackeys, a slamming of car doors, a glare of headlights. Engines purred, cars peeled off with precision and a reckless acceleration through the arch; the army was gone as quickly as it had come. The kleig lights were cut off and there was a moment of dazzling darkness in the garden, and once more the garden belonged to the artistes. Behind one of the yellow lights high up in the walls of the Krankenhaus, Tania lay, unaware of the brilliant success of the show and of the flowers that lay neglected in her dressing-room. . . .

She had recovered consciousness during the transfusion and her eyes, immensely dark in her white face, had turned to see Peter lying by her side and the blood from his arm flowing into her.

Tears had begun to roll down her cheeks. She fought them back and looked at him. “Now it is the end,” she whispered. “When I was a star I could not have you, and now, when it is all over for me, your blood and mine they mix.”

“Maybe it was being a star that got in your way,” he said quietly. “With love nothing should matter, neither being a star nor being . . . like this. . . .”

Tania's eyes closed. "Your blood and mine. . . ."

"Silence!" said the nurse.

# Chapter Forty-nine

Bill Hardy ruffled his hand through his halo of white hair, twitched his angry white eyebrows and looked around the Scala café. There was an air of gloom about the place.

"Them devils are going to bitch it again. I feel it in the air."

Peter stared gloomily into his stein.

One of Bill's eyebrows lifted and the glance that flickered at Peter was a question asking what Peter thought about it all. Then, without needing a reply, he saw the answer; he saw himself and Peter looking at the world from opposite ends of a telescope. He, Bill, an old man, saw the world in the small end, distant and impersonal; Peter, young with the taste of success in his mouth, was seeing it in the large end, magnified, near, coming to overwhelm him. To Bill the problems of the world were losing their power to hurt; he had had his life and, by and large, it had been a good one. To Peter, young and with a straight run of success behind him, the problems of the world were just revealing their terrific power to disrupt and destroy his pattern of life.

Bill glared around him, took another drink, set down his stein with decision. "It's going to be an 'ell of a mess," he said. "That is, if it blows up."

Peter finished his beer and signalled for more. He did not want to discuss politics. The British members did nothing else these days.

"Did you see Tania this morning?"

Peter nodded.

"Poor kid," said Bill. "I guess it's 'it her hard."

Peter cut in. "You think she's finished?"

"What do you think?" Bill leaned across the table and tapped the top with his finger. "This is a good game, but it's tough. She's got plenty, that kid has, but what's the good of a show girl with her legs torn up?"

"But what will she do?"

"God knows. They come and they go and that's the last you see of 'em. There's plenty waiting to take their place, and it's the show what counts. But it's tough on the old man. Anna walks out on him and the girl he was bringing up to take her place is laid out. One of the nicest girls I ever did work with, was Anna; but when jealousy gets into 'em, there's no knowing what they'll do."

"What will the old man do?" asked Peter.

"Maybe he'll push Kathi up, although she ain't what I figure as star for this kind of show."

"Why?"

"Well," said Bill indulgently. "These ballet dancers, they're all right in their own acts, but what you want in a show like this is someone what knows the people and gets across to 'em, like Tania. Now she seemed to know what everyone of 'em across the lights was thinking and she was inside 'em pulling out of 'em all they 'ad to give. Even Anna didn't 'ave the real knack, good as she was. If you've got one girl that can do that, you can do anything with a show.

"But them ballet dancers, no! it's different. Mark you, the audience like 'em, nice for contrast, artistic sort of stuff, if you get what I mean. You're an artist, you ought to know. People 'as one picture or two in a room, but they don't paper their walls with 'em, do they? It's like you and Kathi, you 'ave a nice love affair and that's all right, but you wouldn't marry her."

Bill drained his stein in the ensuing pause. "What I mean to say is, if you married her, what would you marry?"

"That's what you would never understand."

"No," said Bill definitely. "I could have chosen a race-'orse for my act instead of Maud and she'd 'ave looked lovely all right on the stage, but it wouldn't 'ave lasted. For these things to last you've got to 'ave a bit of fun with it, plenty of laughs and a bit of kicking now and again. See what I mean?"

Peter looked up. He was waiting for Kathi. He was hardly listening to Bill Hardy.

"The way I see it," said the old man, "is that the quicker we get out of this country now the better. I've been in this business bloody near seventy years now and the signs are all the same. When you get bigger and better shows and audiences wanting more and more laughs, something is heading

for a crack. Take this show. Last year all peace and harmony. This year bigger and better, but shot through with cracks, cliques, jealousies and what not, and now a climax. And what is the climax? A bleeding gala show to a house full of military and the star clawed to pieces. Believe me, something's going to happen and happen fast, and the sooner we're on the move away to hell out of this damned country, the better for all of us."

Peter nodded. Uneasiness was stirring through all the company and Tania's accident seemed like the end of a phase of happiness that would not be recovered.

Peter looked up again. Kathi was late. She should not have accepted the invitation of the general to lunch with him. Kathi had protested that she had been out with him many times before always with someone from the show when Peter was in England. Peter had known it was useless to explain. If only Tania had not been in hospital, Tania would have managed the situation easily; she would have steered Kathi safely through an amusing lunch and would have left the general charmed but frustrated.

Peter stirred uneasily. That general had almost filled Kathi's dressing-room with the flowers he'd sent round in the few days since the gala performance.

Peter looked up. Someone had come into the café in a hurry, but it was only Mario. Mario came quickly to Peter's table.

"And how is Maud?" he asked Bill politely.

"She's all right. What worries me is how to get her out if anything starts."

"Do not worry. We shall be out just by the skin of our teeth. Pappy and Herr Direktor, they work day and night to arrange it."

He sat down and turned to Peter. "And how is Kathi?"

"Not back yet."

"Ha!" Mario frowned. Then he smiled. "But do not worry. These generals, they are full of formality and military courtesies. In love, like war, full of the smoothness of diplomacy until the war begins . . . then, of course, they are gentle as their tanks."

"If only Tania were . . . You have seen her?"

"I come from her. My poor little Tania. She and Kathi, the embodiment of all youth, Kathi beauty and Tania vitality; Kathi enthroned on her peak,

Tania at last a star. Then life steps in and, pouff!"

"How is Tania?"

"It is touch and go. If there is poison she will lose her leg. If there is no poison she will be well."

Peter stirred as though some hidden torture would not let him rest. Thoughts rose continually in his mind, Tania on that dark night in Hamburg, Tania in his room at Munich, Tania laughing on the crest of a wave of popularity in London, Tania teasing him. The image of Kathi when Kathi was away had no sharpness in his mind, no reality, but every line, every expression of Tania was clear and vivid. It shouldn't be so.

Bill looked from one to the other. They were poor company and he pushed his chair back.

"Well, I'll be going to keep Maud company. She gets to worrying if I leave her too long."

"A riverderci," said Mario, smiling.

Peter stared down at Tania as he stood waiting by her bedside. She would not turn her head to him. He was suddenly thinking how new it was to see a familiar face against an unfamiliar background. Her sleek coiffure was gone and her hair tumbled, a blue-black mass against the pillow. She had grown up fast in the past year, but now had slipped back to her age, a tired, broken child. He stared at her face as though he had never seen before how clear, like her body, the shapes were; good bone structure, the triangle of the cheek clean to the clear jaw line, the definite chin, the nose that had always given the impression of being tilted slightly was definite and straight; there was nothing indefinite about her face. The dark eyes, too, that had always seemed so alive, were now like lights gone out.

"Go away," she whispered.

"I'm sorry, Tania."

"Sorry!" There was a tired emphasis in her voice, a last-ditch defiance, that spurned his pity, and in doing so wrenched his heart. He knew then that he admired this girl who had been licked so hard by the world in the first place and had pulled and fought her way up, without any self-pity. Now the gay courage was all spilled, but what remained still fought back and resented pity.

"You should laugh." The voice was weary. "Go on, laugh, like Anna."

Peter stared down, fascinated by the face drawn with pain and mental suffering. A surge of feeling that he could not define coursed through him. He wanted to express in some way without any hint of pity his sense of the pathetic but futile valour of youth. He wanted to paint that portrait of dark hair, pale face, and sullen defiance against the white pillow, the young bird caught in full flight by an arrow and brought to earth, and, even while lying broken, refusing pity. She was brave, but she was bewildered, her mind was still struggling with the full meaning of it all, still seeing no hope.

But even as he stood there without speaking he was conscious of the sympathy that was between them, a bond that had always underlain their clashes and their cross-play.

She needed to be taken away from her own bitter thoughts.

"Tania," said Peter quietly, "I want you to help me. It is about Kathi."

There was a silence in which he could almost feel Tania wrenching herself from her depths to realize what he was saying. Then her mouth parted in a low bitter laugh. The laugh repeated, but her eyes were not laughing, nor was the rest of her face.

"That is good joke."

Peter sat down on her bed and took her hand. "Tania, you must listen to me."

"Now I must listen. Before you didn't care. Now when it is all over you want me to help you. Go away."

"Tania, it is for Kathi . . ."

"Kathi, always Kathi! She is the lucky one. Everyone wants her; you want her; Herr Direktor wants her; no one hates her . . . because she is still a baby with eyes not open."

"That is why she wants you now, Tania. You know what the world is. I tell you, Tania, Kathi has seen something and she is frightened."

Tania still stared away. Her voice was tired again, the brief burst of spirit ended. "So even Kathi. You would not see that before. Now or later, if she is beautiful, men will destroy her. I hate men."

Peter pressed her hand. "Tania, you must tell her what to do."

"It is the general?"

"Yes."

"What is it now?"

"He took her to lunch, told her he was returning to Leipzig next day, told her that he had a house there for her when the company moved. She didn't understand; she told him she was in love with me."

"She is so simple."

"Then he asked her all about it and she told him and he said he would make no difficulty for me if she would be his mistress."

"He said that to Kathi?"

Peter's hand clenched over Tania's until she winced. He released her hand quickly. "You see what a shock it was. She is hurt, unhappy . . ."

"Her eyes open, yes, at last!"

Peter got up and paced the room. Tania's dull eyes watched him.

"He can have your permit cancelled. You must be careful . . ." Her voice was low, and her replies seemed to be forced from an old depth in which she was now too tired to grope. "Why should I care?"

"Can't you see? If Kathi is bruised now before I can marry her she will be destroyed even more than . . ."

"Go on, say it! Even more than me."

"I didn't mean to say that."

"You can't hurt me. They hurt me too hard when I also knew nothing. Who cares if I am finished?"

Peter brushed her question aside. "But Kathi, you can tell her what to do."

Tania's bitter laugh came again. "It is so simple, but Kathi she cannot do it."

"What would you do?"

"I would be nice to him, I would laugh and joke and despise him. Then I would tell him I would love to be his mistress, but first he must wait until I would be quite well from the last time. I would say; you understand, yes? Maybe you too do not know what I would mean . . . but he would be scared . . . he would run away and never come again. These soldiers, they are easy to frighten, if one knows what they fear, but Kathi could not do that. She

cannot act when she does not understand." Tania turned her head so that her tired eyes met his. "You see, Peter, even now you need me. I have had more of you than Kathi will ever have, and now I have your blood in my veins. Always now you are part of me; but now it is too late." She turned her head again to the wall "Go away."

Peter got up brusquely and left without another word. His thoughts as well as his emotions were tangled. He went into the garden looking for Kathi and, for a few moments in the sunshine, the colour of the groups of players in costume, the brightness of the caravans, the great masses of shadow under the trees brought back the happiness of last summer. But it was different now; even as he walked through looking for Kathi, he could feel it, feel the slackness of spirit, the separation of the groups.

Kathi was not in the garden; he found her in the heavy heat of her dressing-room, writing a letter, worrying about each word. When he entered she turned quickly and it seemed to him that even Kathi had changed now; there was almost a frightened look in her eyes.

"I am writing home," she said.

Peter looked at the thin Continental writing. Kathi followed his eyes and then looked back at him.

"I have been with Herr Direktor."

"What did he say?"

"He says he has spoken to my father. He wants to marry me." Tears started to her eyes at the last words.

"Marry you?" Peter's unbelief was in his words.

"He says it is the only way. No one can hurt me then."

"You told him about the general?"

"Yes, he asked me. He knows about it. Everyone talks."

"Go on."

Kathi hesitated. Peter could see it was hard for her to speak. For the first time he realized how little they had spoken to one another; there had always been Tania to supply the small talk.

"He says, if I marry him, no one will ever bother me. He says he wants me to be a big star now, that he will make me one; but it is better first that I marry him."

"And you?" For the first time with Kathi, Peter's voice was hard.

"I love you, Peter." There was a pathetic simplicity in her words. "I only love you."

"Then why . . ." Peter looked down again at the letter.

"I go home."

Peter could see it all, the simple Kathi running back to childhood, hoping to escape life.

"But why run away?"

"Peter, I will go home and then you can come to my home . . ."

Peter sat down in front of her, holding her hands. "Kathi, we have both been fools in love, so blind that we could see nothing but our own happiness. The world begins to fall to pieces and we are caught in the disintegration. But, Kathi, we are artistes, and there always comes a point where the artiste must face life and defy it. Kathi, you mustn't go now. There is no escape from life. You can't go backwards. We, the young, must go on, believing in love, believing in beauty. That is our only strength. Can't you see that every time you go on the stage, dancing as you do, it is one more plea to people, calling to them to see that there is beauty in life, to see that life is more than greed for power or domination over other peoples."

Peter paused, searching Kathi's troubled eyes that stared at the floor. Then suddenly he knelt by her, holding her hand and looking up to intercept her gaze. Somehow he felt more sure of himself now than he had ever done. He was discovering his own true self.

"Don't you see, Kathi, that is why I love you? I love you because you already are what I am trying to create. The world needs us now as it never did before. There are some words I once read; I have never forgotten them . . .

" 'Unless that surge of wonder, that intolerable beating of wings in the poet's mind, had found the right words, we never should have cared. There is poetry in words, much blood in words, but there is a thing that moves behind them, a spirit that puts them on like a garment and wears them, filling the infinite possibilities of their drapery with a body that lives and moves . . .'

"Don't you see your dancing has found the right words in you, and you the right words in your dancing? That is why I want to paint. I have that intolerable beating of wings in my brain, the rebellion of my generation

against the fate which seems to hang over us, the rebellion not of fighting against evil, but of looking beyond to what is splendid and wonderful. Let us make people see what the world has to give if only men will stop destroying men."

Peter paused and waited. But Kathi was silent. He had the curious impression that he had wasted his words; Kathi never strove to create anything; she was the thing created, beauty. To talk to her of the urge of the artist was to try to make the poem read itself, or the picture stand apart and see itself.

Then her eyes came back to his, staring deep into them. Her other hand came to his.

"Peter, wherever you go, I will go."

He kissed her, and her lips were cool as dew in the womb of the morning.

Peter passed Herr Direktor's office and seeing him through the open door he turned in. Herr Direktor looked up and saw immediately here was more trouble, trouble with love, always love. The world could fall about their ears and all his plans fall to pieces, but his company would always think of love.

"Sit down, Peter," he said gently. He was very fond of this young artist. "You want to see me?"

"Yes, about Kathi." Peter's hands were tightly clenched.

Herr Direktor took up his dangling monocle and screwed it into his eye slowly. "She has told you?"

"About your asking her to marry you. I thought you knew . . ."

Herr Direktor held up his hand. "For a year and a half you have been with my company. Before you came what were you? Nothing. And now? You are a designer of the first class. Who did this for you? I did, because I look at you and I know what is best for you."

Peter looked up to interrupt, but Herr Direktor's hand was up again. "And Kathi, who knows what is best for her? Who knows now what is best for you? For many, many months I have had plans for Kathi, I have had plans for you. This love, I have seen that too. I thought it might pass, but it doesn't. Very well, then, what happens?

"All the time Kathi's dancing improves, her acts draw more and more applause; on the stage she is mature, but off-stage she is still a child. Very well, then. There are those who send her flowers, there are those who want to entertain her, there are those . . . let us be frank . . . who wish to seduce her.

"You have seen my company; you have seen how I watch my girls, and how those who cheapen themselves do not keep their contracts with me. It is not a point of morals with me, it is only because if they are like that when they are too young, they lose interest in my show, they lose freshness, and my show loses something which is important.

"Very well. Kathi is innocent; she is in love; it is calf love, but it is still love, and it protects her until there comes someone important enough, and then what happens? Germany is not like your England. Here those who have the power have all the rights, they can use pressure, they can blackmail. Very well, then. Someone important is pursuing Kathi; someone who can put pressure on me, on her parents; someone who can get rid of you by having your permit to stay in Germany cancelled. Can you do anything? Can you get a permit to marry her in this country? Can you persuade Kathi to marry you? Can you obtain the consent of her parents? No; you, in Germany, are nothing.

"But me? I know her parents. I have estates in Germany and in Brazil. I see Kathi as a child who needs one of very, very great experience if she is to be kept perfect for my show . . ."

Peter jumped up. "Isn't there anything else but your show? Aren't we living people, aren't we . . .?"

He paused for a moment and Herr Direktor very patiently went on. "If I marry Kathi I can protect her. There is no one, however big, who can step in then and interfere with her. Then Kathi is as she always was and we can keep her that way."

Peter's anger would not develop against the respect which he held for Herr Direktor. "We are in love."

Herr Direktor let his monocle fall. "So you are in love! For twenty years I have had artistes around me and they were always in love, always, always, always . . . and never for more than a few years in love with the same one."

"But you don't understand."

"I am old in experience, Peter, and I do understand. I know also that for you it would not be right to marry Kathi. She is not one who can fight her

way through life as you must do, she is not one who can be the wife of an artist."

"Who can say that?" challenged Peter.

Herr Direktor shrugged. "It is why on the Continent we have marriages of convenience. You English, you are used to independence; but Kathi . . . Kathi has never known it. I understand this about her. I understand you, too; it is better for you to forget love for a few years and make yourself an artist . . ."

Peter gave a frustrated shrug. It was a waste of time to talk to older people. They sat immovable behind their barrier of time and called it experience. Why should he worry? He knew that Kathi loved him. But Herr Direktor had it within his power to separate them.

"What can I say? If you like you could separate us when the company splits, and I could never see her again."

Herr Direktor picked up his monocle again and fiddled with it.

"That was not kind, Peter. Have I not given you every chance? Besides it is no longer my choice who comes or goes with my companies." He looked around automatically as everyone did who had things to say that might be overheard. "Love and politics! First it is the Government which tells me what acts I may take from Germany to England and to India. I am an artist of the theatre, I want to create laughter and beauty, I want only to entertain people, the people who work, the common people whose thoughts are not soured by their brains. But no, this Government tells me what I must do. Then it is Madame Rastella who must go to England so that Rita can marry an Englishman; it is Lotus who pesters me to get her a permit to marry a German soldier, which is impossible. It is Anna who, because I wish to marry Kathi, must destroy Tania to hurt me." Herr Direktor took out a large handkerchief and wiped his monocle carefully.

"It is you who want to keep Kathi, but cannot protect her. Look, see this!" He pointed to a list on his desk. "Tania is spoilt for my show. I must have a star for London until the boat sails for India. So I send Kathi. Look! Her name is already struck off the list. She must stay in Germany. Why? Because there are influences, and I suspect your general. Very well, I decide there is no time to lose. I will marry her. She will be safe and she can go where I go."

Peter sat while Herr Direktor talked of love and marriage as though they were cards in a game.

"But don't you understand, Kathi loves me and I love her."

Herr Direktor shrugged. "Very well. I need you with my company, I need Kathi with my company. See if you can take care of her. If after you have seen the East, in six months, in a year, it is still the same . . ."

He shrugged as though it were purely a business matter with him. Time could arrange so many things without effort on his part. Peter rose, feeling vaguely that he had been put in the wrong.

Herr Direktor stood at Tania's bedside with the best surgeon in Berlin. They watched the nurse unrolling endless bandages from the leg, and the surgeon asked questions of the doctor in attendance.

Tania's head, almost hidden in her blue-black hair, was turned away and her eyes were shut as if to push the men and all thoughts of herself away.

Herr Direktor waited patiently. If there were a chance of salvaging Tania he must do it. Even if her leg were permanently injured he needed her talent for holding an audience. He stared at the backs of the two doctors as they bent over Tania's leg. He was sorry for Tania. Tania had never let him down. She had worked hard and had done everything he had asked of her. A nurse was re-bandaging the mauled leg hidden from him by the two talking doctors. Herr Direktor could see the other leg. It was a beautiful leg; the skin so smooth and flawless, and the lines so . . . yes . . . so sensuous. Poor child.

The doctor from Berlin turned to him. "They have done very well. There is no infection; the stitches are excellent; she is very strong. There is nothing I can do."

"She will lose the leg?"

"No."

"But the scars. She will be ruined by scars. She is my star. I cannot afford to have her ruined."

The doctor was not impressed. "It is very fortunate there is no infection. They have done very well here." He looked down at Tania. "We shall know better in a week."

He turned away from the bed and took Herr Direktor by the arm. "I do not think she will require plastic surgery, nor even skin grafting. She is young. The claws of the beast caught her as she was trying to jump away from it. She is lucky she moved only a little. In the thigh the claws cut deep,

but from the knee down the wound is superficial. There will be, of course, scars . . .”

“That is what I ask you to arrange. She is my star. Soon we go to India.”

The surgeon shrugged. “She is young. There will be scars, but in a year the flesh will fill out, the mark will be less. No, I could do nothing that nature will not do better. A fortnight in bed, a rest; it is not serious.”

Herr Direktor walked with him to the door, he shook hands, and then he turned back to the bed. There was more spring in his step, his shoulders were not so heavy. The nurse was covering Tania. He waved her away and turned to the house surgeon.

“This room is not good enough. I want only the best for her, regardless of cost. I want a room with the sun, a room where she can look down into the garden and see her friends.” He looked around. “Fruit, fruit. There is no fruit here. I will send some in every day. She must have everything of the best. She is my star, she will some day be the greatest star in Europe.” Turning away from the doctor he let his monocle drop and his manner changed.

Tania opened her eyes and turned her head to see if she were hearing rightly. He was smiling down at her.

“That is good news. That was the best man in all Germany. He says you will be well again. Soon, you will be back with the show, and I have so much for you to do, so you must hurry.”

“How long?” Tania’s eyes searched his face. Herr Direktor nodded. He had had this kind of thing before in a hundred variations. If they were healthy, most of them were back in the show in a few days. Anna had not missed a show in London when Vixen had clawed her arm. Damn Anna, why had she gone? After all he had done for her!

“A few weeks!”

“But my leg . . . the scars?”

“That is nothing, my child, nothing.”

“They will be all down my leg.”

“But your leg is still there. The scars . . . the wet white will cover them.”

“Then it is . . . it is not the end?”

He saw the sudden dawn of new hope flush back into Tania's face. He smiled down at her.

"It is the beginning."

It was too much for Tania. Tears began to stream down her cheeks and she turned her head away into the pillow. Herr Direktor could feel the pressure of her hand. Tania was dead, and now she was alive again. She would work hard for him now, and he would be kind to her. Perhaps if Kathi were too stupid . . . he pushed the thought away. There were other things to think about now.

The news about Tania ran swiftly through the company. Rita ran into the Rastella dressing-room. "Mama, Papa, Tania will be better."

"Oh, la, la!" exclaimed Madame Rastella, heaving her huge bulk from a chair. "Come, we must go and see her."

Little Gretchen tripped with Kaspar past the English girls' dressing-room. "Girls, Tania's leg is not coming off after all. She's getting better." She pulled Kaspar behind her as she hurried to the garden and the English girls streamed out behind her. In the garden the news went swiftly round and a stream of players converged on the gate with one idea in mind, to see Tania and tell her how glad they were. It was as though Tania's tragedy had been a symbol of the looming troubles that threatened to disintegrate the company, but now that she was going to be well, it was a sign that everything else would be well also.

The stream of artistes poured from the gate into the street and up the steps into the hospital. The hall was flooded for a minute with a tide of untidy life and colour. Then the iron chill of hospital discipline rolled it back into the street. No one could visit Tania. Orders had been given to that effect. These players seemed to have no respect for hospital rules or correct behaviour. There had been enough trouble before with another case when the Arabs had actually begun a party in a public ward.

"But I must see her," said Peter to the severe woman behind the desk.

"It is the rule," said the woman.

In the theatre Pappy sweated with the details for taking half the show to England and Herr Direktor worked to plan a balanced show for the remainder of the German run. When the artistes were not on the stage they were at the arched entrance to the garden watching the changing aspect of Berlin where life on the streets grew more military every day.

It was a week before Peter and Mario were able to see Tania, and they found her sitting up in bed surrounded with flowers and with the sun slanting across her bed. The drawn white face was fresh and rounded with rest and her eyes were alive again with their old sparkle.

"I am glad you come. It is dull, dull, dull here. Soon I will be back."

While she spoke her eyes challenged Peter's as if to remind him that even when she had felt there was no hope she had refused pity and sympathy. Now she could accept all the sympathy she could collect and use it to her own advantage.

Mario took both her hands and sat on the bed. "My little Tania, you bloom again like a flower. And the leg?"

"I would show it to you, Mario, but it is still ugly. But soon there will be only the scars and with make-up they will not show on the stage."

"I am so glad; everybody is glad; everybody waits for you to come back. That is right, is it not, Peter?"

Peter nodded.

"Mario, the passports? You have found out?"

Mario shook his head. "The English passport is not easy. Me, I get a Roumanian one."

"What is all this?" asked Peter.

Mario put a finger to his mouth. "Sh! In case of the war."

"You think it will come?"

Tania laughed. "Maybe you think not?"

Mario interrupted. "The English one I can get, but it will cost more."

"It is the English one that matters if there is a war and I cannot arrange to marry an Englishman." Tania laughed at Peter as she said this. "But he does not understand. He sees only love and nothing else."

Mario ran out into the garden from the stage.

"Come at once," he called. "Herr Direktor wants the entire company on the stage."

As the members hurried to the stage from the brightness of the sunshine they saw him standing in the centre with a sheaf of papers in his hand as

usual.

"Now I have something important to tell you. I hope everyone is here. Our plans have been changed and we are going to make a quick move. To-night we pack. To-morrow there will be a very slim show, and after the performance you go immediately to the station where there will be a special train to take you to Leipzig."

"Jack, you will stay behind, also Rob, Pat, and all the English who care to help me. I will tell you why this is. I have just received word that beginning any day now, Berlin will have a series of blackout rehearsals. We do not know when they are coming, so I can take no chances. It is also very difficult to get anything moved these days if we wait to pack; so we will pack immediately and to-morrow we take the train while we can get one. The baggage will wait here until we can move it, but in the meantime we will all go to Leipzig."

"But what can we do, Herr Direktor? It is not the end of the month and all our rooms are reserved from the first?"

"We cannot help that. We must do the best we can."

"But, Herr Direktor," pouted Sally, "I have a very important engagement to go to Wansee the day after to-morrow." She sat on the floor of the stage, very pretty with her plump curves nicely contained in the elastic bathing suit in which she had just been rehearsing. "He has special leave, just for this once. What shall I do?"

Herr Direktor smiled. Troubles were as light as bubbles to Sally. "I am sure I do not know, Sally. If you had let me know sooner, perhaps I could have arranged to have the blackouts postponed. Now I am afraid the Government will find it too late to co-operate."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sally with annoyance. "There is always some damn thing or other the matter in this country."

# Chapter Fifty

In the last week of July 1939 the company was once more back in Leipzig and Herr Direktor's family wandered the streets waiting for him to come with the baggage. The artistes sat in the theatre yard or the park opposite waiting like children without parents.

After a week of anxiety, Herr Direktor drove into the yard one hot afternoon. Tania was with him in the car, her leg still swathed in bandages, but her face fresh and smiling, happy to be back with the company. Everyone rushed up to the car, but Herr Direktor wore an anxious expression.

"When do we open?"

"As soon as we can set the show. The first loads will be here in a few hours now. We have sat in the Scala garden day after day waiting for the lorries to come, but I could do nothing; they were all carrying troops to the frontier and there were no lorries for us."

"Does not look too good," said Dick Nichols.

That afternoon the lorries arrived and the gloom lifted from the company. There was work to do and they could forget everything else.

With the show well started the familiar atmosphere of the company reasserted itself, but most of the company stayed close to the theatre. All the conversation was of the war. There were now no English papers, and all letters were delayed and opened by the censors.

"This place gives me the creeps," said Jimmy Nichols in the theatre yard. "There will be trouble soon."

"Yes, our landlady is crying all the time," said Sonia, a chorus girl. "She says if the war starts they will starve."

"They are starving now; there is no meat. We haven't tasted any meat for days and we have had no butter since we left Berlin. They say when the Fair starts they are going to put a supply on the market to make a good impression on the visitors. Then we can get filled up, and that will last us until we get to Italy."

"When do we leave?" asked Nancy.

"September eleventh."

Herr Direktor wandered out to the theatre yard, restless and worried.

"Someone told me the main street in Leipzig is roped off every night and they are moving their troops as fast as they can under cover of darkness." Ronnie looked around at the others.

"I think we should go home," said Dick.

"Never mind," said Herr Direktor. "If anything happens you will get out all right."

"Why are they painting the windows black in the theatre here to-day?" Lolita asked the question. She had just come out of the stage door.

"It is for the air-raid rehearsals."

"Oui, oui, but for a rehearsal it does not need the paint."

Herr Direktor shrugged his shoulders and went back to the stage.

Ha Wong, the Chinese hair swinger, came in the gate.

"Where is Herr Direktor?" he asked.

"On the stage. Where have you been, Ha Wong?"

"To Dresden. I went to see the British consul and he gave me my visas. I am leaving for England in the morning."

Yogi, sitting in the sunshine, looked up with an expression of reproach when he heard what Ha Wong had done. Wrapped in his shawl, with a checked skirt and red turban, he was warming himself in the late August sunshine. Ha Wong turned to him. "I am sorry, Yogi." Ha Wong had looked after Yogi like a father after a child. "I am sorry to leave you, but I must look out for my wife and the baby." Ha Wong had married one of the English chorus girls and they had a young baby. They were very much in love.

Herr Direktor hearing the different tone in the murmur in the yard came hurrying out.

"What is it, Ha Wong? You are going away?"

"Yes. I came to tell you."

"There is no available space. So many British and Americans are leaving the country."

"I shall stand all the way," said Ha Wong. "I do not care how I get there as long as I get to England with my wife and baby. I know what war is, Herr

Direktor. I know what it is in my country. When it starts it will be that way here."

"BUT IT WILL NOT START," Herr Direktor shouted, as if he could will it so.

Yogi, who so rarely spoke, lifted his eyes again to Herr Direktor. "It is better for Ha Wong to go!"

His quiet statement had a profound effect on the group around. Herr Direktor looked suddenly agitated.

"I want all the British members. Call everybody. I want you all on the stage at once."

His face seemed to drop a mask and reveal an old and lonely man.

There was a rush to the café at the front, to the cabaret at the back, down to the basement and over to the studio in the yard. Everyone was collected in a few moments. When all were assembled Herr Direktor stood in the centre of the stage with the group around him. He held his head down as if he were groping for words to express himself. After a few minutes he spoke. The stage was dark, the curtain was up on an empty house; only the small light on an iron rod beside him lit the gloomy picture.

"Now we are all gathered together here, I want to talk seriously to you all. Ha Wong had just said he is leaving the company for England. Perhaps you could change your mind, Ha Wong?" he asked wistfully.

Ha Wong looked distressed. "I am afraid I cannot. Somehow I seem to feel the end has come."

"Very well." Herr Direktor's voice was profoundly sad. "I shall not try to influence you. But the rest . . . the British . . . I ask you, please . . . do not go away and leave me. I ask you to stay here with me . . . there will be no war. This has happened several times before. You who have been with me a long time know that.

"Remember last year in Munich? Nothing happened. The year before that we were in Leipzig; it was the same thing. Always in August it is that way. August is the war rumour month. Stay with the company. I promise that if anything happens I will get you out of the country. If the British start running away, the other members will get into a panic and I shall be able to do nothing with them. While the British are here, the others do not worry. Another week and we shall be in Italy and from there we shall go to a far, far country away from all this European trouble. We shall not come back for years. We shall stick together." There were tears in his eyes.

"All right," said Jimmy, "let's chance it."

"O.K.," said Bert. "I think we are fools myself, but we always seem to get out of everything. How about going out to the café to celebrate?"

Herr Direktor started to laugh. "Always the same . . . always the same."

In a moment the crowd had broken up and was going through the gate to the café. The yard was empty except for Herr Direktor, Bill Hardy, and Dick.

"How do I get Maud out of the country if war starts?" asked Bill.

"You will have to leave her. I will take care of her."

"Never," said Bill. "Do you think I would leave her for them to serve up as horsemeat? I will never desert Maud."

"There is no transportation for animals."

"I know a fellow who has a little lorry. I will ask him to drive Maud out. Someone told me we could get to the frontier in seventeen hours."

"I am afraid there is no petrol any more," said Herr Direktor. "Nevertheless, to-morrow morning I will get Pat to drive out in the country with the ponies to see if he can get any."

"Have you none in your car?"

"Not a drop. They took it all overnight. There is no more to be had."

"My God!" said Dick. "We are trapped."

They went to join the others and drown their worries in drink.

Every day there seemed to be more soldiers on the streets. Night after night the members of the company drank in the little café at the back of the theatre and it was always filled with soldiers.

Sonia, one of the English chorus girls, and her landlady sat listening to the news bulletins.

"This is Thursday," said her landlady. "If they do not go into Poland to-night, then we are safe for another week. He always moves after midnight because Friday is his lucky day."

Just then, Julie, Biji, Ching Ching, and a group of the other children passed under her window and called out to Sonia.

"We have just been sent home from school. They said for us not to come back any more. The air force came in and said there would be no more school."

Julie began to cry. “I want my mother, I want my mother. She has gone with Pappy to England and they will do something bad to her if the war starts. I want my mother.”

“Julie,” said Sonia, “do not be frightened. The English will not hurt your mother.”

But fright had taken hold of all the children. They were in the midst of something they could not understand and they scattered, running with panic to the safety of their parents. A few minutes later Ernst, one of the Bavarian boys who had been in hospital after an accident on the stage, whistled under Sonia’s window. He was in love with Sonia. He looked very weak and held his suitcase in his hand.

“Ernst!” cried Sonia.

He beckoned to the window as the landlady left the room.

“Ernst, what is wrong? Why are you out of the hospital so soon?”

“They came this morning and told everyone who could walk to get out. They said they wanted seven hundred beds for to-morrow night.”

“What for?”

“I don’t know. I guess the war will start.” Ernst was suddenly defiant. “I don’t care. Then the British will come and free Bavaria. I don’t care how soon they start their war, I will never fight for them. They can do what they like, kill me as soon as they like, but I will never fight.”

His face was bitter as he leaned weakly against the window-sill in the warm sunshine. In spite of his defiance, he was a picture of despair.

Tania spent her time sunning herself in the theatre yard or sitting in the wings during the performance. The dressings on her leg were at last removed and she would sit bathing her leg in the sun to darken the livid colours. Tania was the only one of the company unaffected by the crisis. The reaction after her first hopelessness, the extravagant sympathy of the company, the circle that always gathered about her as she sat in the yard, all these were exhilarating to her and she accepted them as her right and a symbol of her future position in the company. A favourite game with the girls was to experiment on Tania’s scars with make-up to see how completely invisible they could be made. Tania knew she could do it herself, but she let others try. She herself was more worried about the way light

caught the hollow edges and wrinkles of the scars. The doctor had assured her though that nature and good health would fill them out.

Tania's good spirits drew people around her as always those who are assured and happy will draw about them those who are in need of assurance and comfort. Kathi in particular clung to her company. Kathi stared at Tania's scars as Tania played with make-up. To Kathi those scars were the symbol of a world she did not understand. A terrible thing had happened to Tania and Tania had survived it. Terrible things could come suddenly out of life and strike one down; one could survive them, but there were always scars. Kathi stared at the scars day after day and tried to assimilate this fact of life. But there was a troubled look in her eyes that had never been there before.

Kathi stared at Tania's leg, dark compared with her own, smooth-skinned, with lines, as Peter said, that leapt out at you and asked to be drawn. Her own legs were white and the lines were soft. Even the years of ballet exercises, day in and out, had not muscled them into hardness. So, too, was her body, soft and tender, as though the mind imposed itself upon the body and defied the world to harden it. But now as she stared at Tania's leg she felt a fear of what the world could do. The rumble of military vehicles filled her nights and the worried gossip of the company beat upon her during the day. There was no escape this year.

Then there was the affair of the general.

Tania looked up towards the entrance to the yard.

"Here is Mario," she said. Kathi looked up too with a flutter of nervous apprehension.

"Ha," exclaimed Mario with a broad smile. "My little Tania, my little Kathi."

"You have news?" asked Tania sharply.

Mario looked around, lifted a finger and opened his eyes wide, giving away to anyone within range that he was deep in conspiracy. "I have everything. A piece here and a piece there and the picture is complete."

He looked around for a seat.

"Quick, quick," said Tania impatiently.

Mario sat on a bench and shrugged. "It takes me a week to find out everything and you want it all in one second." He wiped his brow. "I have need of wine. It is hot."

"After," said Tania. "First tell me."

"Patience!" ordered Mario. "Now, my little Kathi. You have need to be careful for a few days until we are out of this country, and then you will need to be thankful. I do not like this General von Schleffner. He is a big man but he is not with the Gestapo as we thought. This summer he was appointed commander of this military district. It is he, my little ones, who is responsible for all these rumblings at night when they pass through his territory. But, this is why we have not been worried by him as yet; he has been in Berlin for very important conferences."

Kathi listened, pale with nervousness. "But, Mario, how do you find all this?"

"It is not hard. If one sits in the soldiers' cafés, sooner or later one sees faces that do not change and they are of the headquarters staff here. Sooner or later one sees a veteran of the last war and one talks and one finds that von Schleffner is a devil to his underlings and there is always one who will blow off steam." Mario leaned forward confidentially. "I have found out more things. He has an apartment at his headquarters and no one of his staff seems to know about this house he has arranged for you, my little Kathi. It seems that the war interrupts his little affair, so we will cross our fingers, and by the eleventh we shall be away. So you see, Kathi, it is nothing. It is one of those things that come and go. He has an infatuation for you, yes; he had made plans to bring to his infatuation the fruition which he planned, but the war, it intervenes on your behalf. But, be careful. Watch her, my little Tania. I do not trust these generals when they see themselves being deprived of their sweets."

Mario rose from his bench and wiped his brow.

"Now I must drink. I have a thirst that all the coldest springs of your native mountains could not assuage, my little Kathi." He laughed. "I must tell you this. Our general has a fat wife tucked away in some Schloss. He also has six children." He noticed the expression of revulsion that crossed Kathi's face. "I expect they all stand to attention when he inspects them, and salute, Heil Hitler, Guten Morgen, Herr General! . . . Wine, wine, give me wine. Alas, if they would only let me build their New World Order, there would be only wine and song; but plenty of wine, cool, cool wine for dusty throats."

"You see," said Tania, watching Mario's back. "A few days more and then we will be far away and we will all be happy again."

Kathi stared at the ground. Every morning and evening she went to church to pray that this trouble would end, both her own and that of the world.

Tania seemed to read her thoughts. “Do not go out without Peter, even when you go to church.”

As September ran through its first week, everyone in the company became conscious of acceleration in the growing tenseness. One night after the curtain had risen on the revue to a packed house the show was stopped in the middle of an act as the stage manager flashed the orchestra to stop. He stepped to the microphone and, reading the names of a number of men, he told them to report at once to barracks. Like automatic robots they jumped up and marched out of the theatre. All during the performance this continued until most of the men in the audience had been called out.

After the show the artistes went out of the theatre into the blackout of such density that it was hard to stumble even across the road to the café or cabaret. Reaching their rooms they passed their landladies and other roomers in tears. All their men had been called to barracks. There was very little sleep that night for anyone because the traffic through the dark streets had intensified, and the rumble of lorries, tanks, guns, and the roar of motor-cycles throbbed the city with a vast apprehension. Telephones rang and telegrams were handed into doors all through the night. Young men, a few minutes before in civilian clothes, rushed out in uniform with a rifle. Fathers and mothers kissed them good-bye, hugged them wildly, and then stood in the dark doorways sobbing without restraint. The end was coming rapidly.

Pat, leaving the theatre late, almost fell over Bill Hardy sitting on a box in the stable with his head deep in his hands.

“Come on, Bill. You can’t stay here all night.”

“Oh, my God!” said Bill.

“Don’t take it so hard, Bill. You’ll have to leave her behind.”

Bill rose to his feet, his old face haggard, but fanatically determined. “I’ll die first. I’ll never leave Maud!”

“Come on, Bill,” said Pat soberly. “Come and have a drink.”

Bill Hardy and Pat stumbled through the blackout to the café. The British members were worried by the rapidly disintegrating atmosphere. Bill and Pat entered the café to find it full of German officers, sitting at tables

strung together, drinking beer while they waited until their scheduled minute to move off.

The British, restive with resentment, were pushed into a corner of the café, but the German officers took no notice of them, no more than they would of worms. The conversation of the British was all of the war and hushed because it was no longer safe to talk in public. Charlie, the barman, whispered to them to be more careful to-night. Charlie, a plump Bavarian, had worked many years in London. He liked the British artistes and they liked him.

Bill joined the group, his angry white eyebrows twitching. He resented this hushed conversation and the presence of the soldiers. They filled the place, taking it over as if by right from the artistes who had always made it gay in the early hours. He sat down, glowering at the officers. He drank one stein, two steins, quickly, and then he could stand it no longer. He was thinking of Maud; he was being forced to leave her to the mercy of these soldiers. Suddenly he stood up.

"HITLER! The son of a bitch!" he shouted.

The soldiers turned like one man.

"Let him start this war," he shouted. "Let him start. We'll turn the world on him. We'll put fifty million men in the field. We'll blow him and all his crowd to bits, THE BASTARD HITLER."

The soldiers stared. Charlie—may his name live among the heroes—plunged reckless of his own safety, to the rescue. He saw that none of the soldiers had understood Bill's passionate north-country accent.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Charlie, lifting a stein of beer high in the air, "Ha, ha, ha, HEIL HITLER." Again he thrust up his stein and yelled, "HEIL HITLER."

The officers stood up stiffly as one man and lifted their steins, "HEIL HITLER."

Lowering his stein beneath the bar with a shaking hand, Charlie emptied the beer. "You damn old fool," he said through unmoving lips. "You goddamn old fool. You want to be beaten to a pulp?"

He lifted a hand to wipe the sweat that had started from every pore of his face. Bill looked at him, suddenly sobered by Charlie's superb gesture.

"Charlie, you are a good sport, and a good actor, you son of a bitch."

"Thanks, Charlie," said Pat. "Some day we shall do the same for you."

The climax came with startling rapidity to Peter and the company. To Peter it came with all the absurd incongruity of one tiny sideshow in the vast tragedy of the tumbling world.

A note was delivered to Kathi by a sour-faced woman of middle age requesting her to leave her present rooms and take up her quarters in the house the general had placed at her disposal. The note was delivered to Kathi while she was alone in her dressing-room at the theatre. She looked up at the woman whose eyes stared down at her with an impersonal cold unconcern.

"But I can't . . . I can't. . . ." Her face had gone suddenly white. She was frightened and bewildered.

The woman did not move. "One does not disobey orders when they come from one so important. He has much to do but he would like you to be there when he comes."

The woman had gone as suddenly as she had come and Kathi ran like a fluttering, wounded bird to find Peter. Peter was grim, like a man in a prison cell who could only see walls around him. He spoke to Herr Direktor. Herr Direktor could not help him, he himself was encompassed about with worries which broke on him like relentless waves, threatening to break up his company before he could get it safe to quieter waters. Peter must have patience. He would get them all out in a few days.

To the remainder of the company the incident was the subject of a day's gossip and then forgotten in the rush of events. A girl in a Continental company was expected to manage the importunities of men of all degrees to her own advantage as best she could. It was not an uncommon situation, only different in degree from the average. Peter felt frantic frustration. Surrounded with people willing to help he could impress no one with his own sense of tragedy. Peter's troubles was only one among a host of individual ones each absorbing the whole thought of its subject.

Every day the news was blacker and blacker. The members of the company clung together like a herd frightened by an approaching storm. Herr Direktor made all his preparations for rapid flight. Once more the cases and trunks were hauled into the yard and all the company worked hard to pack the show in a hurry, anxious to speed their own flight from Germany.

Herr Direktor rushed around the city, to the police, to Cook's, to the railway offices, to the banks, trying in vain to make arrangements to get his company out ahead of the war. Every time he returned to the yard he was

besieged with questions, but there was no news. He sat wearily on a box, but all he could tell them was that there were no trains; troop movements were too heavy, he could not get transportation.

Then, at an unexpected moment, he found buses available, signed a contract for them to come for his company. He directed all the men to wait in readiness to pack the scenery and properties and all the private luggage into storage in Leipzig. He had changed all his plans. He would build a new show. The Indian contracts were cancelled. He had money in England. They would join Pappy Newman there. He had wired his London agents, they had already booked engagements, and they would open in London. He had plenty of money there to build a new show. There they would all be safe.

Excitement ran high through the company. They would all still be together; they could always depend on Herr Direktor.

He used his influence, he used bribery, he made a special application to the Government. But it was noticeable to everyone that he was nervous and would not breathe freely until he had crossed the frontier. He reassured Kathi and Peter as he would his own children; they were safe now. He talked to Bill Hardy to persuade him to leave in the buses. He promised him he would take care of Maud; she would remain with his animals; she would be all right. Bill flatly refused until the other British said they would not leave unless he went with them.

The buses never came. There was no petrol.

By that one mischance Peter and Kathi missed reprieve.

The thin show was straggling on before a thin audience when Kathi came off-stage to find a message waiting for her in her dressing-room asking her to go to the stage door. Without thinking she went.

Tania came in a few minutes later to change, Tania was helping to fill in the show with her songs before the microphone. Katherina, a Dutch girl, met her.

Tania looked around expecting to see Kathi. “She has changed quickly. Where is she?”

“I do not know,” said Katherina. “There was a note for her on her table.”

Tania stood still for a moment. A panic was in her blood. Kathi could easily be trapped by her own simplicity.

“Quick, Katherina, run to the door, to the gate by the street; see if Kathi is there.”

Katherina was gone and was back in a minute, but to Tania it seemed an age. “She is not there. The doorman, he saw her go out. There was a soldier, an orderly, he said, and a car at the gate.”

Then Tania ran limping. She ran to find Peter. She pushed through the Russians crowding from their act, pushed past the property men, past the chorus line waiting to dance on the stage.

Roger grabbed her by the arm. “Kathi’s cue. Where is she?”

“She’s gone. You’ll have to substitute.”

“You go on, quick. I’ll signal the orchestra. Take your gypsy song in front of the drop while I send for her.”

“Find Peter,” cried Tania, and then she was on-stage in front of the microphone, smiling at the audience singing, “How Sweet is Gypsy Love”, while her heart was beating with panic and the audience was misty before her eyes. Her song over, she smiled, waved her way off-stage and ran into Peter in the wings. “Peter, Peter,” she cried. Quickly she told him her fears, pulling at his coat lapels. He tore her hands away.

“Peter, Peter! Where are you going? Peter!”

But he was gone. Ignoring the commotion about her as others crowded round drawn by her distracted cry, she picked up the long skirts of her evening dress and ran to the dressing-rooms. She saw Mario dressed in his absurd blond wig and tights for a burlesque number.

Mario listened to the torrent of words from Tania’s suddenly very childish face. He took off his wig.

“Mario, we must do something. He is foolish; he will be reckless. They will catch him; they will beat him; they will kill him.”

Mario stared down at Tania, his eyes wide and serious. This was the first time he had seen Tania distracted.

“Mario, Mario, quick, we must do something!”

Mario spoke very softly. “You love him, this artist?”

Tania seemed to recoil. Then she recovered and answered angrily. “Love him? Yes, yes, I love him. But I do not care for that. I only want to save him. He does not know what he risks. I want to save her for him, too; only save him!”

Mario paused maddeningly. “But, Tania, if the general has sent for her, there is no need . . . it is easy . . .”

Tania beat her hands on his breast. “Mario, Mario. It is easy for you, easy for me. We would know what to do, but Kathi, she does not know.”

“She has a tongue; she can speak.”

Tania laughed almost hysterically. “Yes, she can speak. She will say, no, let me go home; and the general he will be kind, very kind. He will put a wrap around her to keep her warm, and he will pour for her a glass of wine to reassure her, and he will promise the car to bring her back to the theatre . . . and then in the wine will be something . . . something that will drown her in the desire for love . . . any love. . . . Oh, yes, Mario for us it would be easy, but, Mario, she does not know.”

Mario’s voice was sad. “And what can we do?”

“Peter is gone. He is mad; he will do something foolish. Quick, Mario.”

Mario stood very still. Mario, who had in the past twenty years cultivated an adroitness for deftly avoiding any serious issue, found himself challenged by the uncompromising sincerity of youth. Tania’s eyes were on him, searching into his soul. In his burlesque tights with padded knees he stood a figure of fun and knew that this fierce little gypsy was challenging him to a test he could not refuse. He could turn away and shrug his shoulders and let others look after themselves, or he could go out and, like Don Quixote, tilt a windmill with his futile lance. An inexpressible sadness came into his eyes.

“So you, my little Tania, you know what it is to love so much that you will give up even love.”

“We must do something.”

“Against one so high; on the edge of war? This is the time when soldiers do as they wish.”

The jester that had been Mario’s face to the world was gone. Even in his burlesque costume he had taken on a new dignity. He turned and began to change.

“If he interferes, they will kill him.” Mario paused maddeningly while Tania’s eyes searched his face for hope. “Men will die for many things, Tania, my little one, but of all things it is greatest to die for love. Remember that, little one. There comes a time when all men must choose to go forward

and die . . . or to go backwards and be for ever afraid to die. Poor Peter, it is a great privilege to die for love."

He held Tania's hand as they left the dressing-room. The door of the next dressing-room was wide open. On a table lay Kasha's daggers from the dagger dance act. Mario turned in and picked one up.

"See, my little Tania, I did not tell you I practised a dagger act." He lifted a dagger by its blade and flung it at the wall. It struck quivering where he had aimed it, impaling the first day of September, nineteen hundred and thirty-nine, on the frayed calendar on the wall.

Mario picked up another dagger and slipped it into his pocket.

"First we must tell Roger so that he can make his arrangements for the finale if we are not here."

Tania drew her breath in sharply with a faint hiss.

Peter found the house easily enough. Mario had told him where it was. But he did not know what to do. He stared through the darkness at the dim black shape of the house across the neat grounds. Not a light showed.

Peter slipped through the hedge and approached the house cautiously. Now in the cold imminence of action he did not know what to do. There seemed to be no guards about the place. Peter had come to rescue Kathi and take her away, but he had no idea how to begin. There was no sign of light from the french windows. If one broke into a blacked-out house, how did he know that a sudden blaze of light would not betray him suddenly, swiftly?

There was no time to wait. A panic of concern for Kathi pushed him on. He was in no mood for caution. He crept up on the stone terrace outside the lower french windows, tried to peer inside the windows, but could see no sign of light. He pulled at the window and it came open at his touch. He slipped inside. It was quite dark. He shut the window again.

He paused, astounded by the simplicity of it all. But where was Kathi? Had they brought her here? He listened against the door opposite the window. He opened the door slowly. The hall was dark, but light came down the stairs and then he felt rather than heard a sound of muffled sobbing. He listened so intently that he ignored the other sound until he recognized the crunch of car wheels on gravel. He shut the door quickly. Then he heard a door slam, footsteps running in the hall, a door open, and voices. He heard with his heart beating violently, footsteps coming towards him, and then he

stepped back quickly, softly, to get to the window again. His foot caught on a stool, he tripped and fell with a gasp of surprise. Almost before he could get to his feet again the door had opened, a flood of light startled the room and he saw a woman, cold as a jailer. Then the woman was pushed rudely aside, and Peter was staring into the muzzle of a service Luger. He looked up to the eyes of the general.

There was something chilling in the gleam of the eyes.

"Who are you?"

"I'm an Englishman; you can't touch me. I've come from the revue for the dancer."

His tormentor gave a low laugh.

"So! She will come back to-morrow, but I shall have you arrested as a spy. Your actions are suspicious."

Like a snake holding a bird captive with its cold stare he held Peter. He was going to do something and Peter had no means of knowing what. He had a thousand thoughts in one flashing moment. It was as if he already saw those harsh lips, those cold eyes greedily on Kathi. Desperation surged through him. His eyes caught a large vase, but even as he moved the pistol exploded the room with sound. With a cry of agony Peter whirled grasping his right arm, broken with a cold precise aim. The room swayed about him. He heard the harsh voice of the general ordering him to get out. Then the tall window was flung open, its light flashing out into the blackness like a sudden beacon and Peter stumbled out into the garden.

From the darkness of the lawn there came a running figure.

"Peter, Peter!"

Peter fell and Tania dropped by his side. Mario was standing over Tania and Peter, staring at the window from which Peter had been stumbled. Suddenly Mario strode across the grass, strode the terrace, and with one fierce thrust of his foot he crashed the window. Tania, frightened, looked up to see his tall figure silhouetted against the swift light. Then suddenly the light was out and a shot rang out.

There was no further sound except the hard dry sobs that racked Tania as she struggled across the grass with Peter, leaning heavily on her, fighting to keep consciousness.

# Chapter Fifty-one

At the theatre as the show ended the house was almost empty, so many people had left. The air of Leipzig was gruesome as the members of the company walked in and out of the yard for air between their numbers. They sat in groups talking in hushed voices as the sky above their heads seemed to be filled with planes. From the lane to the street there came the continuous murmur of motor-cycles ridden by young soldiers heavily laden with equipment.

The air was stifling, the night black. The company tried feebly to please the small house. Herr Direktor was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly he dashed through the yard, speaking to no one. He hurried to his office and slammed the door.

Pat looked after him. "Something is going to happen, sure."

"You're right," said Bert. "We are all about to be interned. We'll never get out of this country."

A moment later a German policeman ran through the yard. He asked the men where he could find Herr Direktor. Soon he and Herr Direktor dashed out of the stage door and raced to the street. No one spoke. By now everyone knew there was something serious.

Tania came into the yard tired and wild-eyed. She looked around for Bill Hardy. "Bill, Bill, Peter is in my room. You must go there. He is wounded, his arm, we must take bandages."

Bill was distracted about Maud, but he listened to Tania's story, muttering under his breath: "The bastards, oh, the dirty bastards."

"We can't call a doctor," said Bill at the end. "We must smuggle him out."

"Look after him," said Tania. "I will get him out."

"You?" said Bill.

"Yes," said Tania, distraught with the thought of Peter. "I have an English passport. I got it from the Communists in Berlin."

Then, surprisingly, he kissed her. "You're a good girl, Tania."

When the last curtain fell Herr Direktor called for the British members to come on the stage at once. Standing beside the microphone he held a strip of tickets in his hand.

"I have just been notified by the police that a train is leaving that will carry you to the frontier and you can get to England. The police have told me that this is the last train that will connect with England, the last train out. I have been to the station and I have secured a reservation for every one of you. You must leave all your baggage. You have seats to Hanover, and there you will get the Berlin express. Go to the pensions, get your bags."

The British members rushed through the dark streets. Tania ran to her rooms to tell Peter.

"Now it is finished," said her landlady to Meg, Dick's wife, as she packed quickly. "Now you are going, they will make the war." She threw her arms around Meg and sobbed wildly. "It is not our fault," she cried. "We have nothing to do with it. We cannot help all this. England will send the Germans bombs. It will not be two weeks as he promises; it will be years, the war is always years."

She broke down, sitting on the bed while Meg packed, and sobbed and sobbed. Meg sat with her arms around her and together they wept.

"The war in Germany," sobbed the landlady. "It is always the same. The Government starts it and the people finish it. Before we had Mr. Chamberlain to stop it, but now he will not come again, now there will be no one to stop it." Again she broke down. "They will take my son, they will take my husband, they will take my Elisa's fiancé. They will take them all and kill them and, like the last war when my first husband was killed in Russia, I will be left alone. It will go on and on until all our men are killed or wounded and we shall have nothing left but cripples and old men. We have no good Mr. Chamberlain to help us now." She lost her words in a wild burst of sobbing.

Back once more in the theatre with their bags Herr Direktor told the artistes to sit in the dressing-rooms and wait.

With the dawn the news was released. Germany had entered Poland.

It did not surprise the members of the company. It was as if they had known all along it would come. In the yard Bill was brushing Maud down. He had been with her all night. He stood giving her a last grooming and she was as spotless as if she were about to go on for her act. No one had seen or heard anything of Kathi. Mario and Peter were missing, but all the company

were too deep in personal problems or immediate things to worry about others.

Herr Hoffmann, the director of the orchestra, had no heart left for anything. He sat at a little table at the side of the dark stage: his head had fallen on his arms on the table and he was weeping silently.

"It is not the end yet, Herr Hoffmann," one of the girls said. "Something may happen to stop it all. Come, smile."

He did not lift his head. "Nein, nein, liebchen. It is no use. Now the British are going it is the end . . . now we shall get the war. All is finished."

Herr Direktor went over to the café with Tania, who was pale and worn after a night's vigil with Peter. She told him she was going with the British to England. But as she talked he did not seem to take in the meaning of her words. He just nodded. It was not only the war; he was profoundly shocked about Kathi and blamed himself. Not content with destroying, the devil must soil its victims. For any other girl he would not have worried. But Kathi was different, she had been a symbol that life was good, and now the symbol was broken and he knew he could do nothing.

In the yard Roger directed the loading of the private luggage for the warehouse. While the other British helped, Herr Muller came out with the British passports and began to give them out. Lolita ran through the yard weeping. "No, no, no! You must not go." She clung wildly to the English girls. "You must not go; stay with us, we shall go to Switzerland and then you can come to Madrid with me. You must not leave!"

The orchestra came out to the yard. "They must go at once," said the leader. "Go, before it is too late."

Madame Rastella, with Rita and Rastella, came through the gate. In her arms Madame held big slabs of bitter chocolate and a bag of bananas. It was all that she had been able to find that she could buy. With tears streaming down her face she began to pass them around. "You will get nothing to eat on the way," she wept.

"It is not much, but it will help."

Rita, leaning on her father's arm, was sobbing bitterly. For her it was the end of all hope. Now she would never see Claud again. Rastella, handsome Rastella, was fighting a losing battle with his own emotions.

Chiquita ran out into the yard and, seeing Lolita distraught, she began also to sob. "They must not go."

"Yes, yes," sobbed Madame. "It is better, it is the war. Krieg. La guerre. Mein Gott, it is Krieg again." She wrung her hands.

Just then a little canary began to sing on the window-sill of a pension looking into the yard. Paulus, the Arab, sitting in the yard with his face the picture of despair, began to smile.

"See, Mama, it is Krieg, but the little bird it still sings."

"You will go, Paulus?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "We are French and we will fight."

Yasmini, weeping for her soldier, was going around the yard asking if anyone had seen Mario. No one had seen him. The British boys continued to work in the yard, pushing the big trunks and boxes around. Herr Direktor came out into the yard. "Come, my children, come," he said. "We are going to the station now, or you will miss your train."

The company rushed around him. "We are going to the station, too."

There was a babel of voices in every tongue.

"No, no, NO!" he said. "You must not come. That scene I could not stand. You must say good-bye here. It is all right. It will finish. You will see them again. We are all going to England in a few days' time. You will meet again."

Hanna ran out into the yard. In her hand she held a costume belonging to one of the English girls. Tears were streaming down her face.

"Oh, Hanna, Hanna," said little Connie.

Hanna turned quickly. Little Connie was sobbing. "Hanna, it is not good-bye. You will come to London with Herr Direktor. We shall see you again."

Hanna's eyes had a far-away look. "I hope so, Connie." Then very slowly, "But I think not." She held her hand out. "We will be friends just the same?" Her voice was husky with emotion.

"Always, Hanna."

"Auf Wiedersehen." Then Hanna broke into sobs and ran through the stage door.

"Hanna, Hanna!" called Nancy.

"Hanna," called Dorothy.

But she was gone. “Well, come on, dears,” said Sally. Sally had her collection of engagement rings on her fingers. It was the easiest way to carry them.

“Come, come,” cried Herr Direktor. “You must not delay another moment.” He began to push and shove the British through the archway to the street, while the other members clung to their arms sobbing wildly. They were as unrestrained in their grief as in their pleasures.

Waving wildly, tears streaming down their cheeks, they began to call out: “Auf Wiedersehen . . . Adieu . . . Bon voyage . . . Auf Wiedersehen . . . Good-bye.”

Then they trailed behind the departing British as the British, carrying their heavy suitcases, tried to smile. There were no taxis and they walked backwards to the corner waving back to the German and other artistes . . . “Auf Wiedersehen . . . Auf Wiedersehen . . . Adios . . . Arrivederci. . . Auf Wiedersehen.”

“Hurry, hurry,” called Herr Direktor, leading the procession and turning every now and again to shepherd them.

Reaching the station they found the place in chaos. Tania was waiting for them outside and she ran to get Peter from the waiting-room. She brought him, his arm in a sling, pale and haggard, just as the others, bewildered by the crowded platforms, were struggling to keep together. There was no time to notice Peter in the chaos; and always there was one or another of the company with an arm in a sling. There were no porters; they had all been called up. The trains were filled with troops. Everyone was excited and shouting in German. Everyone in the station seemed to be looking for a train that could not be found. The day was insufferably hot, unfamiliar coats and clothes were too heavy, bags were like lead as the company trailed Herr Direktor, trying to keep together.

Leipzig, one of the biggest stations in Europe, was a little beyond the troupers that day. Even Herr Direktor was in difficulty.

Finally he told them all to sit down on their cases in a group and keep together. He would go to the station-master and come back for them. He was beginning to fear the train had been cancelled. He rushed down the platform, dripping perspiration. The train at the platform pulled out. There was a wave of apprehension among the artistes. That might be their train. Then Herr Direktor ran down the platform. A train was pulling in.

“Here you are, children. This is it.”

He picked up heavy cases in both hands and dragged them on the train. He went round among his "familie" putting bags on racks, inquiring after everyone's comfort. He walked through the car shaking hands with everyone, trying to smile.

"I will come to London in a few days. Everything will be settled somehow and we shall all be together again. Don't get off the train until you get to Hanover."

He came to Peter; Peter was lying back in the seat, his face pale and strained with pain. Tania and old Bill were trying to make him more comfortable. Bill Hardy's eyes were red with tears, and he was cursing all things German in a steady stream of profanity. He had taken hard his parting from Maud.

"Don't worry, Bill. I will get her out," Herr Direktor said. He took Tania's hand and held it for a moment. "Look after him. Put him in a hospital when you get to London. I will pay all expenses."

"Find Kathi and Mario," said Tania. "Quick, before it is too late."

Eight hours had gone, but it seemed like ten years. Mario should have been back; nothing would have kept Mario away from the company if nothing serious had happened. Tania looked into Herr Direktor's eyes. She felt that her words did not go into his mind. He was falling back on the habits of years to help him through this crisis in his affairs. He stepped down to the platform and hailed a man with an ice-cream wagon. He bought the contents and helped the man to pass the ice-cream through the windows. The conductor began to wave the people aboard, the train was about to start.

"All aboard, all aboard."

Once more Herr Direktor passed along outside the windows shaking hands with both hands at once.

"You will wait for me in London. My agent will tell you the name of the theatre. You must go to the London office immediately. We shall rehearse on Monday at nine."

Several young German soldiers appeared racing down the platform. They arrived out of breath, very distressed. "Dorothy . . . Nancy . . . Connie . . . Sally . . . you are going away? We have run all the way to find you."

The train began to pull out slowly. They grabbed the girls' hands through the open windows, kissed them and ran along the platform, holding on to them as far as they could go. One young soldier, just a boy, hanging on to

Sally's hands which were cluttered with rings, suddenly released her hand and, with tears running down his cheeks, he tore off a signet ring from his finger and pushed it on one of hers. Sally glanced at it and with the prettiest smile blew him a kiss.

Herr Direktor stood alone waving in the sunshine.

"Auf Wiedersehen," he called huskily. He passed his hand across his eyes. "Auf Wiedersehen . . . pleasant journey . . . rehearsal at nine . . . do not forget . . . do not be late . . . Auf Wiedersehen."

They all stretched out through the windows, waving wildly to him as he stood alone on the platform with tears blinding his eyes. He became a mere speck in the distance as his British artistes continued to wave and shout above the noise of the train: "Auf Wiedersehen . . . Auf Wiedersehen."

They never saw him again.

The curtain had fallen on more than the Continental Revue.

# Chapter Fifty-two

Go back to that alley behind the Alhambra Theatre in London, back to that first night when Peter stood under the flickering light of a gas lamp in the small hours of the night as the chill fog crept down the dark walls of the theatre.

Watch that bright programme dropped on the wet cobblestones, watch the leaves turned over carelessly by the flicker of the cold draught that swirled down the alley.

Forget the young boy stirred by the intimations of greatness in himself and stabbed by the sudden wound of love. Forget him and watch that programme.

There is Pappy, so fat, so smiling. He met the returning artistes in London, so happy to see them again, and he gave them money as usual. Then England was at war and Pappy was ordered to go with the other Germans back to Germany, but he begged to be interned instead. He got back to America after all, or at least half-way there. He was on the S.S. *Arandora Star* when it was torpedoed. He was one of those older ones thrust aside when the young Nazi prisoners of war stormed the boats.

Look, there is Herr Direktor, immaculate, monocled. He got to Holland with his company and his animals, but he could not get to England. He put all his animals into the Zoo in Holland feeling that, there, they would be cared for and given enough to eat. He put Maud into the Zoo, too, and spent long hours persuading the British consul that Maud was no ordinary animal and that her lover was fretting himself to death in London. And miraculously the British consul understood and went to great trouble and inconvenience at a difficult time to send Maud to London. Maud and Bill were in a Christmas pantomime as skittish as the children they amused.

Then Herr Direktor went to Switzerland to meet Herr Braun, and together they began a new show smaller and less spectacular. It travelled through Italy and the Balkans, always one jump ahead of the war. Where it caught up with him no one knows.

The wind flicks a page of the programme. There is the chorus line lush with bare flesh; and Dorothy and Nancy, Sally and Connie. On the first day of war Dorothy and Nancy joined an ambulance unit that had an attractive

uniform. They continued to play and enjoy life, but complained of having to work through the night because the night was the time to play. Sally became a night-club star and wore less and less as the war went on. Little Connie joined the Land Army.

And the page turns. The Nichols family are muscled and springy in their white tights. They joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and there was a later photograph of Dick silhouetted at the top of an extension ladder against the glare of the great fire of London. So, too, the rest of the men, Roger, Rob, Bert, Frank, Pat, Arthur Murray, they all joined the navy, the army, the air force, and gradually scattered to the many fronts where the army fought. This one is dead. That one is a prisoner. This one has no hands.

There, too, on the same page, are the Tyroleans, so carefully nursed by their own consuls wherever they went. The English Government gave them their permits so easily and then picked them all up and put them safely away.

There is Lubichov as the wind flicks another page, and the Rastellas. Lubichov spent his days in London sitting in the Strand Corner House until he became the musical director at a small vaudeville house. The Rastellas stayed with Herr Direktor, until no more was heard of them. Rita never heard from Claud because he had a short time to live and he was making the most of it.

Frau Schiller and her husband escaped to Sweden with their dogs and with the diamonds hidden in her petticoats. Albert and Elsa Henn, of the rope act, were with Pappy in England. Albert, interned in Germany in the last war, was now interned in England because of his mixed parentage. Elsa stayed in London with a living wage paid to her by the Labour Exchange because she was an enemy alien without means of support.

Ha Wong, the Chinese hair swinger, joined the British Army. Olivia, Hula, plagued the American consul to send them back to Hawaii where they would be safe from the war. Yasmini and Lotus stayed in London, refusing to leave it to return to the poverty of their homes in India. Rani stayed too. Ching Chong and Ching Ching went into a Chinese restaurant there. Yogi stayed with Herr Direktor and was interned as a British subject in Germany. Little Biji, so bright, so like a bundle of springs, faded away suddenly in the London fogs and died in a London hospital.

Little Gretchen, in London with Pappy, refused point-blank to return to Germany even though the German Government demanded her exchange. She lived on in London meeting, Elsa at the Labour Exchange when they both collected their twenty-eight shillings weekly. Little Kaspar was

interned with Pappy, crossed with Pappy in the *Arandora Star* and went down with Pappy into the Atlantic. The Rosanas followed Herr Direktor; Juanita went back to Brazil.

As fate flicked over the pages of that programme in the alley, it had something in store for them all, and none had known what it was.

The pages turn and stay for a moment. There is Tania, nude and so young, with a body that hit the senses like the plucking of a taut piano string. And Peter Kyrle? Tania married him in London and she loved him. When he was sent to Canada to train for the Royal Air Force, she followed him and went to California to arrange, as she said, for their career after the war. There was a paragraph about her under a startling photograph in a movie magazine.

"Fresh from a Kansas High School this young starlet came to Hollywood with the dew of innocence still on her brow. But she was smart enough to pick one of the best agents in town and land a nice contract. One of her legs was clawed by a wild cat while she was on a hunting trip in the Rockies with her father, but try to guess which one?"

Tania's letters were full of love for Peter, but in the end she had to give him back to Kathi. His aircraft, ironically enough, bombed all those places where life to him had been as vivid as his own bomb flashes, Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, and Leipzig. From the raid on Leipzig, where he had last seen Kathi, his aircraft did not return and Tania lost him.

Then suddenly a wayward gust of wind turns back the leaves of that programme and there is Kathi, fragile and slim in her tight, glittering bodice and the airy froth of her short ballet skirts. There she is, poised on her toes, too lovely for real life, and so light she seemed about to take off into the air to wait for her lover. Perhaps that is what she did, there in Leipzig. Rumours that followed the company built up into a story. The shot that killed Mario awakened her too suddenly to her shattered dream of life. Thinking it was Peter who died with that shot, she threw her body from a balcony to a stone terrace, as a silver bird with lost wings might fall through the night. But she knew no pain. With her love inviolate, her spirit floated into the air where the world and reality could not touch it, waiting perhaps for her lover with childlike faith, for all things came to Kathi without effort on her part.

A cold gust of wind ruffles the leaves of the programme quickly; the cover closes; the curtain falls; the show is ended. There is an echo caught from the darkened theatre by the same gust of wind.

"Rehearsal at nine, rehearsal at nine."

One show is ended, but another is always beginning.

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.

A cover which is placed in the public domain was created for this ebook.

[The end of *Continental Revue* by Winifred Bambrick]