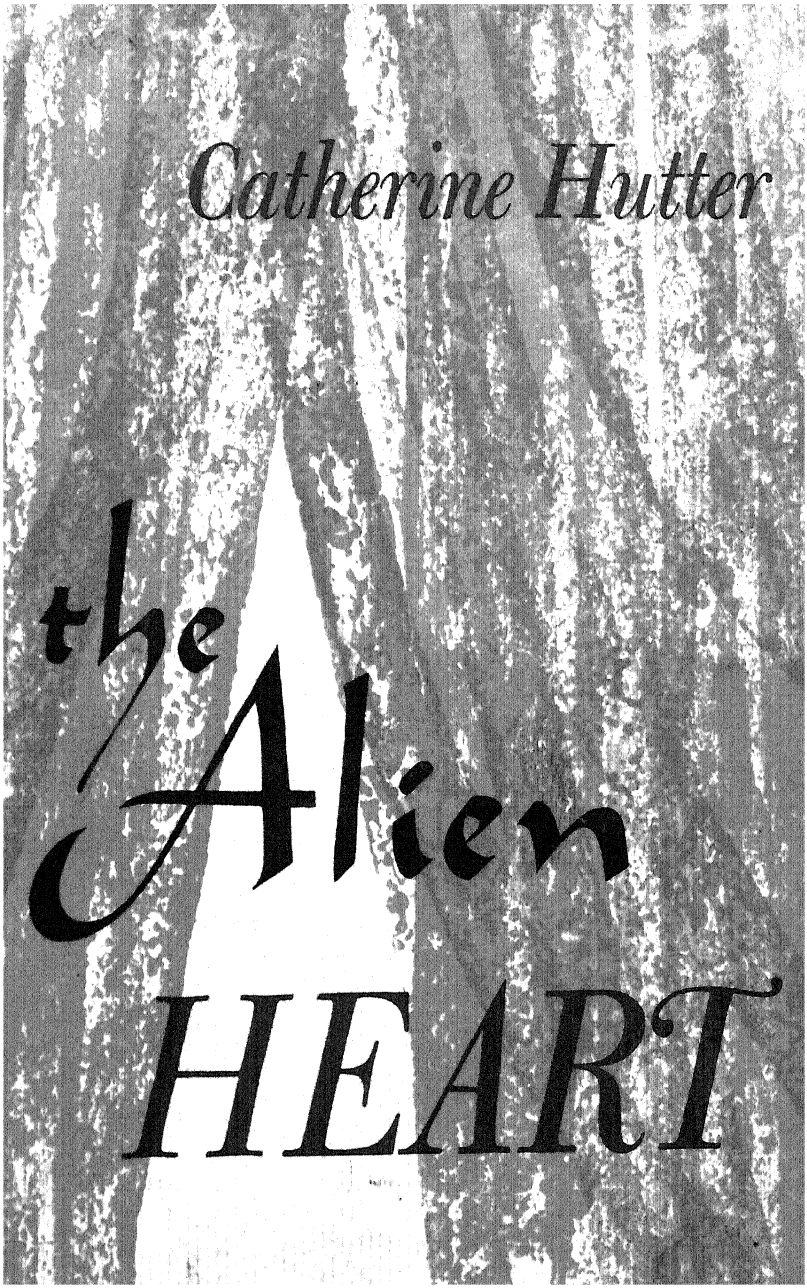
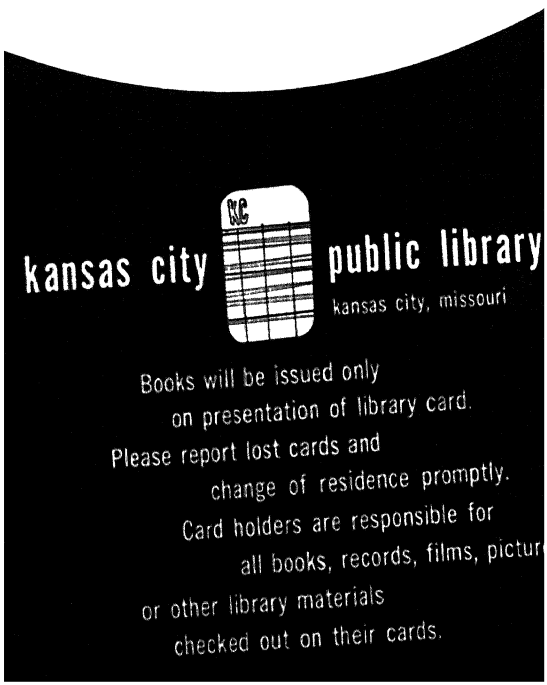

Catherine Hutter
the Alien HEART

THE ALIEN HEART

Hutter
The alien heart.



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THIS DEAR ENCOUNTER

THE *Alien* HEART

a novel by Catherine Hutter

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this book is for Don

1 · BROTHERS AND SISTERS

one

I FIRST SET EYES ON SOFIE IN THE HOUSE WE HAD RENTED ON the French Riviera, my father, my mother, and I; only my father was hardly ever there. Many of the Riviera villas rented by wealthy Americans reflected the past glory of their owners. We rented feudalism. Ornate furniture stood against age-paled damask walls; exquisite marquisette, gilt and plush, fine tapestries, tiled stoves, and porcelain figurines were in their rightful setting. "Don't touch, Robbie!" As if I would have dared.

French windows opened out onto a stone terrace. Through a marble balustrade the Mediterranean merged imperceptibly with the sky. Between house and sea stretched a carpet of white sand. Days were bright, nights were clear, early stars were white chips in a fading sky and the storms—the storms were unforgettable.

They were heralded by lightning the color of mustard seed, while leaden clouds moved slowly across the sky, extinguish-

ing the sulphuric sun and plunging us into oppressive gloom. The heaving sea turned gray and sometimes a wind pocket would spin like a top across the clear horizon. Then, like a swirling curtain, the rain would come from across the sea, shutting us off from the rest of the world in drenched seclusion, hitting the water with a roar and flattening every growing thing. Flowers and bushes bowed their heads and Mother moaned about the roses, making them sound like abandoned children.

Just as quickly as it had come, the storm would be gone, leaving in its wake a dazzling, golden clarity. "Open the window and let in the fresh air," Mother would say, and the parlor maid and I would help her. "Isn't it wonderful, Robbie? Doesn't it give you new vigor?"

But Sofie's story is about a storm that left no clarity; nothing was brightened by it and it brought renewed vigor to no one.

When I met her for the first time I was eleven. In those days my hair still curled, however closely I had it cropped. Pictures taken of me at the time are hard to live down. Thank heaven my nose has grown since then, my jaw has squared, I have learned how to flatten down my hair; but when I first met Sofie I was what they called "a pretty boy," and to my shame I still had a governess.

This was because my father's duties as commercial attaché caused him to travel a great deal and Mother liked to go with him whenever he would take her. Sometimes I went with them; but more often than not I was left behind, and it was essential that I be left with somebody reliable. That they were, these Gorgons of my childhood.

When we were living in France, my governess was English, when we were living in England she was French. Thus, Mother said, I would lose neither language. German, the first language I spoke, had unfortunately been erased from my mind by rapid changes of milieu, but my father said it would soon come back to me when we went to live in Germany

again. My German governess, however, was not forgotten. Her stern features and the stiff, fishbone collars she wore, making her neck a ramrod continuation of her unbending back, were very much with me still in my dreams. Her rigorous regime had replaced that of a wet nurse from the Spreewald who existed for me only in the snapshots of my infancy. They showed her complete with white embroidered headdress like a ship in full sail, a round gentle face, and very full bosoms.

When I met Sofie, Linklater was my governess and she was my teacher, too. She was "Miss Linklater," and Mother used the "Miss." She didn't believe in calling an employee by her last name as they did in England. "Makes her sound like a jockey," said Mother. But I liked to call her "Linklater" in my mind. I thought it made her sound like a constable and that was what she was to me.

One morning Mother told Linklater that she was expecting a friend for tea, a Viennese lady whom she had met at a reception a week or so ago and seen quite a lot of since. "See that Robbie looks right and send him in to us at half-past five," she said. "She wants to meet him."

I liked this "she wants to meet him," even if it meant having to get decently dressed in the middle of the afternoon. It made me seem almost as important as Father, whom everybody was always wanting to meet.

Promptly at half-past five I made my appearance in the drawing room. It was a time when the direct light of a declining sun flooded the room, and its fiery glow gave Sofie's red-gold hair a wine-colored tinge and made her skin shine like copper. She was wearing a heliotrope dress. The effect was quite bacchanal.

She was sitting in a small armchair, her legs crossed and stretched from her rather as if she were reclining on a couch. One arm was propped on the arm of the chair, her head rested on her hand and her other arm hung loosely over the side. She sat there like a Greek sibyl, the picture of thought-

fulness and repose, regarding me with eyes that were a clear, bright blue.

They were her only pretty feature, the rest were austere, the profile perhaps a little too sharp but perfectly symmetrical, the chin strongly grooved and round, the nose long and straight—a face for a coin.

This first sight of her is indelibly traced on my mind, clearer than any picture I have ever seen, clearer than much later encounters with her. At the time she was thirty-three, a few years younger than Mother, but she looked older or, I should say, more mature. Mother, with her short, black, wind-blown hair and large brown eyes in a small face, might still have posed for Reynolds' "Strawberry Girl," but Sofie was the eternal woman. She looked as if she had never been younger and as if she would never age.

Mother said, "Come here, Robbie. I want you to meet a very dear friend of mine. Sofie, this is my boy."

Sofie couldn't make a move that wasn't seductive. She couldn't hold out her hand to a child or a bone to a dog without giving it the air of a caress. What an innocent my mother was beside her! This, of course, I realized only much later. On that day I was aware of nothing but the chills of delight that ran down my spine as this beautiful lady put one arm around my waist and drew me a little closer.

"Oh, but he is like you," she said in English, a slightly clipped accent betraying the foreigner. "And this resemblance is charming."

She did not kiss me. I don't know what I would have done if she had, since the memory of that first meeting without a kiss, with only the simple, graceful extension of her arm toward me, made an impression neither she nor Mother could possibly have guessed.

"She is the most beautiful woman in the world," I told Linklater after I had been dismissed, to which Linklater smiled grimly (she couldn't smile any other way) and said, "You aren't the first person to notice that. She is one of

the great beauties of international society. She is an Austrian baroness but she married a commoner," which, to my delight, made Sofie sound like royalty.

"Her husband is a lawyer and a diplomat, like your father," Linklater went on, putting things away while she spoke. (In my memory Linklater is forever putting things away.) "He's a bigwig in Austrian politics. One of the leaders of the Socialist party. When I heard that, I thought, 'Just another Bolshevik,' but your mother soon put me right. Over here the Socialists hate the Reds more than we do, although they all sound alike to me. Anyway, he's almost been Prime Minister twice, or Chancellor—that's what they call them where he comes from—and, who knows, he may be yet."

That evening I got some more information on Sofie from Mother. I may not remember it correctly; what I recall is perhaps a résumé of all our conversations about her, adorned with my own fervent opinions, but it seems to me Mother said, "I'm glad you like her." (What an understatement!) "I love her. She is so clever, yet with it all she still remains a woman. There's nothing mannish about her, as there is about so many clever women. Perhaps that is because she isn't efficient, only wise." Mother smiled. "What's more, she likes me, and that's very flattering."

"Why shouldn't she like you?" I protested. "You're the darlingest person in the world!"

"My beloved champion." Mother laughed. "Why should she like me? I'm not clever. I'm not as well educated or intellectual as she is. People learn more over here, Robbie, and they think more. I'm ignorant compared with Sofie, although I'm a college graduate and she is not. That's funny, isn't it? But life has given her more than college could give me. She wakes up, eats, drinks, breathes, and goes to sleep again in an atmosphere of culture."

She looked at me thoughtfully for a moment, then put her hand on my forehead and pushed back my hair. "I'm glad you're being exposed to it. It's my only compensation for

having to drag you around the world instead of letting you grow up peacefully at home. But there are things you are missing that are just as important."

"What things?"

"Oh . . . a certain carefreeness we seem able to enjoy only in the States. I suppose it comes from our feeling of security against war, war on our own soil. 'Here I will build my house,' the American can say, 'and it will stand for my children and my children's children.' And he can look across three thousand miles of native land to choose his setting. No borderlines, no passports needed, no questions asked. Such beautiful rich country, such peaceful land."

Nineteen thirty-three. Twenty years ago and a Second World War and an atom bomb have made a fairy tale of it. But then I listened enthralled to what was fact.

Mother sighed, then she looked up and away with a slight toss of her head that was habitual with her. "Well," she said, "we won't live abroad forever."

Thus our first conversation about Sofie ended in a talk about America.

*

two

SOFIE AND HER HUSBAND WERE VACATIONING ON THE RIVIERA and to my delight she came to see Mother nearly every day. She came when her husband was resting (he could sleep during the day, she could not) and when he was working, so she was nearly always there.

"He can't take a vacation," I heard her tell Mother once, "he doesn't know how to rest. If he doesn't make a real holiday of these weeks, his doctor says he won't answer for his health in the hard summer that lies ahead. You know what has to be faced in the months to come."

What had to be faced? Then I didn't realize; now I know. Hitler had just been granted absolute power by an abdicating German parliament. The German people had renounced their birthright and a large group of Austrian Nazis were clamoring for the right to renounce theirs. "Don't let's talk about it," said Sofie. "Don't let me mention politics when I'm with you."

She knew how to rest. She would lie in a long chair under a big parasol talking to Mother by the hour, closing her eyes now and then, dreaming, smiling to herself, looking incapable of a hasty move; and I sat on the broad stone steps a short distance away until I thought my behind would congeal, watching her and worshiping. Sometimes I listened to what they were saying, but I wasn't really interested. Once, however, when Mother said, "Why do you like me, Sofie?" I did listen. I wanted to know, too.

Sofie smiled. "Oh my dear, must there be a reason?" And then, "You are so kind, Sylvia, so generous. Perhaps that is why."

That same morning she said, "I hate my name."

"Sofie?"

"Yes. It is hideous."

I almost cried out, "No, it isn't." I had heard the name only with its European pronunciation, "Zof-*fee*," which I thought was pretty, but Sofie evidently did not.

"To begin with," she said, "it has no diminutive. When I was a child, all my friends had nicknames but there was none for me. I was always Sofie. And it is a perfectly horrid name in English." She gave it the English pronunciation and really made it sound like the name of an old family retainer. "And on top of that it means wisdom!" She covered her eyes with one hand. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!"

She and Mother laughed and I cried out indignantly, "Mother says you are very wise."

"Look who's listening," said Sofie. At once I was included in their conversation, it sank to my poor level and became totally uninteresting.

One thing endeared Sofie to me particularly—a frailty, of course. She was not sure-footed. Like most Europeans, she was a passionate and tireless walker, but when she came to a hindrance in her path, the root of a tree, stones, or uneven ground, her pace became hesitant, her expression worried. You could see she liked to walk best where the way was

smooth. This was especially noticeable when she had to go up or down stairs that had no banister, like the long, steep flight that led from our terrace to the garden. Then she would look about her helplessly as if searching for a prop.

When I noticed this, I sprang forward to help her. She accepted my hand the first time, with a grave "thank you" when we reached the bottom, but the next time she said, "No, Robbie. I will have to go up and down these stairs many times. I must learn to manage them alone. You watch me. It will spur me on."

So I watched her walk down them. When she got to the bottom, she was flushed. "There," she said. "That wasn't bad. I will get used to it. One can get used to anything, you know."

She loved to ride and we rode nearly every day, Sofie, Mother, and I, Sofie riding sidesaddle. "Before I was married I wouldn't ride sidesaddle," she told me. "Then every woman did."

"Why wouldn't you?"

"Oh, that's a long story." But she didn't tell it until later and then not to me.

Her husband called on us, too. Sometimes he came to dinner or, after the theater or a concert, for a late supper at our house. Then I didn't see him, of course. I was in bed. But I couldn't sleep when Sofie was there. I lay awake listening to the chatter downstairs, trying to distinguish Sofie's voice from the others. I didn't join them for dinner, either; for that I was too young. But I went into the drawing room while they were having an *apéritif* to say, "Good evening" and good night to my mother and father, and both men filled me with awe.

I had always been a little afraid of Father—not because of his prominence; at the time I understood nothing of that—but because I saw so little of him. He wasn't a warm, living part of my life. Then, too, his decisions were stern. Everything I had ever been refused had been refused by him, all the granting seemed to come from Mother. And he some-

times said things that hurt her. She never admitted it, but I could tell by the look in her face and the way her eyes grew big suddenly with the tears she wouldn't shed, at least not when I was present. He left her alone a great deal, too. At first I took it for granted that his work took him away from us, but from Linklater's attitude I learned to feel there was more to it than that. It was a vexing absence. Somehow it was wrong. All of which tended to heighten my feeling that he was a stranger in the house. And there he stood, back to the mantel, with Sofie's husband beside him, as if both men were ranged against me.

Father would not strike you as typically American unless you saw him in a group of Europeans. Then he is typed at once by what I like to call "his prosperous look." He is always well groomed, the cut of his suits a little broader in the shoulder, the material a little brighter, and he holds himself very straight. But for his impeccable manners he might strike you as aggressive; his ruddy complexion could be a sign of quick anger, but it is really a last evidence of his descent from farmers; and the squareness of his jaw stands for no personal pugnaciousness, only the positiveness that the American can win any battle, against whatever odds, because he carries an indomitable spirit in his heart.

Father looks like the sort of man with whom you would not want to pick a physical quarrel but you can quite easily fill his blue eyes with a look of indecision. They are the only part of his face that can soften. His forehead and face are very straightly cut and he likes to hold his full lips narrowed as if they might otherwise betray too much generosity. His hair has been silvered above the temples ever since I can remember and it is always immaculately trimmed. In any European salon he is unmistakably American and nobody could bring this out more pronouncedly than Sofie's husband, Eugene.

Eugene was as typically European as Father was American. He had bushy hair of a nondescript brown color, a wal-

rus mustache a little darker than his hair, and small brown eyes that peered at you from under unruly brows like those of a shaggy shepherd dog. Tall, broad-shouldered, but stooped and thin like an unathletic man, he wore his clothes with complete indifference. They didn't fit him and they were crumpled, as if he slept in them. He was undeniably an ugly fellow, yet he was fascinating to watch.

If he hadn't been so utterly unaware of my existence and, what was worse, of Sofie's, I might have liked him. He looked like a man who ought to enjoy playing with children. But he evidently did not. Certainly he made no move toward me. And I could feel nothing but indignation for this rangy man who owned this heavenly creature, and didn't seem to know she was alive.

I watched her, of course, as I did always, since there was nobody else in the room for me when Sofie was present, and I saw her glance at him every now and then with a look of affection that baffled me. She loved him, she loved this uncouth man. It was incredible.

three

MOTHER'S WAY OF LIFE DEMANDS THAT SHE DO A GREAT DEAL of entertaining. Fortunately she enjoys it. She is a perfect hostess, totally lacking in self-consciousness, therefore with a mind completely free for her guests. At her parties everything looks and tastes right, the entertainment is appropriately chosen and her guests are relaxed in her relaxation. Before a party Mother is never nervous, afterward never tired. They are as much a part of her life as eating and drinking. That was how she put it once in an article she was asked to write for an American magazine. It was called "My Homes in Other People's Houses," and a great many of the pictures in it were taken in this Riviera villa. With its large, well-proportioned drawing room, small music room, handsome library and dining room, all with a spacious view of the sea, it lent itself particularly well to entertaining. It lent itself well, too, to my pet form of amusement—eavesdropping.

Whenever I hear skeptics say that in such and such a story—in the case of Proust at the Vinteuil's, for instance—the eavesdropping scene is contrived, I am moved to protest, "I lived in a house like that. I could eavesdrop." And I did. And twice was treated to a major astonishment.

The morning room was particularly vulnerable. It was windowed on three sides and the windows were nearly always open. Seats were constructed in the recesses and Mother liked to have breakfast there because the morning sunshine was just right for sunning. Later it was much too hot.

One day I was listening to a conversation between my mother and father. They were discussing Eugene and Sofie and a man I had not heard mentioned before, called Victor. Father said Sofie and Victor were having "an affair." Mother was shocked and would not believe it. "Do you suppose Eugene knows about these rumors?" she said.

"Of course not," said Father indignantly. "When a man's being fooled everybody knows but him."

Mother didn't say anything to that and Father soon went off to his study to dictate some letters.

I knew what an affair was. In Europe, at eleven, you do. And this intriguing piece of information only enhanced Sofie in my mind which was open wide at that time to all things sensational. From then on I wouldn't have missed my daily ringside seat to other people's private lives for anything in the world.

When Father was away, Sofie came over every day after an early breakfast and kept Mother company in the morning room while Mother had hers late. After that they usually went off for a walk or a swim where I could not follow them unnoticed; but this time, when they were alone in the morning room, was mine.

One morning they were conversing in voices too low for me to hear when suddenly Sofie raised her voice and began to speak in the unimpassioned tone of the narrator. "I met Eugene at the end of a seemingly endless adolescence," she

said, "when I had just become aware of the fact that I was sick to death of the society into which I had been born with its fossilized ideas. Sometimes I felt I must be a changeling with my strange, incompatible notions. They called me 'The Red Baroness.' " She laughed softly. "I was never Red. They just saw red whenever they looked at a color different from their own. I was simply a rebel from the past.

"One day I went to a political meeting at which Eugene was the speaker. The First World War had just ended. He had survived the four years and come back one of the many disillusioned. I shall never forget the way he held that crowd with his sincerity, completely oblivious to the effect he made personally, dedicated solely and passionately to what he was saying. His faith was contagious. I left with the one urge alive in me—to see that passion directed against myself."

She was silent for a moment before she went on. "It took me a year to make him aware of my presence," and then, in a faraway voice that held me tense with the effort not to miss a word, "I shall never forget the first time I felt him put aside this sense of dedication and recognize himself as a man, a man who wanted me."

Again a silence, then Mother said, "You make it sound as if there could never have been anybody else," and Sofie, "Do I? There was nobody else for a long time—not until Eugene and I had settled down to the hard routine which is still our daily life—he working, I making a home for him. Victor walked into that setting like a storm. Not Victor, really, but my feeling for him. Because I have known Victor since I was a child.

"It was intended that we marry. In his and my set, marriages are still arranged. Of course that was enough to put me against him. Whenever we met, usually at some formal reception—a confirmation, a wedding, a funeral—some relative would caution me, 'Now be nice to Victor. If you are a good girl and grow up to be a well-behaved young lady, he is going to marry you.' Imagine it! At six, at eight, he ten years

older than I, looking at me appraisingly as if I were a race horse he wanted to buy when it was full grown.

"Of course he didn't have to do as he was told. Times had advanced even with us sufficiently for that. He was the oldest son, adored by his parents. If he hadn't liked me, he'd only have had to say so. After all, there were plenty of high-born girls palpitating to marry him. But he liked me.

"I remember when I was six and he was sixteen—oh, I remember it distinctly—he stood me on a table and said, 'Features much too prominent for a child, but you are going to be a beautiful woman and the older you get the more beautiful you will become. I won't wear nearly so well.' As if he owned me, as if our future together were settled without any say on my part. I couldn't forget it. I was tormented by it for years." And softly, so that I could barely hear, "It doesn't torment me any more."

Then, after another silence, "Better than anything else I loved to ride. I felt surest on a horse, and I insisted on wearing breeches. There was something protective about dressing like a man and riding like one, so I wore my habit whenever I could. It became a joke and a terrible vexation to my mother. I especially hated to appear before Victor in a skirt and contrived not to do so whenever possible. My machinations toward that end were sometimes quite ridiculous. I have driven my horse through many a rainstorm because I had to be coming from or going for a ride. Victor was calling. This silly inhibition did not leave me until I married."

Again a silence, then, "Very soon after my marriage, Victor married, a woman he did not love, a woman I particularly disliked. She is the daughter of a German shipbuilder and she is fabulously rich."

Mother must have smiled because Sofie said hastily, "No. He didn't marry her for her money. Granted that the idea of amalgamating two great fortunes intrigued him, but it was not the primary reason, of that I am sure. Perhaps he married her because he knew it would vex me profoundly."

And, after a slight pause, "I don't think she loved him, but both of them enjoy the power they have socially and economically. Both of them are cut out for it in different ways. For her I think it means primarily a heritage for her children who she thinks will inherit a kingdom. In a way they will. Anyway, they absorb her. I never wanted children."

A silence, then Mother's voice, a little sad, "Why?" and Sofie's, fiery, "Who would put children into this world? Into this Europe?"

Then Mother's again, gentle, "But wasn't it a Europe in which one could bear children when you married Eugene?"

And Sofie, "Not at all. We had just crawled out from the ruins of the First World War, hungry and defeated. 'It is a truce,' Eugene said, yes, even then. Now everybody knows it. A truce in a battle that will rage until we are a united world. Who would bear children in time of truce to grow up and fight in the continuation of an endless war?"

"If all women thought like that," said Mother, "the human race would die out," and Sofie, "Would that be such a disaster?"

Then Mother's voice again, gently, "Go on," and Sofie's, dispirited, "Where was I?"

"You hated Victor, now you love him. I want to know when the change took place."

Sofie laughed, a mirthless laugh. "At his wedding. That was where I first experienced the other side of the coin. For I see it like that, our love, our bondage to another person, like a coin. On the one side love, on the other hatred. Where the one can thrive, so can the other and the transition can be just as abrupt as the flip of a coin."

"You make love sound like a burden," said Mother, and Sofie, "It can be. Oh, it can be," and Mother, after a moment's hesitation, "Yes. I suppose it can." Then, as if she had given herself a little shake, "Tell about the wedding."

"It was an incredible affair," said Sofie. "So ostentatious,

so unlike anything to which we were accustomed, so . . . so German. Her parents arranged it but it was held at one of Victor's estates. I shall never forget it, their names, 'Victor and Meta' in electric lights, their pictures, over life-size, framed in bunting and flowers. The Hohenzollerns couldn't have shown more appalling taste," and by the tone of her voice I thought I could see her shudder.

"During the ceremony, when Victor should have been looking at Meta, our eyes met—I don't know what made me take up a position where I could see his face—and when he looked at me I realized in a sudden flash of illumination, how much he loved me and how much I had made him suffer. In that moment every dislike and inhibition fell from me. This is a dreadful confession, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mother, "it is."

And Sofie, passionately, "Why? Why is it dreadful?"

"Because you didn't recognize it until both of you were no longer free."

"Yes," said Sofie. "How well you understand. When we were lost to one another, I wanted him. The fear I had felt once in his presence was changed to an excitement I desired, an excitement without which I felt I could not live."

The silence that followed was interrupted by the pushing aside of china dishes and the striking of a match. Mother was having her after-breakfast cigarette. Then Sofie went on.

"Victor's work does not interest me, his way of life would bore me to death. It is the life into which I was born, from which I have been trying to escape ever since I can remember. I want no life but the one I am leading now. Yet I love Victor, too."

Mother interrupted the next silence. "Even now, after you have explained it to me, I still can't understand how anybody can love two people at once."

"But they can, Sylvia, they do. Look at John!"

The second surprise, this time a blow. At mention of my

father's name, my stomach seemed to turn over. I felt sick and my heart fluttered as if a butterfly were imprisoned inside me.

Mother said, "I was thinking of John. So were you, or why did you tell me all this? But Sofie, if you love two people, you must love one or the other more."

And Sofie, "Must I?"

Mother, "Well, let me put it this way. If both men needed you simultaneously, to whom would you go?"

Sofie, "To Eugene, of course. As a matter of fact I was put to that test once. A few years ago Victor and I had a chance to meet in Lausanne. Meta rarely gives him such an opportunity. We were looking forward to those days together as two men lost in the desert look to an oasis. When I arrived in Lausanne, I found a telegram saying that Eugene's cold had developed into bronchial pneumonia. I went straight back without even seeing Victor."

Mother, "What a sense of duty!" and Sofie, "Not at all. There was no question of duty. I didn't want to stay. The oasis was gone, or shall we say there was no desert any longer? Your reactions would be the same if you were embarked on a great love meeting . . ."

Mother, interrupting her, "Oh dear," and a sad little laugh.

Sofie, continuing as if there had been no interruption, ". . . and you received a telegram that Robbie was very ill."

Mother, triumphantly, "So Eugene is really your child!"

Sofie, thoughtfully, "No. Eugene is the brother I never had and always wanted."

The whir of a hummingbird sucking at a nearby Canterbury bell was the only sound. His small beak darted in and out the flowers but his wings moved too fast for sight. I sat perfectly still, feeling less excited but still quite sick, wondering if I could throw up without making myself heard. In the bright sun the bougainvillaea was a pallid purple, the scent of mimosa quite overpowering, and the white stucco wall of the house was warm against my back.

Then Mother's soft laughter. "Perhaps we are so close, you and I, because we are only children. I always wanted a brother, too, never a sister."

Sofie, "Neither did I."

Mother, "Perhaps if I could learn to look upon John as that brother . . ." She laughed again, this time a merry laugh. "What a novel idea!"

Suddenly I didn't feel sick any more. A gentle breeze blew in from the sea and I almost popped up and shouted, "Here I am," when Mother said, "Let's find Robbie and go down to the beach."

four

I AM FAIRLY SURE IT WAS SOFIE WHO AWOKE MY CREATIVE instincts. For instance, when one of my American grandmothers sent me comic books in which whole stories were told in pictures, it was Sofie who suggested I make up some of my own. So I did and enjoyed especially filling in the

balloons that issued forth from their mouths with the craziest dialogue, sometimes so much that it spilled over the framework of the picture. I was studying mythology at the time. Together Sofie and I made up a comic strip that was set on Mount Olympus and it was surprising how well those Greek gods and goddesses lent themselves to the medium.

I liked to copy pictures of dogs and horses. Sofie suggested I try to draw from life. So I painted a picture of the view outside the morning-room window that turned out quite well. It included the figure of a horse and rider coming directly toward the onlooker. Of course it was supposed to be Sofie but nobody would have guessed it. She was riding a fierce black stallion and I put a plume in her hat, setting her back several centuries. But that was how I saw her, surrounded by knights in shining armor, all of whom bore a strong resemblance to me.

It was Sofie again who freed me from the administration of strange women. When Linklater's mother suffered a stroke and she had to go home to nurse her, Sofie said, "Don't you think Robbie is too old for a governess?" and Linklater was replaced by a tutor, a good French fellow called Pierre, who pleased me because he could make mathematics fascinating and was more interested in motorcycles than books. Jounced up and down on the seat behind him, I climbed the rugged coastal hills where there was only an excuse for a road and our tires burned on the churned-up, stony ground.

What Pierre neglected, Sofie attended to. She often read aloud to me, in French, in English. I was supposed to attain in my school work the equivalent of what was required in American preparatory schools because I was eventually to attend one. With Linklater, *Ivanhoe* had been dry as dust; coming from Sofie it was as good as a detective story.

I can see her now, sitting in a comfortable chair, her long legs crossed and stretched from her a little, the folds of her dress making a Greek relief of her figure. She looked

like one of those headless, armless goddesses you see on Greek reliefs; there was the same perfection of line, the same aura of repose, only she had marvelous arms and a head to match the rest and the most remarkable coloring.

When she and Eugene went back to Vienna, I moped until Pierre suggested we rattle across the Spanish border to see a game of *pelota,* which we did. The incredible skill and speed of the game left me breathless with excitement and deeply impressed with the sportsmanship of the Spaniard and got me nicely over the hump of Sofie's departure.

Soon after that Mother went to visit Sofie. I wrote to her every day, not so much because I missed Mother—after all, she went away often and never stayed very long—but because I knew Sofie would read the letters, too, and that really inspired me.

In the past years I had begun to enjoy writing letters. My victims were usually relatives in America who received them with enthusiasm. My New York grandmother wrote once that my lurid description of our wandering life was better than any she had received from Father and Mother.

"I'll bet!" said Mother, turning to me reproachfully. "Robbie, we never met the Shah of Persia. Whatever made you write such a thing?"

"I liked the idea," I mumbled. She didn't seem to realize that I'd read something about him and the colorful retinue with which he traveled. From that to becoming part of it was such a small step, taken before one was aware of it. Putting down this spectacular vision on paper was just as easy as dreaming it up.

Telling what happened restricted one more or less to the truth—there were nearly always witnesses—writing to people far away did not, and that was the charm of writing. For instance, how could Mother possibly check on the fishermen's catch that morning? So I could load their boats with the most marvelous fish until they almost capsize. Or how could she know the extent of the head injury of a friend

who dived too steeply off the rocks while Mother was away? Wasn't I perfectly safe in making a blood bath of it?

I was not. This one backfired just like the Shah of Persia. Mother called up the family to inquire how the poor unconscious girl was. Since she had only sustained a minor injury over the left eye, a mere scratch that had been treated on the beach, the family was slightly taken aback by Mother's solicitude on the long-distance telephone all the way from Vienna.

After that she called me. What she said made any further elaborations impossible and with the truth once more in force, I stopped writing letters.

While Mother was away, Father was home but he was out nearly every evening. On the night of her telephone call, however, he was there. "Father wants to speak to you," I said, happy to divert her reproaches.

"Does he?" she said airily. "Well, put him on."

He wanted to know when she was coming back and when she said she was going to stay another week since I seemed to be all right, he looked crestfallen.

Next day a lady came to call on him. The parlor maid showed her into the library where I happened to be looking for a book Mother had sent me. It had a round hole cut all the way through it and the story always managed to need the hole whenever it got that far. The whole thing was a little too young for me (Mother's presents tended to be, Sofie's never) but the trick of the hole intrigued me. I wanted to look at it again. That was how I happened to be in the library when the strange lady was shown in.

She introduced herself as a Mrs. Griffith and she seemed to know all about me. She was pretty in an ordinary way and her voice was high-pitched like a little girl's, the sort of voice I would not have liked to live with. She began to ask a lot of questions. Among other things, she wanted to know when Mother was coming back, and when I told her Mother was staying another week she stared at me in

a puzzled way. She was going to ask another question but just then Father came in.

When he saw us he looked angry and sent me out of the room. As he closed the door I heard Mrs. Griffith say—now her high-pitched voice was strident—"I thought you told me . . ." A little while later I saw her leave the house, walking with a flourish and briskness that looked like anger.

Worried over my abrupt dismissal, I asked Father if I had done anything wrong. He said, no, and did what was rare for him, patted me on the head. No, he said again, I had done nothing wrong. I asked who the lady was. He said, "A friend of Mother's." I said, "But she came to see you," and he said, with Mother away, whom else could she come to see? That sounded logical enough. Still, soon after Mother came home I asked her about Mrs. Griffith. Mother said, "She isn't a friend, just an acquaintance," and I decided that must be it, because I never saw her again.

five

IN APRIL, WHEN THE SEASON WAS OVER, MOTHER AND I WERE supposed to rejoin Father in Paris, as we had done the year before. But this time we stayed where we were. Mother broke the news to Father one Sunday at dinner.

"John," she said, with the sweet, calm expression I liked to think had been born of her friendship with Sofie, "would you mind very much if we did not come to Paris now but a little later?"

Father looked perplexed. It wasn't like Mother to leave him so long to his own resources. In an unusual outburst of angry confidence Linklater had blurted out once, "And who would want to leave a man as handsome as your father alone?" So I was surprised, too, by her nonchalant suggestion that we stay on.

After recovering from the initial shock, however, Father was pleased. That was evident by the cheerfulness of his expression and the way he began to protest—our lease expired

at the end of the month. Mother said she had already spoken to our landlady who would be happy to have us stay. But the heat was coming, said Father. What on earth would we do on the Riviera in the heat?

"Robbie and I like the heat," said Mother. "He'll be an expert diver by the time we leave. He's just beginning to get the hang of it. I'd hate to interrupt his lessons now."

It was settled, and the way Father said, "I'm going to miss you, feller," didn't fool Mother or me. He wasn't going to miss either of us, he was going to enjoy every minute of his freedom. So we stayed on and a few days after he had left, Sofie came to visit us.

She was quite changed. Hard to believe, but she was more beautiful than ever because she was alight from within. The relief had come to life, the goddess come down to earth. "You look different," I said.

Her laughter sounded a little embarrassed. "Do I? Well, I feel different, too."

That evening I saw Victor for the first time. He came to dinner. Mother had already told me a great deal about him and, of course, I knew things she had no idea I knew—all the things I had overheard. He owned a castle that had turrets and a moat and a drawbridge, just as in *Ivanhoe,* and he lived in it most of the time. It had central heating and a game room with Ping-pong tables and when he wasn't there it was open to the public for certain hours on Sundays. As if this weren't enough, he owned coal mines and he wasn't ordinary even in that! His mines had been the first to find use for the discarded brown coal, pressing it into briquettes that were burned in the tiled stoves of Europe, and this had made him a millionaire. So he was a businessman as well as an aristocrat. He was what was called in Europe a "Great Industrialist."

The minute I set eyes on him I said to myself, "This is the right man for Sofie. This is the man she should have married." He was her male counterpart, splendidly built

and very handsome. His hairline had receded giving him a high, round forehead, his face was long, the nose very straight and thin, the lips fine and never quite still, even when he was silent, as if they were moved by his thoughts as well as his words. His eyes were bright with intelligence, giving him an intensely alert expression, and he had the best-looking hands I have ever seen on a man. Although he was all politeness and charm to Mother, his hostess, and to me, "the man of the house," as Sofie introduced me, he had eyes only for her. And this made him an ally.

The night was warm. I couldn't sleep. Somehow those two had stirred me up. So I kneeled at the open window, my arms on the sill, my chin cradled on them, and looked out across the Mediterranean, trying to pierce the distance and project myself into the strange land Pierre had brought to life for me. Africa. Another continent. Tall, bearded Arabs swathed in dazzling white, striding through narrow sunlit streets like giants; veiled women, their huge brown eyes the melancholy portals to an unknown world; Jews at their money counters, black cap on head, black kaftan; French officers in pale blue uniforms; crowded outdoor cafés, Tangiers . . . He had described it so well, I could see it. If I tried hard enough, I could be there.

But suddenly I was brought back to a world that fascinated me even more. Victor came out of the house and lighted a cigarette, standing directly under my window as he did so. The night was so still, the wind in my direction, I could hear his breathing.

He walked down the steps and stood with his back turned, looking out to sea, waiting, unmistakably waiting, and I waited with him. Soon Sofie came out of the house.

It was strange to see her robbed of color, and I felt I knew secrets the night didn't know, that her hair was golden red, for instance, and could be tinged wine-red when she wore purple, that her dress tonight was blue and

matched her eyes. The night had erased all these nuances and the moonlight had transformed her into marble. But her movements were not stony. She seemed to flow toward that immobile, waiting figure, not looking on the ground, not even when she took the steps, as if unaware of them, as if they had never troubled her. And when she reached him, she put her hand on his arm.

He turned and drew her to him, his hands on her waist as she raised her arms, then his moving around her until their bodies were one. She drew his face down to hers and when he released her I could hear her sigh like someone thirsty who has found water.

For a while they stood there loving each other without a sound but for her sighing. Then, arms entwined, they walked off into the night, their bodies not separate for a moment, leaving me with the desolate feeling that I would never possess a woman like Sofie or be torn by desire like her. And that was what I wanted more than anything in the world. I was an only child, too, but I craved neither brother nor sister. I craved that ecstasy and felt I would never have it.

I didn't see Victor again, Sofie left the next day, and Father began to write, when were we coming home? Mother looked happier than I had seen her look for years and we didn't hurry our trip north; in fact, when we finally got to Paris we had only a few weeks there before it was time to leave for the States. During those weeks Mother entertained hardly at all and Father was home nearly every evening. They went everywhere together and he and Mother laughed more than in all the years I could remember.

six

TO RETAIN AT LEAST A FOOTHOLD IN THE COUNTRY SHE NEVER ceased to love and miss, Mother took me to the States every summer. There we visited relatives.

My father's people were scattered all over the farming lands of Pennsylvania and the city of New York. Father's great-grandfather had been a German-American farmer; I had great-aunts and uncles all around Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His grandfather had moved away from the land but kept in touch with its produce by making a fortune in the canned-food industry. My grandfather had followed in his footsteps and moved his family to New York. Mother, however, was of pure New England origin; and I preferred her mother's home in an old New England country town to any of the others we visited, and was glad when we spent most of our time there.

Mother couldn't have picked a better place to introduce the United States to me. The town has a great historical

tradition and is, for American standards, very old. In fact I was led to believe that the country had been founded in this region and that nothing lay between Christopher Columbus' discovery of America and Plymouth Rock. Not until I studied American history did I find out that there had been a thriving British colony in Virginia when the Pilgrim Fathers had landed in the bleak north. When I asked Grandmother to explain the discrepancy of enthusiasm between the two historical events she told me, "The settlers of Virginia were British colonists. The Pilgrim Fathers were pioneers. They were the first real Americans," to which Mother added with a little smile, "At least that's the way they teach it in the North."

In all fairness it must be said that some of America's proudest events had taken place around the town where we spent our summers, and I was amused to see Great Britain presented as an archenemy. Hatred of England bristled at me from innumerable historical plaques and guide books. Mother assured me it was quite, quite dead, to which her mother replied with lips compressed, "I don't know so much about that."

Grandmother looked absurdly young to be called, "Grandmother"—only years later did I discover that she dyed her hair—yet she wanted to be called just that. She was a widow and she said if I called her Grandmother—no diminutive, please—it might stop a lot of people from getting the idea she'd marry again. She had no intention of giving up her freedom.

She lived in a large house which was always painted a dazzling white with shiny black shutters and what was called a "fan" over the door. The windows were curiously long, the panes very old, therefore thick and slightly buckled, and they were not quite clear.

The grounds were like a park and they were green, green, green. "I wish the boy could see it in the spring," Grandmother said fretfully. She was very proud of her azaleas

which were famous but all outbloomed by the time we got there.

"He'll see them yet, dear," said Mother.

Grandmother had a staff of servants and gardeners, all of whom had been with her for years, in which respect she was completely European. But once a month cook got dressed up in her best, and Grandmother took her and Mother and me to dinner at one of the finest restaurants in the vicinity and that, by golly, was American!

"No woman wants to eat her own cooking all the time," said Grandmother. But I saw more in the custom than that. To me it was a first fine example of "American democracy at work."

Grandmother was a leader in the community, a sponsor of various clubs but absent from their meetings, a patroness of education in particular but not a great entertainer. She subscribed to *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Nation,* had a fine collection of records, a magnificent library, and was strangely sufficient unto herself. But the main attraction of my American visits was not my grandmother's elegant home, it was the neighboring Evans house.

Dick Evans taught Latin in a nearby private school for boys. From a hilltop on Grandmother's grounds you could see the roofs of the Georgian buildings and the gleaming dome of its chapel. It was a destination I knew I was headed for eventually, which worried me whenever I thought of it. Fortunately I did not think of it often.

Unlike the other masters, Evans did not live on the campus. He had married the daughter of a gentleman farmer whose land bordered on the land owned by the school, and had fallen heir, with his wife, to the property. On it they grew apples and Mrs. Evans ran the small farm.

The Evanses were prolific. Every room in the rambling old house showed the impact of their ten children, and it was the comfortable wornness of the place in contrast to the immaculate tidiness of Grandmother's that fascinated

me. You didn't have to look out for anything in the Evans house. It had been smashed, nicked, cracked, or torn long ago. You didn't have to worry that your rocker might bump against the paneling. It had been bumped against for years. And these signs of wear and tear told a story, not of poverty —the Evanses were comfortably off—but they demonstrated quite plainly that this house was there for the owners, not for show, that it was lived in, not just moved about in graciously. And it was here I met "the other woman" in my life, a thought that still makes me smile.

Naturally I never saw Sofie as a girl, nor can I visualize her as a child. And it is just as impossible for me to see Gloria as a woman when I think back. My earliest remembrance of her is as a little girl of four with the independence born of a mother who has too many children to watch, trotting unguarded through the rambling Evans home in a never-ending exploration of sights, sounds, and smells, ending up finally in the kitchen where I was watching her mother stir the mustard pickles. I can remember it clearly. They were simmering in the pot, a sulphur-colored brew, bubbling stickily like lava, smelling sweet and sour in a way that drew the water into my mouth.

"If only everything didn't get ripe the same time," Harriet Evans said, wiping her sweating forehead wearily. "This'd be dandy winter's work."

Cook was peeling tomatoes, and she grinned at this unnatural wish. She hooked rugs all winter. Grandmother's house was full of them.

"May I stir, Mrs. Evans?"

She looked down at me, spoon dripping. "You bet you may. Stand on the stool, there, that's right. Now be sure to go all around the edge and crissy-crossy in the middle, so fashion, or it'll burn."

I stirred vigorously, the heat and steam making my face red, looking up every now and then to watch the women at work. As far back as I could recall, I'd liked this kitchen

with its gay curtains and red trim on yellow walls. Although Mrs. Evans had plenty of modern equipment, it didn't stand out so formidably as in Grandmother's ice blue kitchen which was peopled by cook and maid and nobody else. Any social activity in Grandmother's kitchen was frowned upon and the icebox was sacrosanct. It didn't need defrosting "every five minutes" because so many hands were opening and closing it all day in an uninterrupted search for something to eat or drink. The Evans kitchen was as much a part of the house as the living room. There was even a faded easy chair for anybody who wanted to "draw'p an' set," its upholstery shredded by the cat.

Suddenly I was distracted by the sound of metal scraping on linoleum. "Mrs. Evans, is Glory allowed to drink milk out of the cat's dish?"

"Mercy, no!"

Glory was on all fours trying to lap up the milk with her tongue. As her mother grabbed her, she lifted her face and it was dripping milk.

"I can't!" she howled, "I can't drink milk like Primo Carnera!"

"Of course you can't," said her mother, "he has a long, rough tongue."

Glory stuck out her tongue and tried to curl it up. "Why haven't I got a long, rough tongue like a cat?" she wailed.

"Even if you had," I said, "they don't curl it up to drink, they curl it down and you could never do that."

"They do?" said Harriet Evans, and, "They do?" echoed cook, and, "Aren't you the smart boy to know that," said Harriet Evans. Glory stopped crying and stared at me.

"Mind her for me, will you, Robbie?" Mrs. Evans pleaded, "till I get this off the fire. That'll help me more than anything else."

Mind her. At that time I was six. But Harriet Evans had a way of making you feel a lot older than you were, perhaps

because her children by their numbers alone had had to assume responsibilities beyond the natural capacities of their years. I, surrounded by adults, had had too much done for me. It was another reason I liked the Evans house. Here I was given jobs to do and errands to run, here I was made to feel useful.

So I wiped Glory's face clean and took her into the living room. We sat down side by side in a large armchair that held both of us easily and looked at a picture book. I kept Glory's thumb out of her mouth the way I'd seen her father do while I pretended to read aloud the text of the book which of course I couldn't read. Finally Glory fell asleep, curled up beside me like a scrawny kitten.

That was the day Dick Evans came in with sheets of drawing paper under his arm and a box of crayons in his hand. "Come on, Robbie," he said, "you can help me."

I extricated myself from Glory's sleep-laden body, and Dick Evans set me to making signs with an arrow pointing horizontally and told me to draw any terrifying face I liked on them, skull and crossbones if I wanted to. Then he took the signs from me and printed on them in beautiful script, *This way to Dracula's Den.* All the while his pale, careworn face was alight with a little smile.

I'd always thought Dick Evans would have made a good preacher. He had a more angelic face than a lot of preachers I'd heard and a kindlier manner. He was handsome, too, in a way I wouldn't have wanted to be handsome, too soft, too gentle. No hero, Dick Evans, at least not what I considered heroic then.

"What are they for?" I asked when he caught me looking at him.

"I'll let you in on a secret," he said. "Promise not to tell?"

"I promise."

"Well, Freddy's sleeping alone since Peter went away."

Peter was the sixteen-year-old Evans boy who had just left to be counselor at a boy's camp. Freddy was ten. What did that have to do with it, I wondered?

"I sleep alone," I said, not bothering to explain that Mother's room was next to mine with the doors open between us.

"You've got a lot more rooms over there than we have here," said Dick Evans, "and a lot less people to sleep in 'em. And you don't read horror stories, do you?"

"No sir." I didn't tell him I just liked to make them up.

"Well, Freddy reads horror stories. Right now Dracula's his pet ghoul. So he's afraid to sleep alone. He's kept us awake several nights with stomach ache or a headache but he hasn't really got a stomach ache or a headache. He's just scared."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"So what good'll the signs do?"

"They'll cure him."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

It didn't make sense to me, but I liked drawing the signs. Glory woke up and joined us. Being four, her horror picture was very large and in its lopsidedness the most frightening of all. "That's fine," said her father. "We'll put that one on his door." And he printed on it, *This* is *Dracula's Den.*

Then we thumb-tacked them into place all over the house from the front and back doors to the room Freddy now slept in alone. Next time I went over there I was told it had worked. Freddy, as Dracula himself, had nothing to fear. After that I asked Dick Evans' advice on everything. For me he was infallible.

seven

GLORY'S BROTHERS WERE SEVERAL YEARS ABOVE ME ON THE ladder of growth, too old to want to play with me; so were their friends. Sometimes I played ball with them but found the plain catch from hand to hand a bore after seeing the skill of *pelota,* and baseball was just rounders with a stick. One year I did organize bicycle races on a deserted race track and we posted signs announcing them all over town. I wanted a six day-and-night marathon as I had witnessed them in France but couldn't get that out of my team in the heat of a New England summer. I succeeded, however, in making them circle the track in lap after lap, their tongues hanging out, while I kept the less strenuous job of looking after the box office for myself. Until they tired of the sport and our small paying audience was exhausted—then my brief reign was over.

Summer after summer went by. The only way I could

make my younger presence felt was by teaching the Evans boys to swear in French, by saying "bahth" and "banahna" and "tomahto" for their benefit, and by throwing in a bit of what I could safely say was Cockney since no one was around who knew better. But with that all amenities ended. They didn't amuse me; I didn't interest them.

With the adults it was different. They were intrigued by my European mannerisms, especially when I clicked heels, bowed, and kissed a lady's hand, something I left strictly to European boys when I was abroad. I was careful to perform this little stunt only when Mother and Grandmother were not present, and I knew exactly with whom I could pull it off. There was one old dear who always murmured, "Thank you," when I kissed her hand, a reaction that made me feel a little ashamed.

"Your son is such a fine conversationalist," I heard a lady tell Mother once at a church supper.

"Sometimes I wish he had less to say," said Mother.

"But how can he," said the lady, "when he has lived such an interesting life?"

"Mmmm," said Mother, who wasn't thinking of my life but of what I managed to make of it. Take the story of our adventures in Spain, for instance.

England, Holland, France, or Germany you could talk about and create only a minor stir, but tell anybody in Grandmother's town that you had been to Spain and the result was sensational. Once I was telling a starry-eyed old lady about that part of the world and this time I was quite carried away by my powers to entertain. Before I was through, I'd crossed the Plaza de Barcelona during a Catalan uprising, my hands on top of my head in accordance with police regulations, so that I couldn't be accused of using firearms, while the shooting had gone on above me from rooftop to rooftop. All right. So I'd only watched others doing it from my hotel window, but how much poorer the story would have been if I had stuck to the truth! As usual,

however, I went too far. I invented a little sister and killed her off in the same uprising.

This was a mistake. I should have known better than to spin such a yarn in Mother's home town. A few days later the elderly lady met Mother and condoled with her on the horrors she had experienced in Europe, especially what had happened to her "little girl."

Mother came home and said, "I should thrash you, Robbie. I really should. But it would hurt me more than it would hurt you. Oh, what am I going to do with you?"

"Ask Dick Evans."

"Why Dick Evans?"

"Because he knows how to cure everything that's wrong with boys." So we went to see him.

He looked pleased to be consulted. "You'll have to grant the boy's got imagination," he said with a chuckle.

"I thought you were going to help," said Mother.

Dick Evans tried to look solemn. "I'll admit that telling it to old Mrs. Carson was cruel," he said.

"She loved it," I said. "She just lapped it up."

"She did?" Dick Evans's eyes were still laughing. "Well, then she deserved every bit of it."

"Is that all you can do for us?" said Mother.

Dick Evans shook his head. "I have a suggestion," he said, and turned to me. "Why don't you write 'em down, these yarns? Don't tell them to anybody, just write 'em down. The place for a good yarn is on paper. It's the first step toward getting it between covers."

"You mean I should be a writer?" The idea made me pop-eyed.

"To start off with," said Dick Evans, "why don't you just write?"

So I did and, of course, fancied myself as an author. The excitement of getting started, beyond which it hardly ever went, the thrill of using Father's portable typewriter, the rewarding effort of spacing a good-looking title page. This I

always embellished with illustrations and I was never shy of a title. Below it went my name and, on my first effort, two dates chosen at random, 1807-1903.

"What on earth does *that* mean?" Grandmother wanted to know.

I got down a volume of Strindberg that I'd seen Mother reading. The author's name was engraved in gold on the cover and under it were the dates, 1849-1912.

"Good heavens, child," said Grandmother, "those are the years of his birth and death. An author doesn't get those until he dies!" So the numbers I'd printed with a flourish had to come out.

I was never at a loss for an opening. A sinister-looking man enters a quiet country post office. He picks a girl's pocket, a bystander brings it to her attention with the appropriate agitation. "Don't stop him!" she cries. "I saw him do it, I knew it all the time, but don't go after him!"

"What do you think of it? A good opening, huh? Mysterious."

"Mmmm," said Grandmother. "Yes. What happens next?"

"Search me."

But occasionally I did spin a yarn to its conclusion. Then, of course, I had to have an audience for the finished product, a more enthusiastic audience than Grandmother, a less doting one than Mother, and I found it in Glory who, in recent years, had attached herself to me.

Glory's devotion may have sprung from the same impetus as mine for the Evans menage—the desire for change, for the unaccustomed milieu. Perhaps the tranquillity of Grandmother's house appealed to her after the turmoil of hers. Or she may just have liked the fact that I didn't maul her, perhaps she was simply tired of being her older sisters' "live doll," of being toted, dressed, and undressed out of turn. "Let's give Glory a bath," "Let's wash her hair," "Let's dress her up in her ski pants" (in mid-summer) were favorite games with the Evans girls and their friends. Memories of it

were probably what made Glory wriggle in her clothes every now and then as if they hadn't been put on right.

I remember how she would leave me at the most unlikely moments, saying, "I think I'll go home and take a bath."

"In the middle of the afternoon? Whatever for?"

She frowned over my lack of comprehension. "If you had as many sisters as I have, all of them waiting to share a bath with you and a boiler that's too small for twelve people, you'd take a bath when you could have the tub to yourself."

The idea of bathing communally with a herd of sisters struck me as comical and I roared laughing. When I tried to explain, Glory was indignant. "With you it'd have to be brothers, of course," she said. "Don't be perfectly horrid," and off she ran.

"Want me to wash your back?" I yelled after her, but she put her hands over her ears and fled.

However unmercifully I teased her, her devotion never flagged. For my sake she stopped eating onion grass which made her smell to high heaven, something the united appeal of her entire family had been unable to achieve. For me she stopped biting her fingernails and walking with her eyes closed, like a trapeze artist in a trance, across the nearby dam which caused her mother a great deal of worry. Until I broke her of the habit, the bottom of the fall was the first place everybody looked for Glory when she was missing. For me she'd even practice the piano until I decided what she produced on the wheezy old upright wasn't worth her or my efforts and a waste of the fine weather outside. "Tell Robbie to tell her," was a by-word in the Evans house. It made me feel very paternal about her, and this was probably the greatest handicap I had to overcome when it became time to look upon her as a woman.

In those days she dogged my footsteps. Whenever I wasn't at her house she found her way to ours just as soon as her thin little legs could pedal the short distance that separated us from them. She didn't have a bicycle of her own; she used

her sister's full-size one. When she was on the seat the pedals were beyond her reach so she pedaled standing, with a peculiar seesaw motion of the hips that I was sure would deform her. But it didn't. On a hilltop she'd hike herself up into the seat, stick her legs out sideways, and hurtle downhill in a terrifying fashion, her hair streaming like a flag in the wind she created. She was some cyclist.

Grandmother never minded having her around. She liked Glory. "Only child I've ever known," she said, "who could leave a place the way she found it." She was also what Grandmother called "a dainty eater." Her table manners were perfect and Grandmother decided they should be an example to me.

They were. Considering that Glory was two years my junior, her superiority in this respect was humiliating and had to be overcome as speedily as possible. So I kept an eye on her and stopped "sawing" my meat, as Grandmother put it. No more blaming the knives for not being sharp enough. If Glory could cut lamb chops with silver, so could I. Peas remained elusive but the amount I crammed into my mouth became less. I learned to break my bread before buttering it, under protest. I thought my way of buttering it whole less messy and wasteful. I learned to put my knife on my plate "blade *in*," and I acquired the time-wasting American habit of changing my fork from left to right hand before guiding food to my mouth with it. Not without protest again over the idiocy of the convention.

This particular summer of '33, however, that lesson had been learned and Glory was nobody's doll any more. She was nine and her legs stretched from her long and thin like her arms in an abrupt growing. She was still on my heels, joining in whatever I was doing, watching me if it was nothing she could do, too, and, what was best of all, she would listen by the hour to my stories, written or told.

To my delight her favorite heroine, like mine, was Sofie. She would sit on the sweet-smelling grass, legs stretched

from her, hands folded in her lap, and blink her limpid green eyes at me. "Tell," she would say, "tell about the beautiful lady." And I would let loose with all I knew and could invent, always elaborations of some small kernel of truth. Shamelessly I made Victor Sofie's husband and left Eugene out of the story entirely as an unromantic bore. And, of course, I was always the hero.

"Are you listening?"

Glory nodded vigorously. "Of course. So you could see the horse had gone wild . . . go on . . ."

"Well, why do you close your eyes?"

"Because I always close my eyes when I like anything."

My gaze focused on her straight brown hair, grown straggly in the summer, matted from being wet many times a day and the sand that went with bathing. The bangs were long; they covered her eyebrows and she was forever brushing them aside. "You look like a doll," I said.

She beamed happily. "A rag doll," I said hastily. "Come on, I'll cut your hair or you'll stay cross-eyed." After that Glory was incommunicado for a week.

But this summer of '33 I was dissatisfied. Riding, swimming, reading, writing, and trips that usually included some sort of enlightening entertainment in Boston or New York, did not suffice. A new restlessness assailed me in the midst of almost everything I did. I needed a project. And found one.

Grandmother gave me permission to build a waterfall in "the lane," that narrow green walk which is the pride and beauty and happy spot of so many New England gardens. Ours was particularly pretty, with benches and tables in shaded nooks and rare shrubs that flowered alternately through spring and summer, Rose O'Sharon last, Rose O'Sharon in bloom when Glory and I went to work on the waterfall.

We built it between the rock garden and a giant rhododendron with leaves so dark green and shiny they looked as if

they had been shellacked. I deflected water from the brook a few yards away and made a rill of corrugated iron to a wall for which Glory lugged the stones. I have only to close my eyes to see her sweating over it, lower lip sucked in, no sound except for a grunt now and then while I mixed the cement and placed the stones. The architecture of the thing I would entrust to no one else.

When our small waterfall was cascading into the pool and the run-off was finished, she clapped her hands and cried, "Oh, Robbie, how beautiful you've made it!" taking no credit for herself, I giving her none. "We'll get goldfish," I said.

Out of my pocket-money we bought four and as we dropped them from their cardboard container I named them, "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John." Then we had a party to which my folks and her folks were invited.

"My folks" consisted of Mother and Grandmother, who delighted Glory by coming dressed formally, down to hat and gloves. And of course Glory's entire clan was there except for Peter and Martha, who were working; Judy, the oldest girl, who was married and lived in Boston; and Freddy, away at camp. But even with these four missing, the Evanses far outnumbered us and dominated the lane with their liveliness.

There was Edith, two years older than Glory, my age and a brat. Why didn't I play with her? was at the bottom of her chronic belligerence. "Because I wouldn't be seen dead playing with a girl," I explained. But I played with Glory!

"I don't play with Glory," I told her. "She just tags along. Besides, she's not a girl—yet."

There was Muriel, age twelve. She liked parties and wanted to officiate at this one but Grandmother said, no, this was Glory's day. It was high time she learned to pour tea.

"Who's going to teach her?" Muriel asked hopefully.

"I am," said Grandmother.

Glory had a toy tea set, piddling little cups and saucers and plates, but Grandmother handled them as if they had been her best Limoges.

"Are we gonna have cakes off those little plates?" howled Donald, aged thirteen.

"Go up to the house, Lucas," said Grandmother, in a scathing tone, "and ask cook to give you a full-size cake plate. For Donald."

Lucas trotted off. He was fifteen, the thoughtful, frail one who looked most like his father and was his mother's favorite. He was the only one who had paid real attention to my first feat of engineering and had been full of admiration over the skill which which I had constructed the waterfall, so he was my hero for the day.

Sandra sat with the grown-ups and pretended to be one of them. She looked older than sixteen because she was using make-up now and she had on a party dress. She and my mother, sitting side by side, looked like sisters. Dick Evans, standing between them, said so, pleasing both of them with the remark, Harriet Evans looked up at her husband and they smiled at each other with the affection I had seen often on Sofie's face when she looked at Eugene, only Dick Evans was absorbed by nothing but his family and therefore totally unlike Eugene. I preferred him to Eugene any day, I felt closer to him than to my own father.

"Watch what you're doing, Gloria," said Grandmother. "Sandra's ready for another cup of tea. She's not going to ask you for it. It's up to you to watch her. Take her cup from her—that's right. Now pour what's left in this little basin," she pointed to her silver basin, loaned for the occasion. "Slop basins, they call them in England. Awful expression! Now pour some hot water in the cup to rinse it, not so energetically or it'll spill. Besides, it isn't done with so much energy. Nothing social is. That's what makes social life so boring. There now. Pour the water away, that's right, and in goes the cream first, the tea next, and there you are!"

"You wouldn't have that much trouble with tea balls," said Donald.

"*We* don't use tea balls," said Grandmother.

Glory turned to Sandra. "Do you take sugar?" she asked graciously, in a wonderful imitation of Grandmother.

"You shouldn't have to ask the second time round," said Grandmother. "You should remember."

"With cream and lemon and sugar and with so many people?" Glory was aghast.

"With a lot more than are here," said Grandmother. "The other day, when we opened the new wing of the library, we had thirty-seven people and I poured tea and didn't have to ask anybody the second time round." Grandmother had to smile at Glory's wide-eyed admiration of this miracle of memory. "I'll give you a tip," she said. "Pick on some idiosyncrasy—everybody at tea parties has one—and just add the cream or lemon and sugar to it. For instance," she closed her eyes, "Mole-Face takes cream. Miss Purple-Hair takes lemon but no sugar. The one who clacks her false teeth when she talks takes her tea straight. . . . dear me, I can still see them all. How dreadful!"

She opened her eyes again, smiling at Glory. "Well, my dear," she said, "by the time you're as old as I am you'll be able to handle that many people, I'm sure, and I hope they won't be such fuddy-duddies as I have to pour for sometimes."

After tea we played games and when we were pleasantly exhausted, we sang. Harriet Evans had a fine natural voice and all her children could harmonize. We sang American folk songs, most of them airs the Negroes had made famous. In our Anglican mouths they sounded less sensuous, more innocent. "Dance," Glory's brothers and sisters cried, "Come on, Glory, dance."

Glory got up from where she was sitting, lifted her thin little arms, and moved about in motions that remained singularly the same yet went well with the music because that

didn't have much variety, either; it was simple, too. Glory seemed especially preoccupied with her hands, watching their motion as if she were not the originator of what they did, and the inclination of her head as she did so gave a prettily rounded picture. There was nothing awkward about her because she didn't attempt anything difficult. Watching her dance made you feel anybody could dance.

"She's really very graceful," said Grandmother, when it was over.

"She's always dancing," said Harriet Evans, drawing Glory to her and pushing the hair off her forehead.

"She's always jumping around," said I.

"It's the same thing," said Glory, and, "Who'd have thought you could dance to folk songs," said Mother.

"They make wonderful dances," said Glory, not knowing, none of us knowing then that out of the mouth of this babe had come a real wisdom, that a few years later famous dance choreographers would make the same discovery.

It was a very clear day, that day of our picnic, with the clarity that sweeps a landscape clean a few hours before rainfall. The hills looked near, the woods were blue-green with every tree sharply outlined. Bright field flowers bobbed brazenly in a distant field and the Evans cows crunched nearby in the stubble. Our vantage point overlooked it all and I was struck suddenly by the difference of the beauties on our planet—pebbly English beaches, hot Riviera sands, the wide grandeur of Paris streets and squares, the bustle and soot and damp of London, the gray, wide, wild expanse of an Atlantic crossing and this green, fruitful land, this law-abiding New England.

Suddenly I missed Sofie, I wished I could have conjured her here to share this scene with us, to meet these people whom she would have liked. From Glory I could, of course, keep nothing. She noticed at once that I was miffed. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"I wish Sofie could see the fall," I told her.

She looked thoughtful and nodded, then her face brightened. "Why don't you paint a picture of it?" she suggested. So next day I did, showing the brook, the rill I had constructed to deflect it, and the waterfall itself, all in rather cockeyed perspective, but colorful. I sent it off to Sofie, whose letter of enthusiastic thanks came so late I was sure the picture had been lost in the mail. Only years later did I find out that I had sent if off before it was quite dry so that it had arrived totally smeared, looking as unintelligible as a late Picasso. Sofie hadn't been able to express her thanks until letters had passed between Mother and her as to what this hodgepodge was supposed to represent.

eight

FEENY WALKED INTO MY LIFE ON A PARTICULARLY BRIGHT DAY, so to say on the tail of a plane. I heard the plane before I saw it, a small metallic roar very close to my head, and I ducked. The plane—all of sixteen inches to its wing span—

almost clipped my ear and imbedded itself behind me in a tree. There it quivered for a moment and was still.

Next a boy came crashing through the shrubbery. "Where'd it go?" he demanded in a hoarse, harsh voice. "Goddam it, tell me where it landed or I'll kill you."

He was an older boy. His eyes were flashing, his face was crimson, the sweat of anguish stood on his brow. He looked like a devil.

I took to him immediately. This apparition was for me. I pointed to where the plane was impaled in the crotch of the tree. He had it down in a jiffy and was holding it in trembling hands, examining it carefully. "It's okay," he said, his contorted face relaxing, and suddenly he looked familiar. I'd seen this guy before.

"It'd better be okay," he went on, "because I snitched it."

"Snitched it?"

"Well, not the plane, just the motor. That guy's too dumb to build a plane like this but he's got the money to buy the motor. That's how it is." And he shrugged over this containment of a whole philosophy in four small words.

"Did you build the plane?"

"Yeah. Okay, isn't it?" And he handed it to me.

At that time the model-plane industry was in its infancy. To me it was a miracle of balsa-wood modeling, finished off brightly in red and yellow and highly varnished. I'd never seen anything like it.

"So it wuz done," the boy was saying, "an' I couldn't fly it but I knew where there wuz a motor."

"Where?"

"At Haskell's." Two houses away from us, about a mile down the lane. I knew the family and the boy. Bores.

"How d'ye know?" It was easy and amusing to slip into his jargon.

"I know the kid. He can't build planes. But he can buy all the expensive models. Never gets 'em done. Cook gives 'em to me when they're thrown out. I can put 'em together

even when there're parts missin'. I got balsa reserves. This was one of his'n. Then he buys this motor. Wanna know somethin'? This motor cost sixteen bucks. I know. I seen the catalogue." He fondled the plane, silent, pensive.

"So I'm deliverin' the meat . . ." That was who he was! The boy from Toby's who was delivering our meat that summer. . . "an' I see the motor lyin' in the kitchen yard, right out there in the open. The dope! Don't he know it'll rust? Wuz already. He don't care. He can buy himself as many as he wants. So I snitched it. I cleaned it an' oiled it. It fits into three u'my planes. An' boy, does she go! I gotta find myself a big, open field for the next flight . . ."

"Hickey's?"

"Yeah. Hickey's'll do, I guess."

"Can I come with you?"

A moment's hesitation, an obvious reluctance to get involved with friendship. "I ain't got time now. Besides, I gotta put this motor back where I found it."

"Why?"

He looked me in the eye darkly. "Because I can't take chances."

"Whaddayamean?" It was fascinating, this new language, and so easily acquired. The foreign languages I knew paled in comparison. None of them was so expressive and to the point.

"I'm on parole, stoop. From over there," and he gestured with his head in the direction of the state reformatory.

The effect on me was overwhelming. At last I had before me, near enough to touch, talking to me, an inmate of this formidable establishment, whose forbidding stone walls and barred windows filled me with nostalgia every time I passed them. How many times had I implored Mother to slow down the car so that I could peer into the faces of those whose good behavior permitted them to work outside the high stone wall on the reformatory farm that ran parallel to the highway? Oh, to have the bold, bad courage to risk such ostracism!

The boys at Dick Evans' school played the reformatory team once a year. I'd already asked Dick Evans what they were like. "Tough," he'd said. For me it was the one compensatory aspect of life at the school I was some day to attend—I'd get to know the reformatory boys. But now I didn't have to wait. One such specimen had walked into my life. The thing was, of course, not to let him go.

"Look here," I said, "don't give it back. I'll find out if it's been missed and let you know. Time enough then to find a way to get it back to him. I'll think up something."

"Okay," he said, and was turning to leave.

"Hey!" He turned, a little more ready now for dalliance. "If I get a model would you show me how to build a plane like that?"

But he was cautious. His eyes narrowed with distrust. "All you gotta do is follow the instructions."

"I know. I've had a model. But it takes more than that. Would you show me?"

He stood where he had stopped, looking down at the ground, bashing his heel into the soft earth in a new shyness, aware of me suddenly as a personality. Ally or enemy?

I walked up to him. "Aw, come on," I said.

"How do you figger your folks are gonna like it?"

"My folks? I do as I please."

"You do?" He grinned. "Like hell you do. Your kind's always hamstrung."

He was right! "Look here," I said, "if I say you can come, you can come."

This and the way I said it seemed to impress him. "I've got time late in the afternoon," he said. "An hour or two. If your folks'll clear me with Toby."

"I'll see to that."

"Okay, then."

"Today?"

"No. Tomorrow. And while you're at it, get a Lockheed Vega. The big one. And . . ." his eyes narrowed again, "if

you could get a set of knives. Mine are lousy." He pursed his lips suddenly as if to whistle but no sound came. He looked pleased and I could feel myself expanding to gigantic proportions.

It was the beginning of a friendship that ran like a solid silver thread through what was left of the summer. After a talk with Toby, Grandmother had no objections to Feeny but Mother was not so easily persuaded. "You'll have to put every thing valuable away or never leave him alone," she said.

"I don't know what he was sent up for," said Grandmother, "but Toby said not to worry, it wasn't for stealing. The cash register's been accessible all summer and never a cent missing."

"Is that supposed to console me?" said Mother. "There are a lot worse things than stealing. Oh, dear."

"Now, Sylvia," said Grandmother. "Don't worry about it and don't haunt them. I'm thankful to see Robbie with a boy. He's always either with adults or alone or he has Glory, bless her, on his trail. It isn't right for a boy."

"I suppose it isn't," said Mother. "But there are the Evans boys and there's Haskell, within walking distance. Does it have to be a reform-school boy?"

"Well," said Grandmother, "you know Robbie."

But even Mother was won over in the end by Feeny's soft-spoken presence and intrigued, as all of us were, by the immense skill of his hands, not only for plane modeling, but for drawing, too. He had a perfectly true sense of proportion. Once he drew our house from a nearby hill, a view that looked down on its many roofs slanting in different directions, at different heights and angles, and got all of them right. Grandmother praised the drawing and asked him if he didn't want to become a draftsman. "That's what my aptitude test showed," said Feeny.

"Well, why not go after it?"

"Mebbe," said Feeny.

"What's your real name?" Grandmother asked him one day. "I mean, what does the Feeny stand for?"

Feeny flushed and broke out in a sweat of embarrassment. "It's a helluva name," he said. "I hate it." But she was waiting for her answer and even Feeny couldn't withstand her. "Serafino," he mumbled.

"But that's a beautiful old Italian name," said Grandmother. "You ought to be proud of it. I suppose you know what it means?"

"I know," said Feeny, giving her one of his fierce looks. "I guess my mother didn't know when she named me that I was gonna be a devil."

Of course I'd hoped to find out all about his "crime" and his reformatory life but I didn't. On both subjects Feeny preserved a tight-lipped silence and there was something about him that made it impossible to ask, even for me. But I did find out quite a bit about him otherwise.

His mother was dead. "All she's missin' is trouble," was how he put it. His father was a drinker. That was why Feeny was on parole at Toby's and not at home. None of his older brothers or sisters wanted him. "They're all married an' havin' kids fast as they can make 'em. Don't ask me what for." But if he could keep out of mischief until the end of the summer, he'd go to a parochial school in Boston in the fall and finish his education there. If he could just stay out of mischief this summer.

Feeny was fourteen but he seemed to prefer my company to that of boys his own age. Why? "All they wanna do is fight," said he.

"But you're not a man, really, are you? Until you've fought?"

"You and your stupid ideas."

"Well, what else is there?"

"I dunno," said Feeny. "But you can't tell me there ain't somethin' else."

"Why don't you want to fight?"

"I can't afford to." His face had darkened. "I black out when I fight. I'm liable to kill a guy. I almost did once. That's why I'm here."

The dark implications of the confession delighted me. I'd sensed quite a while ago that brutality of some sort had lost him his freedom and put the indelible blemish of reform school on his future. Nothing but friendliness, a taciturn yet feelable friendliness, had marked our companionship, yet something latent behind those burning eyes, the sparseness of expression that made every spoken word sound like an invective, had conveyed to me that there was another aspect to him. And it was undeniably this possibility of violence that attracted me to him. Like people who run to watch a fire, I was waiting for him to burn.

Glory, of course, was not to be excluded from this new friendship. At first she eyed Feeny with distrust and jealousy, but he was amazingly nice to her and won her confidence. He started her on a small project of her own and she whittled and glued away at it with her usual doggedness and lack of talent. The results were doomed never to fly but were outstanding in their color schemes.

When the two were working side by side, Feeny leaning over Glory to explain a diagram to her, he looked like a boy who could do no wrong and there was an atmosphere of innocence in the shed we'd converted into a workroom, as if Glory had brought her own aura with her, and it was somehow more potent than ours. Feeny seemed to sense it, too. "She's a nice kid," he said. "But then lookit how she's been raised." From which I gathered that he approved of the Evans menage as much as I did.

Sometimes he brought Glory presents, wintergreen hearts with mottoes printed on them or a kind of hard candy she particularly liked. There was a sugar flower in it that never melted away even when the candy was sucked down to a

sliver. Every now and then she'd take the thing out of her mouth and look at it to reassure herself that the flower was still there.

Dick Evans loaned Feeny Peter's bike for the rest of the summer. Feeny's, with the heavy butcher's tray, was too clumsy for outings. Feeny didn't mind if Glory came along when we pedaled out to Hickey Field to fly our planes or just rode off somewhere, anywhere, on Sunday picnics. We taught Feeny how to swim. His body was very white, he was painfully thin and short of breath, and he never did develop any style. He floundered.

On the way to Hickey's we passed the reformatory farm. When he saw his friends working there Feeny greeted them morosely, but never until they greeted him. One day a boy hailed him. I was the one who stopped. "He wants to talk to you," I shouted.

"Let him," said Feeny, pedaling on ahead.

In the end I had to get on my bike and ride after him, leaving the boy standing at the edge of the road, looking after Feeny, a venomous expression on his face.

A few days later the boy hailed Feeny again. This time I somehow got entangled with Feeny's bike and forced a landing. The boy came over and drew Feeny aside.

I couldn't hear what passed between them but it was something that enfuriated Feeny, whose final words, "That's out, get it, jerk? *Out!*" although hardly above a whisper were clearly hearable. "What did he want?" I asked.

"Why don't you mind your own business?" said Feeny, and he was in a black mood for the rest of the day.

The following week, when this same fellow stopped Feeny in his tracks and forced him off his bike, it happened. "Why don't you lemme alone?" said Feeny, and there was such genuine despair in his voice, I, for my part, was ready to call the whole thing off.

The boy's answer was beyond me but it sounded foul.

Feeny whitened, even his lips. "Nobody's gonna push me around," he said, a phrase he used with monotonous regularity.

"No?" said the other boy.

It was the glove in the face. At that point physical battle was as imperative to those two as breathing. Even Glory sensed it. She withdrew to the other side of the road, pale suddenly, her eyes wide.

Feeny was slighter than the other boy but more wiry. They fought lawlessly, rolling over and over on the hard asphalt of the road, kicking each other, clawing, scratching. The other boy winced every now and then and cursed, but Feeny fought in a blazing trance of silence. Even his breathing, unlike the other boy's, was quiet.

I remembered then that he had one of our modeling knives in his pocket and terror seized me. I wanted to undo what I had done, for I had done it, I was fully aware of that: I'd wanted to see just this happen and somehow I had brought it about. But Feeny didn't resort to the knife. His long-fingered hands were all sinew suddenly and his thumbs were on the boy's Adam's apple.

Glory's whisper broke the silence. "He'll kill him," she said. "Daddy . . . Daddy . . ." and she turned and ran to where her bike was lying.

I threw myself upon the two and broke Feeny's hold on the boy by the sheer impact of my body. The boy rolled over and over to the side of the road where he sat up slowly. Then he vomited. But I was under Feeny now, his hands were on my throat, and I could feel the saliva spilling out of the side of my mouth.

A few words burbled out of me, words of persuasion, but they died on my lips, blotted out by Feeny's hands and the swift, terrible knowledge that he had no idea out of whom he was pressing the life. He'd blacked out, all right, and I was the victim.

So for the first time in my life I fought, and it was as if

a dam had burst and spewed out all my dissatisfaction with life. A new sensation was born in me like an evil baptism, a new strength, a diabolical exultation, a lust for just this.

I was tall for my age and heavy-boned, not much lighter than Feeny, and more muscular than he. We were well matched. My hands were large and strong and I found his chin, pushed it up and away, wondering vaguely if his neck would break. But it didn't. Only the pressure of his fingers on my throat began to give.

I drew up my knees and pushed him off, made a half-turn and freed myself to fight back, to bite, claw, tear, silently, too. Suddenly there was the warm, sweet taste in my mouth of my own blood.

I don't know how long it lasted until I heard a car draw up and stop, and Dick Evans' voice tore into the sunny afternoon. His strong arms parted our weakened bodies. It was only then I found that I couldn't get up. Something had happened to my leg at the hip, my wrist was limp, there wasn't a part of my body that didn't hurt. But before I passed out, lying flat on my back, staring up into the sky, I felt a beautiful calm of the spirit, like a quiet death, like the end of all restlessness forever. I'd never felt like it before and I wasn't to feel like it again for years, and then under quite different circumstances.

"It's cost him his parole," said Dick Evans, looking at me coldly, angrily. "You know there's just as good a way to Hickey's without going past the farm. Why didn't you take it?"

Mother said, "Why, Dick! It couldn't have occurred to Robbie that . . ." but Dick Evans interrupted her. "I don't agree with you," he said. "I think it did occur to Robbie. That's why I'm going to tell him here and now—if he wants excitement, let him create his own. Don't let others do your living for you, Robbie."

I thought of Sofie and Victor, of all my unfulfilled long-

ings and feeble escapes into heroic dreams, and felt a terrible despair. It hurt far more than my strained muscles, aching bones, and black eye.

So the summer was a failure. The beautiful calm, on awakening, turned into inertia, the memory of Feeny faded fast because it had ended in disgrace, shed and work bench stood deserted. Defeat and boredom settled upon me, making me chronically unkind and rude, and Glory wore a cloud on her face to match mine.

During the first days of September my father came over from Europe and my heart gladdened at the prospect of change and excitement, but he swept Mother off with him for a motor trip through Maine from which she returned windburned and looking like a young girl. They looked like strangers to me.

Then, on one of our last days at Grandmother's, Father came tearing out to the house unannounced to tell us, "Now I have news that's going to tickle the hell out of you. I've been transferred to Vienna."

Saved. Saved from an unbearably innocuous life. "We're going to live in Vienna this winter," I told Glory, and showed it to her on Grandmother's globe where it was tangibly on the other side of the world from the euthanasia that was now.

Glory's lips puckered, her face crinkled up like shriveled fruit. "You're going away?".

"Of course I'm going away. I only come here for the summers."

But the memory of my last going was a year old, the prospect of my return a year away, and at nine a year is an eternity. She yelled. For weeks I couldn't get her screams out of my ears.

nine

SO WE MOVED TO VIENNA AND ALL "BROTHERS," "SISTERS," AND lovers were reunited. Instead of New England's rolling hills, farms, orchards, and prosperous homes I could see from my window the Gothic spire of St. Stefan's Cathedral. Instead of Hickey Field and Glaspell Pond I picnicked in the Prater and rode on the biggest Ferris wheel in the world. Again mine was an adult world; I was a spectator and an actor only in the safe realms of my imagination where I won all battles and got nobody except villains into trouble.

Sofie initiated me into the solemn rites of Austrian coffee-drinking. Melange-light, melange-dark were coffee with hot milk. *Kaffee-Haut* was coffee with the skin of boiled milk floating on it, an *Einspaenner* was coffee with milk, served in a glass, a *Kapuziner* was a demitasse with cream, and a "black one" was just plain black coffee. My favorite was "coffee with." With what? Whipped cream, of course.

A residue of German must have remained somnolent in

the back of my mind because the language came back to me surprisingly fast. In that Father had been right. And Sofie introduced me to the idiosyncrasies of Viennese German. *Fisolen,* not *Bohnen,* were beans. *Karfiol,* not *Blumenkohl,* was cauliflower, *Orangen,* not *Apfelsinen,* were oranges, *Palatschinken,* not *Pfannkuchen,* were pancakes. For goodby they called out to one another the ridiculous syllable, *"Pa!"* or *"Servus, kuess die Hand,"* or they said *"Adieu,"* in a melodious singsong tone, and in the stores they God-greeted you instead of wishing you good-day.

I met Sofie's family and with them went on my first hunt, a stag hunt which catered, so it seemed to me, exclusively to her father. Nobody else was allowed to shoot. The stag turned out to be a *"Sechzehnender,"* which meant that he had sixteen points to his antlers. It was a frightening experience to see such a magnificent creature brought down. It upset Sofie, too. As she stood there looking at the dying animal rolling its eyes piteously at us, its breathing shallow, one of her innumerable cousins put his hand through her arm. "The old man's eyesight is still perfect," he said. "It was a good, clean shot." At that moment the animal's eyes became fixed and he died.

Sofie said, "I suppose I go along on these horrible excursions because I'll accept any excuse to ride but it's not a noble sport, Robbie. Don't let anybody tell you it is."

We walked away together, I with a dreadful feeling of flatness at the pit of my stomach. I'd wanted to see two boys locked in battle but I didn't want to see an animal die. There was something vastly different about the two tragedies.

That night my father got into an argument with Sofie's father. The old man didn't see any reason why Hitler's advent to power in Germany should change his views on the desirability of Austria's union with that country. Since the infernal Allies had truncated Austria, making Vienna into a capital without a Hinterland, there was no other solution

for the Austrian dilemma and Hitler was just the man to see it was properly done. He was an Austrian anyway, wasn't he?

Father said he had also deplored the decimation of Austria at the Treaties of St. Germain and Trianon but that any union with Hitler meant moral and spiritual death, and Austria had every chance, if its tourist trade were managed properly, of becoming another Switzerland. And who was to do the managing, Sofie's father wanted to know?

Mismanaged the country certainly was, Father agreed, but it had a charm all its own. Union with the present Germany would mean annihilation, and so on and so forth, all through the meal, with the antlers and stuffed heads of a hundred deer bristling over our heads, making the huge dining room of the hunting lodge a gruesome place. Although I had been assured that the venison we were eating was not the stag we had seen killed that day, the meat tasted bad to me. I listened to my father, outnumbered, with every cousin agreeing with the old man, Sofie silent and withdrawn, and Eugene not present. If only Eugene had been there. He would have defeated the old man. Perhaps that was why he wasn't.

I never saw Victor on any of the occasions that brought me together with Sofie and her family, but I was treated to another aspect of this fascinating triangle when I went on a vacation with Mother and Sofie, just after Christmas.

Mother wanted me to learn how to ski. She was good at it, having learned one winter before she was married when Grandmother had taken her to St. Moritz. Later she had perfected herself on the steep trails of New Hampshire, more tortuous than any to be found in the Alps. Sofie didn't ski nor did she want to learn. She came along for the good air and sunshine and to get away from politics.

School was still in recess and the Tyrolese resort to which we went was crowded with children. To my disgust Mother went off on cross-country treks while I had to join a class on a

gentle slope and learn the rudiments of the sport. After a week of it I flattered myself that I was doing very well.

The brief school vacation over, the children disappeared from the practice field except for the privileged few who were taught privately, of which I was one. One day I came back to the hotel, sore not only physically. There had been a few nice-looking girls on the slope and I had tried to show off more than I could do. I found my beloved Sofie reclining on a long chair in the brilliant sunshine, dark glasses on to protect her eyes, oil on her face to protect her skin.

She may have liked to wear breeches when she was a girl but she evidently didn't any more. Here, where practically every woman wore pants, Sofie wore one of those glorified dirndls made by a fashionable dressmaker on the lines of the original Austrian peasant dress. Closing the high neck, she wore a piece of old peasant jewelry, a gold brooch shaped like a lover's knot. She had let me hold it in my hand once and I had been astonished by its lightness, like a feather in my hand, like nothing at all, because it was hollow and the gold was very thin. But in spite of the pseudo-peasant garb, Sofie didn't look like a peasant at all.

She was talking to a young girl who might have been sixteen, although it was hard to judge since she wore ski pants and a Norwegian knitted sweater—sporting enough—but her blonde hair hung most impractically loose down her back and a huge white bow on the top of her head held her hair scraped away from her brow. From the neck up she was a dutiful child, from the neck down a sportswoman. It struck me as odd.

"Robbie, come here." Sofie beckoned and introduced me to Victor's daughter, Huberta, a heck of a name for a girl, I thought. We shook hands heartily, one good solid shake, German style. "I saw you on the practice hill," she said.

"You did? How is it I didn't see you?"

"Fräulein and I were on the cross-country hike," she ex-

plained, "and we saw you as we came by the hill on our way home. You were very busy disentangling yourself from a slalom stick," and she smiled, without any malice, but I felt deflated just the same. I had hoped I'd been noticed because I cut a dashing figure. Just then a harsh voice called to the girl from the main house. She kissed Sofie's hand, bobbed a curtsey in spite of her clumsy ski boots, shook hands with me again (she might have been taking off on a journey into the interior), and left us.

"Is Victor here?" I asked eagerly.

"No," said Sofie, "only his children, with their tutor and governess."

That night they made an entry into the dining room like royalty. First came the governess, a voluptuous Brünnhilde, tall, full-bosomed, with a tower of braids on top of her head, young and aggressive from her facial expression to the way she strode into the room. I made a mental note of the fact that I'd find her tomorrow if it took me all day. I had to see that woman in pants!

Then followed, to my amazement, the boys, the boys first! They were wearing sailor suits, all four of them, from the tallest who looked older than Huberta to the smallest who was much younger. They looked like those dolls that fit into each other, not only because they were dressed alike and their sizes graded so evenly, but because the family likeness was so strong. And I couldn't see Victor in one of them.

The two girls came next, spoiling the symmetry with their white dresses and sashes. The only sashes I'd ever seen were in a Kate Greenaway book of Mother's that she'd saved from her childhood and the girls looked rather as if they had stepped out of that book. There was Huberta, the girl I had met that afternoon, all child now in her party dress, her lips strangely bloodless in her flushed, self-conscious face. She was leading by the hand a small girl about nine or ten years old whom I recognized at once as the little demon who had driven all of us crazy on the practice hill that morning.

Why she'd been there heaven only knew because she skied like a devil. Unlike her sister, she was sunburned and against her almost white-blonde hair the nut-brown skin looked rather lovely.

Her name was Susanne. Not that I'd been introduced, but the name had been constantly on the lips of the nervous fellow who now brought up the rear of this formidable cortege. This morning I had thought he was the unfortunate father of this little beast, now it turned out he was simply the tutor.

"For heaven's sake, Robbie, stop staring and eat," said Mother.

After dinner all of us met in the spacious lounge. Sofie, rather reserved I thought, made the introductions. Huberta settled down on a hassock at her feet and began to talk to her in tones so low nobody else could hear but Sofie's answers were clearly audible. Susanne attached herself to me.

What was this strange power I had over little girls? "How did you ever get so brown?" I asked, trying to break the spell, as she stood staring up at me.

"I am a sun worshiper," she said. "Whenever I can, I lie in the sun. I'm like that all over, look," and she lifted her skirt and slip, revealing a pair of dazzling white drawers and, above them, nothing but her deep brown skin. She was brown all over, all right. It even showed through her pants and I could feel myself turning purple. A few ladies sitting nearby gasped and one old gentleman buried his face in his paper to hide his smiles.

It was all over in a flash. Huberta leaped forward, pulled down her sister's skirts, and slapped her hard on the wrist. "Have you no shame?" she hissed. "How can you do such a thing?"

Susanne's brothers were laughing and Susanne gave them a look out of the corners of slit eyes. Then she turned around and whacked her sister so hard on the hand that

Huberta winced. "Don't you dare hit me," she said. "Nobody can hit me but Fräulein von Werthenau."

"I am going to tell her what you did," said Huberta, her tears ready to fall.

Susanne looked her straight in the eye and said, "You are not going to tell her any such thing and you know it. Leave me alone. Just let me be bad. It's the only way you'll ever get rid of me when I go to hell and you go to heaven." The boys laughed all over again. And this time Susanne laughed with them.

"I think the devil is much more amusing than God," she said, turning to me. "I have a picture book. God is an old man with a long white wavy beard but the devil is red and has horns and a tail and he hasn't any clothes on. He looks jolly and I love fires."

"You wouldn't want to burn, you wouldn't want to burn," yelped her youngest brother, who had a nervous habit of jiggling up and down when he spoke.

"The devil doesn't look as if he minds," said Susanne.

"Why does she say such dreadful things?" Huberta appealed to Sofie.

Sofie adjusted the folds of her skirt and looked bored. "Susanne likes to attract attention," she said, "and since she is a very stupid girl she can do so only by behaving stupidly."

Susanne turned crimson, the color suffusing her tan prettily all the way to her ears. She marched up to Sofie and raised her arm to strike. Huberta gasped but stood immovable. Sofie grasped the child's arm at the wrist and her eyes, as she looked at the child, were cruel. I had never seen her look like this before and it startled me.

Susanne's arm was turning white about the wrist from the pressure of Sofie's fingers. Neither said a word, they just glared at each other. Then Sofie let the child's arm go. It dropped limply to her side.

"I want you to apologize," said Sofie, "to me and to the others."

The room was filled with an oppressive silence. Suddenly Susanne broke the hold of those merciless blue eyes and began pirouetting away from Sofie. As she did she sang in a quaint, attractive, singsong voice, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," sounding perfectly happy and immensely pleased with herself.

She came to a stop in front of me. "Is your house fortified against the Indians?" she asked, such a droll expression on her face I had to laugh. Even Mother and Huberta smiled at the absurd question, only Sofie's face did not change. But the cruelty, thank heaven, had left it.

So the unpleasant little incident was over, the atmosphere clear again, making me wonder if the room had really been filled a moment ago with such bitter animosity.

I started to explain—something I was quite used to by now—that in no part of the United States were we still menaced by Indians, that every fifth child was not kidnaped and held for ransom, and that, so far as I knew, gangsters did not shoot at one another from the rooftops of Times Square.

Susanne and her brothers listened with interest, except for the older boy. He began to ask questions and I wished to heaven I'd listened more to my father and Eugene and mooned less over Sofie.

This elder boy's name was Floris . . . why did this family go in for giving boys' names to the girls and girls' names to the boys? I wondered . . . and he had inherited Victor's beautiful hands. He knew more about the results of America's depression than I did, had been informed that one third of our nation was living in abject poverty, mostly in the Deep South, for which he said there was no excuse. It was just a case of bad management, corruption, and greed, and he made them sound like purely American failings. America, he told me, was materially-minded and its cul-

tural standards the lowest in the world. That we were a young nation had little to do with it except that it excused our abysmal ignorance, but our trend unfortunately was toward ever greater and greater materialism. He had followed every detail of last month's terrible lynchings in California and challenged me to see any difference between our persecution of the Negro and Hitler's treatment of the Jews. All this in the quietest voice with the coldest look in his eyes. It was a blast that left me reeling and cornered, with a strong desire to settle the issue as Feeny had done on that country road. Only that was impossible. Not that I couldn't have beaten the hell out of this smug, pasty-faced German youth, in spite of the difference in our ages, but it was quite clear to me that this sort of attack couldn't be settled with brawn, only with brain, and in that respect I was no match for him. It was a striking revelation that was to haunt me for some time to come and greatly influence my life.

"There is a very important difference between the American attitude toward their Negro minority and the German treatment of the Jew."

It was Sofie, coming to my rescue. "In America all men are equal before the law. That is not to be underestimated because it is what makes life possible or impossible." And into the silence that followed the finality of her words, "You are sixteen, Floris, and Robbie is only twelve. You have four years more of history and economics behind you than he has. Don't you think it would be fairer to carry on this argument a few years later when he has had an opportunity to equip himself for it?"

Floris smiled disagreeably. "I will win then, too," he said, "because I am right."

Sofie smiled back, just as disagreeably. "That remark shows how young you are."

"Don't say that," Susanne cried. "You are hurting Floris' feelings."

Sofie's eyes were as cold as Floris'. "He has just hurt Robbie's feelings," she said, "by saying nasty things about his country." And, by God, suddenly it *was* my country! Just then I claimed it.

"But it's true! It's true! Floris said it was all true," cried Susanne.

"He is in no position to pass judgment on that," said Sofie. "And now I suggest you children talk about something more suitable."

Thank heaven we weren't put to the hopeless task of finding a suitable subject, for Brünnhilde saved the day. Two high spots of color in her cheeks, she sailed into the room and said it was Susanne's bedtime, at which Susanne raised an uproar. Brünnhilde took her by the hand and gave it a sharp twist, whereupon her howls of rage turned into howls of pain which, however, ceased abruptly. Evidently you could scream with rage but never with pain in this family. With compressed lips she walked out beside Brünnhilde, stiff and straight as a soldier to court-martial.

Sofie rose and said, "Let us go. I want Robbie to hear the zither player at Feigl's." Huberta looked as if she longed to be asked, too, but Sofie did not extend the invitation to her. The last I saw of her she was wandering back disconsolately to the group formed by her brothers.

When we got outdoors I said no to the zither player in the village. The moon was up, throwing deep purple shadows on the snow, and I announced I was going to get my skis and practice. I was determined to put on a good show tomorrow with that tribe around or bust.

Mother was all remonstrance but Sofie said, "Let him. I want him to put on a good show, too."

"All right," said Mother. "I think you're both crazy but I'll get on my things and show him a thing or two."

The snow that had fallen while we were at supper had carpeted softly the harsh ruts we had left on the practice hill that day. It glittered in the limpid moonlight. The air

was cold and clear, you could feel it penetrating into the farthest corners of your lungs, it dried up your nose and made it tickle. And it was still, still, still.

"I'm glad we did this," said Mother. "It's lovely out. Sofie, are you warm enough?"

Sofie had on a fur coat with a hood. "Plenty warm enough," she said, her breath visible, like a puff of smoke. "You two go on ahead. I'll take my time."

Mother gave me the most enlightening instruction I'd had so far. She was for dropping everything fancy I'd learned and concentrating on a good Christie. It would get me by any tough spot, she declared, and stop me in my tracks at the highest speed. "Like this, look!" It stopped her. It stopped me, too, on my rear end. "Lean out, out, out," she yelled, and I leaned out, out, out.

To my delight Mother's lesson made quite an expert of me. Even my teacher was surprised and signed me up with Victor's younger boys for the cross-country hike that afternoon. Brünnhilde was there but, alas, not in pants. After a while she left and the minute she had gone, Susanne skied over to me, finishing up in front of me with a professional flourish I'd have given a great deal to be able to accomplish.

"Come into the woods," she said. "It's fun in and out the trees."

This is where I get my head bashed in, I told myself, but would rather have cracked my cranium wide open than admit the idea appalled me. She led the way. Why had Brünnhilde gone off? Why did nobody stop us?

"Where's Brünnhilde?" I asked hopefully. "She wouldn't let you dash off into the woods like this. You're going to be late for lunch." So was I, but I wasn't going to let on that it mattered.

Susanne opened her eyes wide. They were big blue eyes, shiny as glass. "Brünnhilde? Who's that?"

"The dragon who looks after you."

She giggled. "You're funny. That's Fräulein von Werthenau and her name isn't Brünnhilde. It's Waltraute." (Same difference, thought I.) "Mother calls her Vally. She was called to the phone. Come on, let's get away before she comes back."

"Okay," I said, "it's your funeral." But it didn't sound funny in German. So few Americanisms did.

We reached the woods and took the plunge into the blue and white snow that covered stumps and roots, making a hillocky carpet. I'd never skied over such uneven ground but it didn't seem to trouble Susanne. She darted in and out the trees, avoiding all obstructions with incredible precision, so small and skilled, I kept having to stop and admire her. As she flew by she hit the low branches of the firs with her poles so that she proceeded under a crystalline shower of powder snow. Very pretty. She lost her tasseled cap but didn't stop to retrieve it. I certainly couldn't. As I descended it was all I could do to steer clear of the trees, much less pick up girls' caps. My eyes were glued to her tracks which I had to follow or crack up. No crystalline shower for me.

She looked back once and yelled, "Fun!" her face aglow, her white-gold hair like a streamer of silk, and met disaster. I yelled, "Look out!" but she hit the tree simultaneously with my outcry.

Strange how those long wooden feet still preferred to take their own course. This wasn't like the practice hill; my Christies failed me. I went right past her and stopped myself finally by embracing a tree, the shock of the impact beating the wind out of me for a moment. But I was rather pleased with myself when I saw how neatly I'd steered my long feet to either side of the trunk. Then I clambered back to where Susanne was squatting, one ski going one way, the other another, her legs doubled up under her awkwardly and frighteningly limp. She was sobbing.

I felt sorry for her. "Are you all right?" I asked.

She was holding one hand to her forehead and I could

see the blood beginning to seep through her fingers, dyeing the ice crystals on her glove red. She stopped crying. Now she looked dazed.

"You *are* hurt! Look, we'll take off our skis and I'll carry you back."

I took off my wet glove and stretched out my hand to help her. She let out a high-pitched scream of protest and bit my hand. The blood spurted from the wound but I felt no pain, only tremendous astonishment.

"What did you do that for?"

"I hate you," she said.

"For heaven's sake, why?"

"Because you saw me fall."

She got to her feet without my help, her limp legs suddenly firm. One ski was loose and she tightened it, the blood trickling from her forehead down her cheek into her mouth. Her little tongue flicked out and licked it. Then she picked up a handful of snow from the ground, held it against her wounded forehead which was swelling up rapidly, sniffled loudly, and herring-boned back up the hill without another word. She looked so comical from the rear, I wanted to laugh but for some reason or other the laughter stuck in my throat.

"Hey! You've left your poles," I yelled after her. But she didn't even turn around.

I did what she had just done, picked up a handful of snow and applied it to my wound which soon stopped bleeding. It was puffed now and beginning to pulsate and hurt like the devil. You could see the imprints of her teeth quite clearly and the white snow at my feet was stained bright red. Drops of her blood, or mine. I didn't know.

I wound my handkerchief around my hand and trudged up the way she had gone, awkward with the four poles. On the way I picked up her cap. When I got back to the practice hill she was gone; everybody was. It was lunchtime. But at luncheon none of her tribe was there.

"What did you do to your hand, Robbie?" Mother wanted to know.

"Fell and jabbed it on a tree stump."

"Oh, do be careful, dear. It's a dangerous sport, you know." It hadn't been, I reflected, until that little devil had appeared on the scene.

After lunch I marched to the desk with Susanne's poles and cap to ask the clerk for their room number. Huberta opened the door and took them from me. She had quite evidently been crying.

"You are a naughty boy," she said, "to take Susanne off into the woods like that. Why, she might have broken her neck!"

And the world would have been a better place for it, I thought grimly. "May I see her please?"

"No, you can't. She's lying down. We are leaving by the three o'clock train. We had lunch in our room because everybody is upset." Strange. I had thought they were there for the rest of the week as we were.

"It has nothing to do with Susanne having got herself hurt, has it?" I asked.

"No," said Huberta, "it hasn't. If we moved every time Susanne got into trouble, we'd never stay twenty-four hours in one place. Mother called up. She wants us to meet her in Salzburg."

"That sounds like fun," I said, my memories of Salzburg being gay.

"Not if you're visiting the kind of relatives we're visiting," said Huberta.

"Is your father going to be there?"

"My father?" Her lips drooped, she shook her head. "No. Only my mother. My father is a very busy man. We don't see much of him."

She looked at me reflectively. "Your father is an important man, too," she said. "Fräulein von Werthenau knows all

about you. Does your father have time for you? Are you friends?"

"Of course," I said stoutly, my hands in my pockets, my legs spread, teetering from heel to toe but unable to look her in the eye. This was a lie that didn't come too glibly.

"Oh well," she said, "you're a boy. That makes all the difference."

"Why? Does your father have time for the boys?"

Hesitantly, "No. It's my mother who worships the boys. My father doesn't have time for any of us except Susanne, and he gets angrier with her than with any of us, which only goes to show she's his favorite. And that's surprising because . . ." Her voice faded, her eyes looked far away.

"Because what?"

She came back to me. "Oh I don't know." Then she gave herself a little shake and said, "My father is simply a very cold man," and I thought, that's what you think.

There were tears in her eyes. She brushed them away with the back of her hand and said, "This has been an awful day," and sighed.

I crossed my feet and leaned my elbow against the door frame, resting my head on my hand. "At ease," I told myself, since this seemed to be developing into a heart-to-heart. "Do you wish you were a boy?" I asked.

"No," she replied, with quite startling vehemence.

"You don't like boys?"

"I don't mind boys," she said. "How could I, with so many brothers? But I would not want to be a man."

"Well, there's no getting around that if you're a boy," I said, grinning.

But she didn't smile. "I would like to be . . ." she said, her voice fading again.

"Go on," I said, determined not to let her escape me this time. "What would you like to be?"

"I would like to be exactly like Sofie." Now her voice was

a whisper again. "I admire her more than anybody else in the world. She married beneath her, you know, and that takes tremendous courage. If I could be exactly like her, I would be the happiest person in the world. Only I never could be. I'm not brave at all."

She stole a look back into the room, came out into the corridor on tiptoe, and closed the door. Then she took my hand and led me to the end of the corridor and around the corner. "Will you do something for me?" she asked.

"Sure. If I can."

"I know why we're leaving." Now she spoke rapidly. "It's because of Sofie. Mother must have found out she's here."

"What on earth could that have to do with it?"

"Mother hates her."

Aha! I thought. So Victor's wife knew about "them." And Eugene didn't. Were women so much smarter than men when it came to affairs of the heart?

"I love her. When I saw she was here I nearly died of joy." There was a tense, feverish look in Huberta's face, a sort of unholy ecstasy that had little to do with joy. "But I knew we wouldn't be allowed to stay. We're not supposed to have anything to do with her. How can Mother be so intolerant? Why, even Sofie's family has forgiven her marriage. After all, Eugene is an important man even if he is misguided."

"Misguided?" I said. "What are you talking about? He's brilliant. My father admires him tremendously."

Huberta looked at me as if I had been a lost soul. "You, as Americans, would think that," she said, and I felt like telling her that her mother swept them out of Sofie's reach for quite another reason than that she had made an unsuitable marriage. But I decided the poor girl looked troubled enough already so I asked instead, "Well, what do you want me to do for you?"

It brought her back to me. "I want to write to Sofie," she

said, "and send it to you. Will you give her the letter when nobody's around and not tell anybody?"

"Sure," I said. "But whatever for? Can't you write to her direct?"

"No. I'd be punished."

"Why let anybody know?"

She shook her head impatiently. "Oh, can't you understand? We're never left alone. It's too difficult. Will you do it for me?"

"All right," I said.

I gave her my address and swore I wouldn't read the enclosure. She didn't know me. Partly I agreed because I was so anxious to see what it would be like. Then off she went, looking much happier, and that was the last I saw of her for some time.

I steamed open Huberta's letter but I might have spared myself the trouble. It was the most abject twaddle I had ever read. A love letter from a girl to a woman! At the end there was a poem:

I think of you when the sun's rays reflected in
the water shine twice for me,
I think of you when the moon's gentle light from
heaven gilds the sea.
I see you when on the road the faint dust rises,
far away
Or in the night, when on a narrow path a wanderer's
gone astray,
I hear you when the mounting waves are strident,
And in the quiet glen, where
all is silent.
I am with you. However far away you are, you're near.
The sun is setting, soon the stars will gleam. Were
you but here!

Not bad, I thought. Only years later did I find out that it was Goethe's *Naehe der Geliebten.*

When I gave her the letter, Sofie frowned. "How silly!" she said, and she frowned as she read it, which did not surprise me. But she said nothing and I never received another.

ten

DURING THAT WINTER EUGENE AND MY FATHER BECAME FRIENDS and he came to the house almost as often as Sofie. It was the short ruinous era during which a pygmy chancellor called Dollfuss, leader of Austrian reaction, was trying to stem the Nazi tide threatening his country from Germany. He was succeeding because he had entered into a marriage of convenience with the strongest party in Austria, the Social Democrats. It stood behind him, a solid wall, and one of its bulwarks was Eugene.

He and Father discussed politics all the time; you could tell it was what bound them together. Eugene brought his political friends with him, they went into long conclaves with

Father, and Mother's parties changed. Formerly her guests had been for the most part businessmen, bankers, agriculturalists, leaders of big industry, but Eugene introduced the political idealist to Mother's salon. One day he even brought Bernard W—— with him, one of the great Socialist leaders of Europe.

Suddenly these men interested me, something for which I think I had Victor's son Floris to thank. It was he who had steered me head on into the firm acknowledgment that the power of the mind was infinitely more important than the power of matter. And Father was pleased. "You can't start learning too soon," he said. "European politics are as complicated as sin. Compared with them what we call politics in America is horseplay. A mere juggling for the right to administrate."

But it was Eugene from whom I learned the most. It was he who made me aware of the politically-minded European who could create so many different parties with the resultant confusion of cabinets rising and falling, chancellors and premiers appointed and overthrown.

All of a sudden he was aware of my existence, this rangy man. "Where a majority of the people is interested in politics," he explained to me, "you will always find many parties."

"Is that good?"

"Is that good?" He laughed. "My dear boy, that is never the primary question. First comes the question, is it *inevitable?* And if it is, then good or bad, we must cope with it."

When he talked to me like that, I found my attention straying from Sofie. She listened, too, her eyes alight with affection when they looked at him. But now I knew so much more, and whenever I saw them together I compared this union with the other I had witnessed, compared Sofie's motherly gesture as she flicked a crumb off Eugene's tie or let him go without an apparent pang when he had to leave for some political meeting, with the sensuous flow of her

walk as she had moved toward Victor, the greed of her hands drawing his face close, the sigh of longing and completion. I knew whom she loved most.

Until the February days when the little chancellor decided he could do without the Social Democrats, and turned his cannon away from the German, threatening in the north, onto the ally within, and murdered the Austrian republic. Civil War broke out and Eugene was being hunted with other Social Democrat leaders. Sofie came to our house in a state of dreadful agitation. Could Eugene stay the night with us? Of course, and any other night, Mother told her. He should remain with us until this dreadful upheaval was over. No, no. Sofie shook her head. He must move on, he mustn't stay more than one night anywhere. It wouldn't be safe. He might be betrayed.

But our house enjoyed diplomatic immunity, Mother protested. With us he would be safe. Sofie made a despairing gesture. Safe? A man of Eugene's political prominence wasn't safe anywhere in this god-forsaken country. They would come to our house if they found out he was there, and take him. There would be a small, a very small diplomatic incident. What did Mother think the State Department would do about it—declare war? And what would John say? He might not permit it.

Mother called him and asked him to come home right away, it was urgent. No, there was nothing wrong with me. And while she phoned Sofie strode up and down, her long steps making the large room seem suddenly small. Her pacing brought her to the threshold of Father's study where I was supposed to be doing my homework and I moved away quickly from the heavy portieres behind which I had been watching what went on in the next room. She saw me and realized that I must have heard everything. "Oh, Robbie," she said.

I couldn't move. I was frozen to the chair, my heart

aching, actually aching because I could do nothing to relieve her distress. "I won't tell anybody," I said.

Her eyes softened. She came over to where I was sitting and ran her fingers through my hair, and although the gesture was completely mechanical, it excited me profoundly to feel her cold fingers on my scalp. The gentle caress held a latent strength as if those hands could be iron. "I know you won't," she said.

Father was in an uproar about the whole thing. I heard him say, "It must be arranged with the utmost discretion. Thank God it's only for one night. We can't afford to go in for this sort of thing, Sylvia. If only you would realize that our position here . . ." and he closed the door to the study, shutting me out.

Eugene arrived after dark in a closed cab, Sofie came later the same way. By this time you could hear the noise of cannon coming from the center of town. They were shelling the workers' new model apartment houses. "Bastards!" said Father.

"It is nothing," said Eugene, "compared with what is to come. This is only the beginning, a dress rehearsal with an inferior cast." He gave Father a piercing look. "And how does *your* Father Superior feel about all this?" (It was the way he always referred to our Ambassador.)

Father's face reddened as he sought for the right answer and Eugene raised a hand. It was white and thin, almost transparent, the hand of a much older man. "Don't tell me," he said. "By the expression on your face I can see that your embassy is on the wrong side again. What a penchant you have for just that." He shook his head. "Ignorance," he said softly. "Nothing can lead a man more astray."

I had never seen Father's face so moved, so unreserved, as he stood looking down at Eugene. "I don't always like the company we keep either," he said. "This may cost me my job but I don't care."

"It won't cost you your job," said Mother. "Nobody will find out and Eugene will leave us before dawn."

Eugene sat there, his shaggy head in his hands, shaking it hands and all, and said over and over again, "I can't run away. I can't run away."

Sofie got up and began to pace the room again. Father looked at me and said to Mother, "Do you think it's wise to have the boy in on all this?" and Mother said, "Yes. I want him to know all about it and that this couldn't happen at home."

At about nine the front doorbell rang and startled all of us. Mother said to the maid, "I'll answer," And I followed her to the threshold of the library door. It was Victor.

"Thank God you have come," said Mother.

He kissed her hand, then took off his hat and coat, and hung them up. "We're in the library," she whispered. (We had been whispering all day.) "You must persuade him to go. You will . . ."

"I will do my best," said Victor, and followed her into the library, I close on their heels. Now, at last, I would see them together, these three.

I don't know what I expected but certainly not what took place. Eugene was sitting astride a small Biedermeier chair, front to back, making it look like a ridiculous piece of furniture. "Hello, old friend," he said. "So they have harnessed you to my rickety wagon. What a fool you are to stick out your neck like this!"

Victor was looking at Sofie. She stretched out her left hand to him, but she was still watching Eugene as she had done all evening with that wonderful, wild anxiety, and Eugene didn't seem to notice at all the hunger, the need for her, in Victor's face. He really didn't know what was going on between these two!

"I've had nothing to do with all this," Victor said. "I had no idea this was going to happen and I want you to know I am horrified."

"You are?" Eugene cocked his head to one side and looked up at Victor. "Oh, my sweet dreamer! Well, I had an idea it would happen and I am not so close to the powers that be as you are. But then, I am not so guileless."

"But you know I had nothing to do with it, you must know that."

Eugene stretched out his hand, his gaunt face lighting up with a friendly smile, and for the first time I could see charm in this uncouth fellow. "I know," he said, as Victor grasped the outstretched hand, "and I am very touched that it should mean so much to you that I should know." And they shook hands.

"The question is," said Eugene, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to get you out of here."

Eugene threw back his head and his hands shot up in a gesture of exasperation. "Not about me, dear God in heaven, not about me! What are you going to do about the thing itself, about this disastrous regime?"

"What can I do?"

"What can you do?" There was no anger in Eugene's voice. He spoke like a teacher to a child. "You stand there and ask me what you can do—with all your power?"

"If I did anything, much of my power would be gone."

"Then let it go."

Victor shook his head. "With it I can still do a great deal that pleases me. For instance—save you." Eugene's answer was to glare at Victor, whereupon Victor said, "Give up trying to change me, old fellow. I was born on the wrong side of the tracks."

The words made Eugene smile. Suddenly his shoulders shook. I looked at Sofie. She was not laughing, she evidently saw nothing funny in Victor's remark. She was still watching Eugene. Sometimes her hands jerked toward him as if she must touch him, then she clasped them again and I saw her knuckles turn white, as if she were using all the power at her

command to keep them from taking Eugene in her arms. And there was in this intense desire to save him as much power and drive as I had seen that night with Victor in her desire for love.

Victor saw those hands, too, and an expression of anguish passed across his face. He turned his back on Sofie and said, "And now I am going to get you out of here."

"I won't leave," said Eugene. "I refuse to run away."

"Do you realize how many of you have died? How many are still going to be killed?"

Eugene looked up at Victor, his expression distraught. "They will never forgive me if I run away."

"They will never forgive you if you let yourself be taken."

The two men stared at each other and a whole battle was fought between them in that prolonged look. Then Eugene said, "What do you propose?" and Victor replied, "I will fly you out."

"You?"

"Yes. In my plane."

Sofie gasped, there was a moment of absolute silence, then Eugene got up abruptly and shook himself like a dog out of water. "But it is flight!" he bellowed, the first person to raise his voice in the house that day. "However you like to dress it up, it is flight. I won't do it."

He turned his back on us and faced the mantel, arms crossed behind his back, hands tapping nervously against each other. Sofie walked around him and came to stand between him and the fireplace, facing him. All of us could see the piteous pleading in her expression. "Do it for me," she begged. "Do it for my sake."

He was looking at her—you could tell by the angle of his head—and I said to myself, if he refuses he is a monster. How could he stand there looking at her and not touch her? But he did, the only change in his body was in his hands that were fists suddenly. He said, "My dear Sofie, we do not

count, *not that way,*" and she hid her face in her hands and wept.

Then Victor's voice. "Would you go if I told you Bernard W—— has gone?"

Eugene swung around. "But he hasn't."

"He was flown out this morning."

"I don't believe it." Victor said nothing. "Why should I believe you?"

Victor shrugged. "Why should I lie to you? I give you my word of honor that he was flown out this morning and is now safe in Zurich."

Again a battle between their eyes. "You swear it is true?"

"I swear it."

Eugene's shoulders sagged. The battle was over. "I won't be more papal than the pope," he said. "I'll go with you."

Sofie rushed to him, took his hand between hers, and kissed it, not trying to control her tears. He covered her hands with his free hand and said, "Don't, child, don't," and his voice broke.

He left with Victor. When the door had closed behind them Sofie stood quite still. Mother went up to her and put one hand on her arm. "Dearest," she said softly, as if arousing a sleepwalker.

Sofie lifted her shoulders in a gesture of helpless resignation and said, "There goes everything I hold dear."

Father went to bed at three. I knew, I could tell the time by my illuminated watch. I tiptoed downstairs. Mother and Sofie were playing bezique by the light of a lamp. It shone directly on Mother's curly black hair and her pretty little girl's face, sweetest when serious. She was sitting up very straight but Sofie's body expressed its weariness. She looked as if all life had been drained from her.

They played soundlessly. I tiptoed upstairs again. At six there was a long-distance telephone call for Mother, then

I could hear them talking on the stairs. Mother passed my room to go to hers. "Mother. Mother. Did they get there all right?"

"Yes, dear." She came in. "You shouldn't be awake. Oh, Robbie, darling, yes, they got there all right."

Next evening Victor came to our house. Sofie was in the library; she had been there all day. This was what I had been waiting for all day, too, and I stood in the dark recess of the kitchen stairs from where I could look into the room. I saw Victor go over to the couch where Sofie was sitting. She didn't make a move toward him, only looked up.

"He is safe?"

"Yes, my dear, he is safe."

"What will he do when he finds out Bernard hasn't left?"

"He knows. He found out when we arrived in Zurich."

Sofie leaned forward. "How did he react?"

"Very calmly. Almost as if he knew I had lied."

"He didn't know," said Sofie with great intensity. "He couldn't have known or he would never have gone."

"Has it ever occurred to you that he might have gone for your sake?"

She was silent for a moment, toying with the pleats of her dress. "You know him better than that," she said, and repeated Eugene's words with a bitterness his had lacked. "We don't count, *not that way.*" Then she looked up at Victor. "God bless you for what you have done for us," she said, and I would have given a great deal to see the expression on his face. But they did not touch each other.

eleven

SOON AFTER THAT SOFIE JOINED EUGENE IN SWITZERLAND, LEAVing a terrible gap in my life. Fortunately I was helped over it by a trip to Italy. Father went on business, Mother and I to sight-see, and the following September I did not return to Vienna. Father enrolled me in the New England prep school where Dick Evans taught Latin.

He left strict instructions that I was not to be permitted to lose the foreign languages I now spoke fluently, French and German. "God knows whether he'll want to follow in my footsteps and go into the diplomatic service," he told the headmaster, "but if he does, he'll need languages. You might as well send a deaf-mute as assign a diplomat to a country whose language he doesn't speak."

Dick Evans said to Mother, "I can't persuade you to let him board? I think you're making a mistake, Sylvia, by entering him as a day student. He'll be neither at school nor at home."

"Oh, Dick," said Mother, "I could only bring myself to do it if I knew he was living with Mother," and with a hand on his arm, "You'll keep an eye on him, won't you? He's liable to be homesick."

"For what home precisely, Sylvia, dear?" said Dick Evans, and Mother laughed.

But I was homesick. Left behind for the first time, I longed for wherever I was not. The idea of being settled in one place for the next four years appalled me and the fact that I was to spend my summers abroad was poor consolation. Like a small colossus, standing with one foot in the New World, the other just as deeply rooted in the Old, I was torn between the two continents, at home in both and neither, alien wherever I went.

I couldn't tell Grandmother I was homesick to be homeless again. She would have said, "Nonsense!" leaving me with every heartache intensified. With the Evanses it was different. They "understood" me, I decided, and spent a great deal of my free time at their house.

"In what language do you count, Robbie?" Dick Evans asked once.

"Well, sir, I started arithmetic with a French governess, so I count in French."

"In what language do you pray?" asked Harriet Evans.

"Oh, I pray in German. I learned my prayers from my German governess and she prayed to a very stern God."

"What language do you dream in, Robbie?" Of course it was Glory asking that.

I dreamed of Sofie, so I flushed and said, "That depends whom I'm with and where I am."

How explain to them the magical flip of the mind as it switched from one language to another, the sense of brilliance that came with French, the pompousness that accompanied German, the nonchalance good English brought with it?

"Please, Robbie, please like it here."

It was Glory, pleading for her milieu. "You'll see the apple orchard in bloom."

"And those goddam azaleas!"

"Oh, Robbie, your grandmother's azaleas are the most beautiful sight in the world. You've never seen anything like it."

So I saw them, spilling down a hillside like lava, in every shade from russet to purple. Consolation? Not for me.

What did I miss exactly? The four-star wonders in the Baedecker? Oh yes, I had ridden in a gondola in Venice, been received with Mother and Father at the Vatican, bathed in the Italian lakes, climbed in the Dolomites, seen a bullfight in Spain, and the gypsies dancing in a Granada cave dwelling. I had been through every major picture gallery in Europe and in the end, by sheer knowledge of the subject, grown to appreciate good pictures. There were snapshots of me with the Parthenon in the background, feeding the tame blue trout in a Swiss lake, with Dutch girls on the Zuydersee—we hadn't missed a trick. All within easy reach of each other, no vast distances to cross, we had moved from one exotic atmosphere to the other. For years I had been treated to a pageant with a ceaseless change of repertoire. Yet these were only the superficial wonders of Europe. They were not what I longed for. I was homesick for a way of life that arose out of them. I missed the underlying conflict, the clash of minds, the sense of strife, the insecurity. That, perhaps, most of all.

Instead of pictures of football heroes and the newest car models, the walls of my bedroom were hung with prints of my favorite works of art. "Who's that?" a boy from school asked once.

"That's a painting by Ter Borch," I explained. " 'The Man in Black.' The original's in the National Gallery in London. See the leather of his shoes, his cotton stockings, the velour of his hat, the satin . . ." I pointed them out as the guide had done. "You can tell what they are even though

they're all black. Not bad, huh?" But the fellow had never heard of Ter Borch and thought I was pretty queer because I had.

I didn't know how to follow the baseball scores, the World Series left me cold, I loathed having to study the grammar of languages I could speak more fluently than my masters, but I stuck to my school work, got high marks, and was unpopular.

During this first school year Glory walked in and out of my life, brief appearances that mean more to me now than they did then, as if there were such a thing as a reserve memory. Now she was tall for her age and lanky, wearing her straight hair braided on weekdays and pushed behind the ears with a broad ribbon on Sundays. There was nothing fancy about her appearance ever. The Evanses were thrifty, so she wore her older sisters' hand-me-downs. In the making over they somehow became plainer and they always looked home-made. But about things like that she didn't care. She never actually looked plain, although I suppose that's what she was in those days—sun-burned, freckled, tough-skinned, hardy, boyish, like a colt. Now she was more inhibited about offering to be with me, holding back a little, pretending a nonchalance that crumbled at once when I said, okay, let's do this or that. Then the radiance of her expression embarrassed me. I looked away from it but I took her along. And she hadn't forgotten Sofie. She asked about her.

There was no longer any need for elaboration. Actuality was sufficiently exciting even for my imaginings. I straightened out the story at last, giving Victor his true role and introducing Eugene, who shone in my mind now with equal brightness. Glory, I had decided, was old enough to know about such things as a "triangle."

I thought I was making a pretty good story of it until I saw the expression on her face. "But that's dreadful!" she said.

"Why?"

"She's married to Eugene. It's a fearful sin for her to love Victor, too."

This had never occurred to me. I thought at once of my father and had to admit that there any digression was a deadly sin, and these two sets of standards, one for him, another for Sofie, perplexed me. My perplexity must have shown in my face because Glory drove home her advantage.

"Just think," she said, "if your mother loved two people, or mine! It would spoil everything."

In my mind I had to concede she was right, although the idea of plain, homey Harriet Evans complicating her life by loving two people at once seemed absurd. But aloud I said airily, "Sofie doesn't have any children. That makes all the difference."

"It doesn't make any difference," said Glory. "When two people marry they belong to each other."

She opened her arms wide, then clutched them to her flat little chest abruptly as if pressing someone close to make him eternally one with her. Figuratively I could see myself squashed in that embrace and I had to laugh.

"I know a lot of marriages that aren't a bit like that," I said, thinking of some of my father's relatives in New York. "Don't you know anybody who's divorced?"

She reflected for a moment, then shook her head. "No, I don't. And I don't want to. The only true love is the love that lasts forever and ever."

"Sofie's does," I protested. "It's just that she loves two people." But Glory would have none of it. "I don't want to hear about Sofie again," she said, "ever."

So I lost my best audience, but it didn't matter. Going to school with American boys was making me reticent. I had learned not to talk any more about the emotional problems that absorbed me, with the result that they absorbed me less. Oddly enough I did not tell Glory about my savage encounter with Victor's daughter, Susanne. She noticed the

scar on my hand one day and asked me how I got it and I said indifferently, "It was a bite," and immediately saw Susanne's big blue eyes and her silky, white-blonde hair. The memory was singularly unpleasant and it was something I did not want to share, which made it somehow seem sinister.

"Some bite!" said Glory.

"It was a rat."

"A rat?" Her eyes were wide with horror. "Robbie! You might have got the burb . . . the bube . . . oh, you know, that plague that begins with a 'b.' "

"You mean the bubonic plague? Yes," I said loftily, "I suppose I might have, but I didn't."

I did let myself in for one thing that year and can't for the life of me imagine why. It happened quite simply, like this:

Harriet Evans, while she was over delivering jellies or something, mentioned to Grandmother that Glory was dancing in a recital (she'd started dancing school a while ago) and Grandmother said to *that* she would like to go.

"But it's just an amateur recital," Harriet Evans protested.

"Never mind," said Grandmother. "I'd like to see how she's doing," and to me she said, "I think it would be nice if you came along."

"Who—me?" My voice cracked at the idea, and I almost said, "Are you crazy?" but with Grandmother such lapses simply never came out. Instead I reiterated weakly, "Me? Go to a dancing recital?"

"I think it would please Glory a great deal if you did," said Grandmother, and I found myself saying meekly, "Okay," which left me open-mouthed. I don't know what it is about Grandmother, but that's the way she mostly gets things done.

It was held on the hottest day of the year, of course. Dancing recitals and musicales always are. Under my jacket my shirt stuck to my back and I unbuttoned my top collar but-

ton when Grandmother wasn't looking. The very thought of dancing made me wilt. But Glory looked cool. She did a solo in a green gauzy dress, her legs and feet were bare, and oh, Lord, she was clean! She was pink and white and smooth and pretty. Her shock of brown hair was washed and brushed and looked almost too heavy for her small face with its regular little features. There was gold in her hair where the light fell on it. I could swear I'd never seen it before, but then I'd never seen her so glossed up. Anyway, she was quite changed and not the least nervous, whereas I was sweating blood. That she would fall flat on her face seemed a foregone conclusion.

But she didn't. No denying it, she'd learned a lot since the day she'd moved her arms and hands so prettily to the singing of her brothers and sisters. It was as if she had discovered the rest of her body as well. Now there was a queenliness in the motions of her head and shoulders. She had a long, slender neck which was probably what gave this impression of stateliness, but it was strange to see in a child I had never dreamed could be commanding. She held herself proudly, like a conqueror, she looked indomitable, and she was very light.

"My goodness, she *is* good," Grandmother said to Dick Evans, who was sitting beside her. "Don't you think so?"

He was smiling in a troubled sort of way. "Alarmingly good," he said.

"Let's get out of here," I suggested, as soon as it was over. "I wouldn't be seen dead by any of the boys from school," but no, we had to go "backstage" and oh, Lord, the sweet sickly smell of flowers and hot little girls, their make-up running, their hair wild, and their goofiness.

Grandmother told Glory how good she was but Glory's eyes were fixed on me. "You do all right," I said. "What are you all painted up for? You've got plenty of color of your own."

"Not with footlights," she said gravely. "They make you look green."

Just then I turned green because there was a boy from school. We grinned at each other, sickly, and "What are *you* doing here?" I asked.

"Sister," said he.

"Same here," said I, "well, practically," and I gestured toward Glory.

"Terrible, isn't it?" said the boy.

"Pass the vomit bag," said I.

Meanwhile Grandmother was telling Harriet Evans that Glory should be trained properly if this was what she really wanted to do.

"It's what she wants to do, no doubt about it," said her mother, "and you know what a one-track mind she has." (I knew.) "But how could we manage it? I keep telling her it's impossible. The only thing they teach around here is this interpretive hop, skip, and jump. Oh, it gives them a nice feeling for their bodies, teaches them to move gracefully and all that, but there's nothing professional about it."

"There's a professional ballet school in Boston," said Glory.

"And how am I to get you to Boston?" asked her mother.

"I could live with Judy," said Glory.

"Your sister, just one year married, would love that," said her mother. "She's thankful to be out of the three-ring circus at our house. You're not wanted there."

"I could live with Aunt Belle."

Harriet Evans gave Grandmother a look that said, "See what I mean?" Aloud she said, "We should never have taken Glory to see the Ballet Russe when they came to Boston. That was our undoing."

twelve

THAT SUMMER GRANDMOTHER AND I JOINED MOTHER IN EUrope. She met us in Southampton with Sandra Evans, a college senior now. Sandra was doing a thesis on the English cathedrals and Mother had offered to chauffeur her because she thought the trip would be educational for me, too. Grandmother said she was beyond educating, and proceeded to Paris where she took up residence in a small hotel on the Square Maleherbe which she said held pleasant memories. I'd have given my eyeteeth to know what they were!

With Grandmother gone, the spice seemed lacking in our entourage. When, where, and how were we going to see Sofie, I wanted to know? At the end of our vacation, said Mother, in London. We would be meeting Father there, too, she added with a hint of reproach because I hadn't inquired about him.

So we were off. North, south, east, and west, past crum-

bling ruins and buildings in the exquisite perfection of the day they were built, standing isolated in the lush English countryside or in the hearts of towns and villages Mother and Sandra cooed over and found "quaint." Stonehenge gave me a brief thrill. For a happy moment I grew a beard and was a Druid until I found out they had not sacrificed human beings to their gods. To me the mighty stones looked as if humans would have been the only fitting sacrifice. So I retired to our hotel room and read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* which left me feeling moody.

At last we saw Sandra off on the boat in Southampton and headed for London. And the minute I laid eyes on Sofie I knew I could not possibly go back to the arid desert of the United States. I'd wangle it to stay in Europe or bust!

Of course I was more in love with her than ever, but now I was thirteen and my love was no longer the simple adoration of a year ago. I wasn't satisfied any more to worship from afar, now I craved her attention.

The first thing I did was set up a hue and cry about having to go to school in the States, careful to choose a moment when my father was not present. "You don't know what a bore it is," I said, standing in front of my two women, "nobody has any imagination. The kids have no real interests, they're childish. It's like going to kindergarten. They don't care about anything but sports or the movies or the radio. Nothing they do amuses me. I hate it!"

Sofie turned to Mother and said, "Don't you think he'd better stay in the States for a while until he's found his roots?"

"You mean not even come over in the summers?" I cried. "I'd die!" and could say nothing more or I would have burst into tears.

Sofie didn't even hold out her hand to me as she would have done a year ago. And I knew why. She had noticed that, for the first time, I wanted to touch her and had done

so consciously whenever I could. She had freed herself from my handclasp gently but firmly every time, responding to my halting efforts to be close to her with almost imperceptible withdrawal. Yet for me it was as noticeable as if she had pushed me away.

When it was accomplished she always smiled a little as if asking forgiveness for having had to hurt me. I knew very well what was going on in her mind. "Silly boy," she was thinking. "You must get over this infatuation and you will." And nothing could have hurt me more.

Now I turned on her, my unhappiness making me rude. "What do you know about America?" I challenged her. "You've never been there."

"Enough," she said, "to know that I would give ten years of my life if Eugene and I could live there," and there was a finality in her words that shut me up. If I was going to win my case, it would not be with her help.

This time Sofie did not implore Mother to avoid a discussion of politics; she talked of nothing else. Eugene was attending a political conference in London, that was why they were there; but she was mainly preoccupied with his intention to settle in Czechoslovakia, once his business in England was over. Why, why, why, she wanted to know? When they would be so much safer in Switzerland. But the Czechs had offered this man without a country sanctuary, something for which he would have had to beg on bended knee in Switzerland, and nothing else mattered to Eugene. He would have accepted even if it meant living on the brink of a volcano.

"And that's just what it is," said Sofie. "All this Nazi agitation for the return of the Sudetenland. The Czechs will be involved and we will be trapped again."

"And move on again," said Eugene.

Then, one night over dinner, Father came forward with a proposal. He thought he could arrange it, he said, for Eugene to receive a professorship at an American university.

I stared at my father, a worker of miracles suddenly, with this plan that would bring Sofie to me. I looked at her and saw in her face such radiance, I felt ashamed of my disavowal of my native land. Her hands were trembling and she clasped them as she turned to Eugene.

"Accept," she said, "oh, my darling, accept and let us live again."

"Run away again?" Eugene shook his head. "No."

"We need men like you," said Father. "We need the sort of enlightenment you can give."

"They need me here more," said Eugene.

Father gave him a long look. Then he said, "I wonder." But the brief struggle was over. No Victor, no lie would make Eugene save himself again.

Before we left London something happened to make me forget I had planned rebellion. It dispelled all enervating longings and brought Sofie and me close again in the old natural friendship. Mother received a letter with the familiar postmark of home and I gave it to her.

"From Hattie Evans," she said, taking it from me. "A bread and butter letter for the English cathedrals." But it wasn't. The news was something that made Mother look serious. "Oh, dear," she said softly, "Oh, dear."

"What is it, Mother? What's happened?"

Mother looked up at me. "It's Glory. She has infantile paralysis."

For the first time Glory reached to the very core of my heart. I could feel it twisting inside me. I could see those long, lively legs crippled by disease, that lightness grounded forever, and to me it was unbearable injustice.

I told Sofie, "And she wanted to dance!"

Sofie asked me to tell her more and suddenly I was talking my head off about Glory and Sofie was listening with an interest she hadn't shown since we had met again. As I talked she held out her hand to me and I grasped it, without any mawkish desire, the hand of a friend, of solace.

"She sounds like a wonderful child," Sofie said, when I had exhausted my topic.

"She is. There's something so plucky about her." I could feel myself redden as I said, "She's crazy about me, always has been."

"You conveyed that," said Sofie.

"I've never been able to do a thing about it," I protested.

"Why should you?" said Sofie. "It sounds like something to cherish."

thirteen

WHEN I SAW GLORY AGAIN, SHE WAS WEARING A BRACE ON HER right leg. She was ganglier than ever and very pale but on her funny, white little face there was a broad smile. It wavered for a moment when she saw me but then she managed to hold it steadfast.

"I don't have to wear it much longer," she explained, lifting the caged limb for my inspection. "What do you think

of it? Elegant, huh? And the doctor says ballet'll be the best thing in the world for me once I get out of this ol' thing. So I *am* going to live with Aunt Belle in Boston when they take this ol' thing off, and go to that ballet school I told you about every day!" Her eyes were big with excitement. "So it wasn't such a bad ol' infantile paralysis, was it?"

"Since when do you call everything ol'?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Do I?" and beckoned to me to lean forward; she wanted to whisper something in my ear.

"Nobody can hear us," I said. "You don't have to whisper," but she said, "This has gotta be whispered."

So she told me, in my ear. I said, "You're crazy! What if you fell off?"

"I won't fall off," she insisted. "My knees are okay. I can hang on with my knees. If you'll just lift me on, I swear I won't fall off."

"But when, if nobody's supposed to know?"

She was downstairs all day on the porch couch. "When I'm supposed to be napping, after lunch."

"I'll get hell for it."

"Don't swear, Robbie. You won't get into trouble. Not when they see I can. They'll be so pleased."

There was no resisting her drive, nor the hope that lay in her eyes. Next day, after lunch, I rode over to her house, leading the pony she'd always ridden. I walked the horses across the grass, not daring to risk the gravel path for fear I would be heard, and tethered them to a willow. Then I went in for Glory.

She was waiting for me, her closed eyelids quivering. Anybody could have told she was foxing.

I walked up to the couch. "It's me," I said.

Her eyes were open at once. "Did you bring them? I didn't hear you."

"Nobody was supposed to hear me, remember? I've hitched them to the willow outside."

She sat up, a little awkward with her weakened back and unwieldy leg. "How am I going to get there?"

"I'll carry you."

"This contraption weighs a ton."

"No, it doesn't. Anyway, you don't weigh so much."

I carried her, her thin arms tight around my neck, her face resting on my shoulder. Feeling very paternal about the whole thing, I hoisted her onto the pony. "Okay?"

"Okay."

"Your back all right?"

I saw her turn white. "Yes," she said, her voice a whisper. "My back's been all right all along," and she closed her eyes with a little frown as she remembered those whose backs would never permit them to sit upright again. This expression of suffering, including as it did her compassion for others worse off than she, is indelibly imprinted on my mind. There was nothing childish about it. She looked like an old woman.

We rode away into the still afternoon. Not until we were quite some distance from the house did it occur to me, "Do you realize we got off without a single person seeing us, and with that crew at your place?"

I meant not only her immediate family but the farm hands and house help. But she didn't seem to see anything astonishing in it. "God loves us," she said.

I looked at her dangling, steel-encased leg and at her determined little profile, straight, stubby nose, rounded forehead, prettily grooved chin, and thought, "If God doesn't love you, you brave little devil, He'd better begin right now."

How could I know it was the doctor's day? When we got back an hour later we were forewarned by Mr. Bennett, the old farmer who looked after the truck garden, good-natured Mr. Bennett who had got in Dutch once for letting Glory and me ride astride the headlights of the old Ford, hurtling

us into town at thirty-five miles an hour, Glory and I yelling like banshees, gripping the fenders for all we were worth, Mr. Bennett who had been as heartbroken as any member of Glory's family to see her crippled. "Gee," he said, "you're gonna get it."

He was sweating and his little eyes looked rheumier than ever. "I seen yer go," he said. "Didn't have the heart to stop yer. Now, doggone, wish I had. 'Cause they're waitin' fer ye." And they were, a phalanx of hostile faces. Mrs. Evans, Mr. Evans, the doctor, and six of Glory's brothers and sisters. Lord Almighty! I'd never felt the impact of that family so strongly before, not at Thanksgiving, not at Christmas, as in this unified disapproval.

Glory cried from afar, "Look, look, I can ride!" And, when she got closer, "Maybe I can't walk yet but I can ride."

The doctor stepped forward, took the reins in his hands, and looked at her, her head level with his now that she was sitting on the pony. "It got the color in your cheeks all right," he said. "Guess you ought to ride every day. Will you attend to that, young man?"

"Yes *sir!*"

"Only next time let us in on your therapy, will you?"

By Thanksgiving Glory was up and about but sometimes I wished her back on the couch again. It was harrowing to see her dragging her leg, as if her own healthy limb had been taken from her to be replaced by this grotesque appendage. But she was remarkably agile in spite of it; her arms and hands developed a compensatory strength. Never have I climbed so many trees as I did that fall, with her egging me on.

"Since when did you get this yen for climbing trees?" I asked, panting in the heights of a tall maple, her impish face looking up at me from a branch below.

"Since when it got difficult," she said, busily extricating some leaves and twigs that had become entangled in her brace. "I seem to be taking half the tree with me," she

muttered. And then, looking up at me, the inevitable remark that made me feel like a man, "But I couldn't do it without you."

They promised her she'd be out of the brace by Christmas. Thanksgiving I took the measurements of her foot. "What do you want it for?" she asked, looking down at me as I traced it, her underlip sucked in with the effort of standing still.

"It's a secret," I told her.

She was out of the brace, one leg a little thinner than the other, dragging it a little, when I gave her a pair of pink satin ballet slippers on Christmas Day. She gave them one look, lying in their open box, imbedded in tissue paper the way Grandmother had arranged them, and burst into tears.

"What's the matter? You don't like 'em?"

She flung herself on me. "Oh, Robbie, Robbie," she wailed, "I love you so."

I held her. Right then and there I realized that somehow or other I was saddled with her for life, that was just the way I thought of it, "saddled," as I was with my two arms and legs.

"Try 'em on," I said, disengaging myself from the flood of her embrace.

She put them on. They fitted. She held out her hand, I steadied her, and she stood on her toes, the knees bent and wobbly, the ankles swaying from side to side, but she stood on her toes.

"When I've learned a while," she said solemnly, "I'll be able to fly."

At that moment I didn't doubt it. If any of us poor mortals ever learned to fly, it would be Glory.

fourteen

THE FOLLOWING SPRING FATHER WAS CALLED TO WASHINGTON. Summer came, he and Mother were still there, so I was dispatched to a camp on Cape Cod from which I returned trailing sand from my luggage, with a good knowledge of sailing and athlete's foot.

"That's what comes of bringing up a boy with nursemaids," said Grandmother. "Didn't anybody ever show you how to keep your toes dry?"

"They were governesses," I said with dignity, "and I've always looked after my own toes."

By Christmas Father and Mother were in Europe again and, as usual, I tried to find consolation at the Evans house. With the whole family assembled, we had a range and volume of voices that made Christmas carols sound as good as in church, and the tree was of marvelous height and breadth. With so many hands to trim, it was laden with

decorations until the sprawling green branches barely showed.

There were evidences of every Evans child on it; you had only to look to know who had put up this or that. Glory's contribution were cardboard angels with real hair. She'd been saving hers after every cutting for months and they were formidable, these bushy-haired angels.

I had left my mark on the tree, too. With my fret saw I had cut moons, stars, and circles out of plywood. Glory had helped me paint them with mucilage and sprinkle them with sparklers. "They're beautiful," she said. "They're the loveliest thing on the tree."

But just because I was the only outsider in one large family I felt forlorn. Until Glory came over and slipped her hand in mine. She had a sixth sense that led to my broody mind like an antenna.

In an overflow of sentimentality, possible only at Christmas, I told her I didn't mind having her around, which left-handed compliment resulted in the radiance of expression that was always downright embarrassing when directed toward me.

"You're like a pup," I said hastily, anxious to tone down my admission, but it didn't dash her in the least.

"I must be full grown by now," she said. "You've had me an awfully long time."

She veiled her eyes suddenly with her lashes in a way that embarrassed me even more. There was something so womanish about it. I glanced around hastily to see if anybody was looking, but nobody was paying attention to us.

"You, full grown?" I said, and laughed.

"Well, both of us will be some day."

I felt pretty mature already if only she'd known it. My life had been a broadening one, I told myself, especially according to standards here in America, where I was living with boys who hadn't traveled, who were intellectually and culturally unschooled and whose ideas on love were

infantile. Love? They didn't know the meaning of the word. When it came to love scenes in the movies they squawked. Their minds and hearts wouldn't have been able to grasp a woman like Sofie. But the thought that Glory would grow up had never occurred to me until then. I'd better wean that pup, I told myself. It would never do to let Glory reach maturity with this one-track devotion to me.

During that vacation we skated a lot on the pond where we'd swum in the summer. "It's good for my leg," she said. She didn't drag her leg much any more. Whenever she did I'd tell her, and she'd stop at once. "Why do you drag it if you don't have to?" I wanted to know.

Her lips compressed, she said, "Because I want to attract attention, stupid."

"You do not."

"Then figure it out for yourself," she said, cutting a figure eight, and looked back at it. The side she'd drawn with her game leg was pretty wobbly. She shook her head at it, frowned and tried again, watching to see if the line got less fuzzy. Snow began to fall, not fall really. It was the light snow that on a windless day is tossed about in the air like the snow in a paperweight, lending everything a Christmas-card sort of enchantment. "Next time I see the doctor," said Glory, "if he doesn't say I can start ballet lessons, I'll die."

But she didn't have to die. The doctor let her go to live with Aunt Belle and start studying ballet that spring, so I saw a lot less of her. Now she only came home for occasional Sundays and vacations. She was absorbed with her work and I felt that the "weaning" was being accomplished nicely. So, I thought, was mine from the continent of Europe.

As the months went by my American roots grew deeper. I had insisted and got my way at last that my second year at school should find me a boarder. This meant that I took a greater part in extracurricular activities. I starred in the

school operetta, for instance. I was Elsie in Gilbert and Sullivan's "Yeoman of the Guard."

When we started rehearsals my voice was the clear, required soprano but as the weeks went by it began to change. Our coach, appalled at this possible disaster, set my songs in a lower key, still it was anybody's guess whether I'd get through the performance without braying like an ass.

But I did. And as I ran on stage in my Alice blue gown, the long tresses of my wig bouncing on my back, flowers in my hair, and sang, "'Tis done, I am a bride," in the most dulcet treble, I was ready to burst with relief. So was the coach. I could see him in the wings mopping his brow.

In the first row sat Grandmother, tears in her eyes, shoulders heaving, but when she took her handkerchief from her face I saw it was laughter that held her convulsed, not the poignancy of Jack Point's death. When I reproached her afterward for her lack of cooperative emotion she was convulsed all over again.

"Don't be cross, Robbie," she said. "You were wonderful, really you were; all of you did beautifully. It was just . . ." and she had to stop to laugh again, "it was just your feet and hands and . . . and your elbows. They're so large! I mean, compared with a girl's," and she was off again.

That same year I helped our school win a debate against Harvard freshmen. As the only prep school sophomore on the team—the rest were juniors and seniors—I covered myself with glory. The topic was the Spanish Civil War and our side was for intervention against Franco.

Among boys of eighteen and nineteen my political knowledge was unassailable. None of them had had my schooling or a man like Eugene to draw upon for political argument.

"Let us discuss the subject," I began my speech, "not on the foundation of our prejudices but on a factual basis, not from the standpoint of what we *want* but what our opponent *needs*," and saw my English teacher's mouth drop open as these pearls of Eugene's wisdom, word for word, dropped

from my fifteen-year-old lips. As a result of the debate I was assigned to do a regular political editorial for the school paper.

I discovered that sports were not such a bad form of recreation after concentrated mental work. I didn't take up baseball, I'd had my experience with the reformatory boys and it had sufficed; but I went out for lacrosse which was just coming back in vogue. It reminded me of *pelota,* it required skill as well as brawn, and I was good at it. I won my letter, our team received special mention in the *New England Handbook of Athletics,* and my unpopularity was on the wane.

This was helped along a great deal by the fact that I stopped spinning yarns about Europe, not because I was writing them, I was simply thinking less of that other part of the world which had once meant so much to me. The font of my imagination dried up. I sat back like the others and let myself be entertained in a country that had mastered the art of entertainment like no other. I listened to the radio while I did my homework; movies and sport events began to crowd out the opera, theater, and concerts. The form of amusement that demanded no mental cooperation took precedence over the one that required thought. I lost the urge to entertain others, even myself, and I was happy. The carefreeness of which Mother had once told held me cradled in its pleasant arms. Until the spring of 1937, when I suffered a setback.

Again my snooping tendencies let me in for a shock; this time nothing overheard but letters read that were not mine. I was at Grandmother's house for the week end and I had gone up to the attic to look for my bathing trunks. Grandmother had said if I was crazy enough to want to go bathing in an ice-cold pond, however hot the day, I could get it out of mothballs myself.

Next to the cedar chest marked "Robert" into which my winter things went in the spring and my summer clothes in

the fall, I discovered a small chest with a fancy wrought-iron lock. It looked as if it might once have held pirate treasure. Scraps of old velvet still clung to it and the material had been nailed on with hobnails that were black now. I rubbed one with my finger and the brass gleamed through. The lock was rusty and open so I opened the chest.

On top lay a bundle of letters, yellow with age, held together by a rubber band. When I picked them up, the rotted rubber broke and fell to the ground. I opened a few. They were love letters from Dick Evans to my mother and there were snapshots of him, some taken with my mother. In them he looked quite different from the Dick Evans I knew, like a younger brother or older son, handsomer than any of his sons and not like a parson at all.

Suddenly the attic was hot and airless. I had to get away or suffocate. I stuffed the letters in my pockets and went downstairs and out to a solitary clearing in the woods where I read them all. Then I burnt them, burnt all that wonderful poetry in prose that had poured forth from Dick Evans' heart twenty years ago, before I was born, before my father and mother had married, so there was nothing wrong about it, was there? Yet it burned in my consciousness like the deadliest sin. Glory had been quite right on the day she had rejected the love of more than one so vigorously. Everything was spoiled.

I sat on a tree stump and watched the thin blue thread of smoke spiraling up from the ashes of Dick Evans' love for my mother, but I couldn't stamp their impact out of my heart. Every intimacy I had ever noticed between them, a hand laid on an arm, smiles exchanged, a glance of affection or mutual understanding, were translated into something damning. My mind was a jabbing thing, lunging in all directions. What had my mother's letters to Dick Evans been like? it demanded. Were they reposing somewhere in a secret hiding place in the Evans house? Had she loved him?

No, she hadn't. Of course not. His letters had been full of

frustration and persuasion, the letters of an unrequited love. He had said he couldn't live without her. Yet he had, quite happily. Or was he secretly an unhappy man? No. The Evans home radiated a harmony that could be based only on happiness.

So love, such wild, demanding love, could fade away and die, leaving the heart whole and content? A most depressing thought. I wanted an immortal love, a love that must possess or kill. Robbed of the possibility of a broken heart I felt bereft. A dope, that's what I was, I thought, kicking savagely at the underbrush, a goddam dope!

Then a chaotic thought: I might have had Dick Evans for a father. That made my father suddenly the most attractive man in the world. I wouldn't have exchanged him for a thousand Dick Evanses.

Sunshine filtered through the trees and the foliage was veiled by the light blue haze of heat, but I was sitting in the shade where the sun had had no chance as yet to dispel the coolness of dawn and dew. And I longed for someone to talk to about this, somebody who could straighten me out. Sofie, I thought, and missed her as I hadn't missed her in months.

"I see you didn't go in bathing after all," Grandmother said that evening. "You've got more sense than I thought."

I didn't tell her I hadn't even looked for my bathing trunks. They were still reposing in moth balls.

"How did Mother and Father meet?" I asked instead, in a way that must have seemed abrupt to Grandmother, but it was an opening phrase I'd thought out carefully. No use asking about Dick Evans directly, it would only have aroused suspicion. The circuitous approach was the right one and it brought me to my goal much sooner than I had expected.

Grandmother was reading. Usually, during this after dinner hour she was alone, and she had looked a little surprised when I had joined her instead of doing my home-

work or going outdoors to enjoy the last few minutes of daylight. Now she put down her book and took off her reading glasses, just as if she knew she was in for a session with me.

"How did your mother and father meet? Well, Dick Evans brought your father to the house. In those days Dick was your mother's beau."

Just like that. And me sitting there in a stew, the little I'd been able to eat giving me indigestion already. "He was your mother's beau," just like that, without flushing. Her mother and her son and the same piece of news affecting both so differently.

Maybe if I got Grandmother to talk about it I could assimilate some of her aloofness. But did I want that? No, by heck, I didn't. I didn't want to exchange her calmness for the chaos in my mind. Dull was her lack of involvement compared with my heartfelt affinity to the thing. I wanted to boil, I wanted to seethe, and I simply had to know all. Not that I'd ever know all from Grandmother but I might get a start. Research definitely began here.

"Oh. Were they friends?" I asked, pleased at how well I could match her easygoing tone in spite of my agitation.

"They were classmates at Harvard," said Grandmother. "Dick was there on scholarship, your father, of course . . . wasn't. Yes, they were friends, but they were very different," and by her tone I could tell that, in those days at any rate, Dick Evans had had the edge over Father in her affections, poorer though he might have been.

Of course in this house money wouldn't have made any difference. It would in the home of my New York Grandmother where wealth had been more recently acquired and was, therefore, more highly thought of. My New York relatives lived to the hilt of their incomes, but this house was ruled by the truest elegance, the unobtrusive wealth that went back centuries, well, perhaps not centuries, but that was the impression it gave. This house had a tradition of wealth. Grandmother's people had been bankers in England

and bankers over here. Mother and Grandmother had been able to waive the question of money when it came to choosing a mate, not only because they didn't need it but because they had been wealthy so far back it had ceased to mean much.

"Well, how did Dick Evans meet Mother?" I wanted to know.

"He worked here one summer," said Grandmother, "at the Paul Revere. I went there sometimes with your mother—she was sixteen at the time—and Dick waited on us, not too well. I don't think he was paying attention to what he was doing when he waited on your mother and me. He never could get the order straight," and she chuckled.

"You mean he was a *waiter?*"

"Well, it wasn't his profession. He did it one summer and made enough money to carry him through the following semester, which was quite a feat considering how often he took your mother out that winter."

Strange country! Would it never cease to surprise me?

"But they didn't get married."

"Of course they didn't get married. You know that. They weren't even engaged."

"Father appeared on the scene and put a crimp in it."

"Yes. That's a good way of putting it."

The story was getting terribly trite. No duels, no tragedies, no weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. I felt a sense of outrage.

"I suppose she was never in love with him?" I said, giving it the intonation of a question.

Why couldn't Grandmother answer promptly? Instead she looked at me, then out the window where the sun had just set, leaving the sky dove gray with mackerel clouds spread across it, a motionless curtain. Not that she saw what lay outside. She was deep in thought, tapping her glasses against her upper lip, pensive at the wrong time. "Was she?" I asked again, urgency in my tone.

"I don't know," she said. "They got along very well. They had much more in common than your mother and father."

"Then why didn't she marry Dick Evans?"

"I think the relationship with your father was more exciting," said Grandmother with a little smile.

"You mean it's better to marry somebody exciting?"

"Heavens, no!" said Grandmother, "that isn't what I mean at all."

"Well, then, whom should you marry?"

"If you're lucky enough to be able to recognize him, then the one person in the world who was meant for you, of course."

I looked up at the portrait of the man Grandmother had married. He had died when Mother was only six. He hadn't had a penny. She had met him on a Colorado trip with her family (two older brothers besides herself). He'd been curing for tuberculosis. When he had been pronounced well they had married, after an engagement that had lasted six years.

He had had no profession at all. He'd painted a little, not badly, mostly scenes around the country here. Several hung in Grandmother's bedroom and there was one of Mother lying in her crib, the only oil painting (the rest were water colors) and that hung in the study just over Grandmother's head now.

It might have been anybody's baby, the features were blurred, but the picture was pretty because the baby was lying under a tree bearing the small fresh yellow leaves of spring and the sun was shining through the leaves, giving everything a dappled glory. He'd got that effect very well. Even now, with the day fading, the sunlight in the picture still seemed to give forth light, and the tremulous smile of the infant made it look happy, as if it had been greatly loved.

I'd always thought it rather odd that a strong, self-reliant woman like Grandmother should have married a physically weak man. Not that the face in the portrait showed weakness.

On the contrary, it was the picture of a very dashing fellow with a ruddy complexion who looked as if he had never known a day's sickness in his life. A very young man. Well, of course, all of them had been young once. But this face looked as if it had never been meant to age and, of course, it never had. A chill and relapse of his former illness had killed him in his thirties.

"Did you?" I asked.

"Did I what?"

"Find the person who was meant for you?"

Now she looked up at the portrait and there was no more indifference in her expression. It was alight with the same glow that had been on Sofie's face when she had come to meet Victor. There it was again, this time on the face of an old woman, the glow that always filled me with envy and with a sense of being shut out.

"Yes I did," she said. As if it had been necessary to say anything after looking like that!

"Do you think Mother did?"

"Robbie," said Grandmother, "don't you have any homework to do?"

Class dismissed. Research ended.

"Well, how did Dick Evans and Harriet get together? Why do you suppose they married?"

"Oh, Harriet was your mother's closest friend. They grew up together and when Dick Evans came along they made a threesome of it. They were like brothers and sisters. Robbie, what's come over you? One doesn't probe into people's affairs like this."

She didn't know me. "How are you going to manage your own life if you don't?" I asked.

"Certainly not by encroaching on other people's privacy. Now get your work done, there's a good boy."

So I went upstairs, burdened with the love life of my relatives. It seemed that a lot of people married their "brothers and sisters" instead of the grand passion of their

lives and that these marriages turned out very well, a thought that was abhorrent to me. I wanted the grand passion, I was determined to have it, the idea of marrying a "sister" bored me to death. Just wait, I told myself, one of these days I'll confront Mother with the whole mess. Then we'll get to the bottom of it, then there won't be any more of this goddam nonchalance about things that should be earthshaking.

Somehow I managed it so that I didn't have to go over to the Evans house again that spring and when I met Dick Evans in the corridors at school I couldn't look him in the eye. I was going to have him for Latin next term. Well, I wouldn't. I'd run away from school first.

fifteen

WHEN MOTHER CAME OVER THAT SUMMER TO FETCH ME, I WAS still in a belligerent mood. She didn't help matters by putting a hand to her lips in a gesture of consternation when I greeted her and saying, "Robbie! Your voice! It's changed!"

"What did you expect?" I boomed in my best basso profundo.

"Oh dear," she said, "not so *soon!*"

"It's been that way for ages," I told her. (It had changed just two and a half months before.) "Mother, I'm fifteen!"

She clucked her tongue and said, "Dear me, so you are."

It was even worse when she saw my room at school. If I'd known what her reaction would be, I'd never have taken her up. Knowing she was coming, I'd picked some of the house master's best peonies and stuck them in a milk bottle and taken down all the signs on the walls that read, "Hangover under construction," and "Blow on this circle. If it turns blue you've had one too many." The torn part of the bedspread was tucked under the mattress, the drawers to my bureau were closed, so was the closet. (God help anybody who opened them.) Then the fag of clearing the stairs and corridors of seminude boys coming from or going to the showers.

I might have spared myself the trouble. Mother had no eye for my efforts at interior decoration. All she saw was the scuffed furniture and the dust mice in the corners. "It's perfectly ridiculous to expect you boys to keep your rooms clean yourselves," she said. "You can't possibly do it."

"It's clean," I muttered, cursing the fact that I'd forgotten to take down the Petty calendar inside the closet door. (I'd traveled quite a way from Ter Borch.) But that didn't seem to worry her so much as the chaos of my drawers—of course she went through them—the fact that so many of the knobs were off, the ink stains on my shirts, the shorts I'd used to clean my shoes, and the "handkerchief of the month," a round, hard bulge in my pocket.

"Oh, come on, Mother," I protested, "this is a man's world. Just resign yourself to it. Be casual."

"What's that?" She was pointing to a small mirror that I'd attached to the low ceiling at a fory-five-degree angle.

"That's so's I can see when I'm parting the back of my

hair." And Mother laughed. She laughed until she almost cried. A year before I wouldn't have minded, now I was incensed.

"Why did you come for me anyway?" I wanted to know. "God knows I'm old enough to cross over alone."

"I wanted to see Grandmother," said Mother. "I have important things to discuss with her."

She certainly did. She and Grandmother conferred together for hours which suited me fine. Because I soon discovered that I was as embarrassed with my mother as with Dick Evans. She didn't seem to notice it, which annoyed me and made it quite impossible to do any "confronting" then. After all, you can't barge into somebody so wrapped up in a mood of innocence, at any rate, not if you're fond of them. You have to pave the way. And there was no opportunity for that. Mother was preoccupied with what was on her mind and I was able to grasp the gist of it because she and Grandmother talked of little else.

Apparently Father wanted to come back to the States for good and have his own law firm again. Grandmother was being asked to help financially, which she seemed pleased to do because it would bring us home. "Where you'll stay put for a while," was how she expressed it.

This didn't suit me at all. I was ready to move on again and if Father gave up the work that kept him abroad and settled down in this dismal country, I saw little chance of returning to a continent that held no disillusionment, that gleamed in my mind once more as the most desirable Eden.

"Why does he want to give up his work?" I protested. "It's the most interesting work in the world. See how it gets you around. It's . . . it's like driving a gigantic troika with a hundred horses, all different nationalities . . ."

Now I was really working up to my theme, but Mother's wry smile dampened my ardor. "I don't think your father sees it quite like that," she said. "I think he's a little homesick for his native land. We're not getting any younger,

Robbie, and I've noticed lately that his pace is slowing down. For which I am thankful. But don't worry about it. He's come to no final decision yet. My talks with Grandmother have paved a way he may never want to take. He is fascinated by diplomacy, always has been. Personally, I can't see him turning his back on it."

This boat trip was different from any other. It was no pleasure cruise because I was in no mood for pleasure. Worst of all, there were a lot of chattering girls my age and at fifteen, looking, I hoped, every bit of eighteen, I was definitely eligible.

Mother and I sat at the captain's table. I had a tuxedo. Time was certainly marching on. But nothing irked me so much as the obvious efforts of these young ladies. Simpering, coy, or with the direct approach of pure sex, they left me cold. All I wanted to do was snub them. Where Sofie had put me in the mood for love, Dick Evans seemed to have put me off it for life!

Never had I been so glad to see my father, never had my heart felt so warm toward him and, as if he sensed it, there was a new warmth in his response to me. Now I was almost as tall as he, he didn't have to look down at me any longer. Perhaps he'd never been cut out for that.

"Fifteen," he said, as if it couldn't be true, but coming from him I didn't resent it.

"Yes sir," I said.

"Good," he said. "Unlike your mother, I'm glad to see you grow up." And he gave me another long look. "I'm taking three weeks off. We're going to tour the Alps, all of 'em." And by golly, we did!

I don't think we missed one Alpine pass, French, Swiss, or Italian. It was as if Father simply could not take the valley route if there was a mountain to scale. We didn't even miss the unpaved ones that cut through the Savoy Alps, dirt roads, too narrow for two cars to pass. If you met a car, the one

going up had the right of way, the one descending had to back up to the nearest widening with an unguarded drop hundreds of feet to the valley below. The summits of these French Alpine passes were bleak and treeless, with a high wind clawing at us. Wind that has nothing to play upon but your own body can be mysterious, like an invisible power. In my dreams I still sometimes find myself on an eerie plateau, lost and alone, with this wild, undeterred wind attacking me.

On the highest pass of them all, the Swiss Stilfser Joch, our road zigzagging as we ascended, making our knees feel wobbly, our hearts beat fast and a little shallow, Father let me take the wheel. I'd driven Grandmother's station wagon and the Evans truck for over a year, still Mother was worried.

"Let him," said Father, "just this once. You pray, Sylvia, and God'll look after us."

Mother prayed all right. In the rear mirror I could see her sitting with her eyes closed tight, like Glory listening to my tall stories. But I didn't look at her much. My eyes were fixed on the wide white road winding its way up, up, up, like a ribbon of toothpaste coiled on the landscape.

"Foot off the gas pedal just before the curve," Father shouted, "and now step on it. Yes, *in* the curve. That's the way to take them. Gently now, only as much gas as you need. We've got miles of this ahead of us, do you want her to boil? Okay, see if you can get this one right. Now. Hang onto your back teeth, kids, here we go! Good. You didn't have to change gear. Like a veteran," and he looked back at Mother whose eyes were still closed. "Oh, come on, Sylvia, relax."

"Piloting must be like this," I yelled. "In another second we'll take off into the blue."

"I hope not," said Father, crouching low in his seat. Maybe he was praying, too.

"They sure know how to bank their roads," I bellowed. "It's like riding a roller coaster. We couldn't go over the edge if we tried."

"Do me a favor," said Father, "don't try," and his smile said quite plainly, "Not so grown up after all." But I didn't care. If exhilaration like this meant being young, I never wanted to grow old.

We were going to meet Sofie and Eugene in Château-d'Oex. As we neared the place, the breath-taking Alpine roads could distract me no longer from the thought that I was going to see Sofie again. I found it difficult to concentrate on the conversation and the scenery palled to my eyes. When the question arose whether we should dine before reaching Château-d'Oex or wait until we got there, I burst out with, "Oh, don't let's stop now."

Mother smiled. "I believe you're so anxious to get to Sofie you don't want to eat."

I was. "After all," I said, "I haven't seen her for two years."

And I was not disappointed. When I saw Sofie, the American years fell from me, school was a dream, Glory a child I had played with once. When I saw Sofie, I had come home.

sixteen

SHE HAD FADED A LITTLE. THE BACCHANAL COLORING WAS GONE and a new, sad calm had replaced the old impetuousness. She looked resigned and in her resignation helpless, and this I liked. It made me feel that some day I might be called upon to help her over more than a flight of stairs, that in some way I might yet be a hero in her eyes.

Over dinner Father brought the conversation around to Victor. "I met him in London a few weeks ago," he said. "One of our big oil companies is going to build tankers in Europe and Victor was trying to negotiate a deal. He wanted me to influence the powers that be to get the order for a German shipyard. Since when is he mixed up with German shipping?"

"Since his wife came into her inheritance," said Eugene. "She comes from an old shipping family and he manages her affairs as well as his own. What did you tell him?"

"I turned him down. I said I'd negotiate no business with Hitler's Germany. He said if I didn't, some other influential

American would and, damn it, he's right. Oh Lord, how I hate some of the company we keep."

For the second time I heard him say the words and I heard them again when we continued to trade with Stalin's Russia, and when we recognized Franco's regime in Spain and, in much the same phraseology, when one of his best friends came back from China with a thorough knowledge of conditions there. And suddenly I thought I knew why he wanted to retire. Not because he was homesick or tired but because he didn't like some of the company we kept.

Eugene said thoughtfully, "I don't let Victor disturb me. He is true to himself, even as you and I."

"Why do you always defend him?" Sofie asked angrily.

"Because I can look away from myself when I think of him," said Eugene with a little smile. "When we discuss Victor it is only fair to move into the world in which he moves and judge him by its standards."

"I would rather not move into Hitler's world," said Sofie, "not even for a contemplation of Victor."

Eugene shook his head. "You don't see Victor clearly. He hasn't moved into Hitler's world. Hitler has moved into his, the world of finance and big industry, where there are no boundaries. It embraces our entire planet. The only passport required is money, in any currency. It is the world where the Hitlers never quite achieve power, so far the only impregnable world."

There was a short silence, then Sofie rose abruptly. "I have eaten too much," she said. "Who will go for a walk with me?"

She looked at Mother, but Mother's lids were heavy. "I've not only had too much to eat," she said, "but too many changes of altitude." She put a hand to her head. "I have a little headache and if I'm to be worth anything tomorrow I will have to go to bed."

"I'll walk with you," I said, and Sofie said, "Fine."

The ground was hard under our feet and Sofie set a man's

swift pace with her long legs and pent-up energy and troubled mind. The moon was up and its light was on her face. It wasn't smooth now as on that Riviera night but drawn with the fine lines of chronic anxiety. She asked questions about our trip and I told her about the fascination of driving Alpine passes and how I couldn't wait to have my license to come back and drive all of them myself. "Oh, Robbie," she said, "you won't come back to drive them. By the time you have your license we will be at war."

"Not Switzerland," I protested. "Switzerland is always neutral."

"Maybe not Switzerland," she said, "but it will be surrounded by an impassable inferno. Wait and see."

I looked at the peaceful scene, at the mountains outlined black against a gray-blue sky, hills, fields, stone, and darkened chalets illumined by the light of the moon as if it had been day, and I wondered by what unholy method man had managed to remove himself so far from this natural harmony as to make war possible. Or do I think thus now in my recallings? Not that it matters. Then as now man mars the scene.

I looked at Sofie. She didn't mar it. And I discovered that I didn't want to touch her any longer. All I wanted now was to talk! So I told her about Dick Evans' love letters to my mother.

Before I'd got even halfway started on what I had to say, Sofie interrupted me. "Do you mean to say you opened and read letters that weren't yours?"

Suddenly it was a crime, what I had done, and I could feel myself turning crimson. "Well," I floundered, "they were awfully old letters," but it sounded feeble and I wished to heaven I'd kept my big mouth shut and my troubles to myself.

"All right, all right," I said, after a long lecture on man's inalienable right to his privacy, "I promise. I swear I won't read what isn't mine to read again as long as I live, so help

me God," and that vow I have kept and my curiosity, for the greater part, seems to have gone with it because I haven't even wanted to poke my nose into business that wasn't mine since then.

"But now tell me one thing," I demanded. "Did she ever talk to you about him?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"How can I tell you things that were told me in confidence? Would you ever confide in me again if I did?"

"But good heavens, this is my mother!"

"Dick Evans didn't love your mother. He loved a woman called Sylvia."

The argument was maddening. "Well, she's my mother now and I have a right to know because she's mine."

"Oh, oh, oh," said Sofie, "is she? Are you hers?"

Was I?

"I hope not," said Sofie, sparing me the perplexity of a reply. "Because we belong to ourselves, all of us. I think a great many of the world's troubles can be traced to the source of man's possessiveness."

She wasn't being any help at all. She could deny me the excitement that came with a knowledge of other people's private lives, always so much more fascinating than what they chose to show to the world, but when she tried to rob me of the right to own, I was enraged. She was smiling happily, however, pleased with herself. "Why don't you ask her about it some time?" she said.

"Ask her? How can I?" Forgotten was the fact that once I had planned a "confrontation" in style. Now the very idea of it scared me stiff. "Think how embarrassed she'd be."

"Oh, I don't think she would."

"Yes, she would," I insisted, "and if she wasn't, she should be." It sounded all wrong grammatically but Sofie knew what I was driving at.

"We grow up believing that our mothers belong to us,"

she said. "I suppose it's a mind residue left over from infancy. And it is always a shock to think of her as a woman, even in love with one's father, much less with another man."

"But she wasn't in love with Dick Evans," I said hastily, "she . . . ."

Sofie laid her hand on my arm, slowing her pace. "When you can think dispassionately of your mother loving somebody beside yourself, you have grown up."

The road led over the crest of a hill. Suddenly a small village lay below us, most of its chalets already dark. But its only imposing building, a medieval castle on the crest of a hill directly opposite, was brilliantly lighted and this brought forth an exclamation of surprise from Sofie.

"I didn't know Mark was here," she said. "Did you know that a wealthy American bought the castle a few years ago? He is married to an old friend of mine. But they are hardly ever there. Oh, Robbie, I know Sepp, the concierge. We'll ask him to let us in. I'll show you the little chalet Mark bought and had moved into the courtyard. It is the most exquisite example of Swiss woodcarving you can see."

"Can we do that when he's there?"

"Of course, the place is tremendous. Nobody knows at one end what's going on at the other. And if we do run across them there'll be no harm done. I'll have to call on them anyway." She seemed pleased as a child at the whole idea.

The steep hill gave us momentum. Even I was a little breathless when we had climbed the next one and reached the high wrought-iron gate. Sofie rang the bell.

A bent old man came out of the lodge and peered at us. "Sepp, it is I, Sofie . . ." She used her maiden name. "Don't you remember me? I came here often when the old folks used to live here."

He remembered her then and opened the gate, his gnarled hands trembling, the tears of pleasure in his small

eyes as he kissed her hand. It was quite evident that the memories she brought with her were very dear to his heart.

"I have a young American with me," said Sofie, introducing me, "and I would like to show him the little chalet." The old man made a derogatory gesture with his hand. "I know," said Sofie, turning to me. "Sepp thinks it was a travesty to move it a hundred miles away from its natural setting. They don't go in for moving houses over here."

"Doesn't the *gnaedige* want to see the Herrschaften first?" the old man asked. "There's a party going on. They would be so happy . . ."

"Heaven forbid!" said Sofie. "I didn't even know they were here and I'm hardly dressed for a party. I'll call on them properly one of these days but not now."

Sepp led us around the building to a courtyard, cobbled and inclined toward a gutter in the center, a reminder of days when there had been no American installed plumbing. In the center stood a small Swiss chalet, like an oversize doll's house.

I didn't get to see the inside that night because, as we crossed the courtyard, two ladies entered at the other end through a stone arch. Sofie stopped, a hand on my arm, and whispered, "Heavens! What now?" But Sepp walked on, not noticing that he had left us behind.

It was too late for flight. Already there was a smile of recognition on the face of the one woman but the other looked definitely hostile. She reminded me of someone . . . I looked at Sofie. Her face was closed against intrusion, the eyes were stern, the lips twisted in a formal smile.

"Sofie . . . !" the friendly woman cried and strange, I thought, that she, too, should use Sofie's maiden name. "Welcome! Welcome! Where have you come from? Dropped like manna from heaven?" Both hands were on Sofie's shoulders and she kissed Sofie on both cheeks. "I can hardly believe my eyes!"

Sofie introduced the vivacious lady as the wife of the

fabulous owner of this fabulous place. She called her "Sidonie," and explained, "We went to school together. Oh dear, how long ago that seems!"

"When I see you," said Sidonie, "it seems like yesterday."

"Heaven forbid, that we should still be so close to that painful stage of our development, and I am not referring to school," said Sofie, and both of them laughed.

Then Sofie turned to Sidonie's companion whose inimical expression had not changed. To my surprise, for I thought she did not know the stern woman—there had been no greeting—she said, "Meta, I want you to meet a young American friend of mine," and introduced me to Victor's wife.

She was tall and thin, this unfriendly woman, and she held herself very straight. She had on an evening gown of exquisite material, I could tell by the way it gleamed in the moonlight and fell in soft folds to her feet. But sewn into the neckline as I am sure no designer had intended was a choker collar of fine lace. I hadn't seen a woman wearing a collar like that since . . . and then I knew of whom she reminded me. Of my German governess. And at once the terror of that brief regime overwhelmed me.

Her greeting to Sofie was barely audible, to me she inclined her head. Meanwhile Sidonie was insisting that we come in. She was chattering. Never had I heard a woman talk so fast.

"I didn't think we were coming here, either," she was saying. "We arrived only yesterday. But Victor . . . yes, he is here . . . he wanted to meet a friend of Mark's. Inconspicuously. Oh, you know, all these intrigues. We are living in medieval times. That's what I am always telling Meta who seems to like them. But then, whatever happens, she only gets richer. Really," she turned to me, "Meta can confound your legend that only American streets are paved with gold. For her the streets are paved with gold even in postwar Germany."

She laughed, then went right on with the flood of her

news. "It was Victor who suggested we meet here and now I am glad. I had forgotten how peaceful it can be, peaceful and exhilarating. This wonderful air! But the men are closeted in the solarium and Meta and I are bored to tears. Come in, *do* come in. I will drag them out of hiding. Mark will forgive me because he will be so pleased to see you."

But Sofie was not to be persuaded. "I will call tomorrow," she said.

"Is that a promise?"

"It is. And I will bring Robbie's father and mother with me. Mark will be interested in meeting Robbie's father."

"What is your name, young man?" Sidonie turned to face me. "Let an old hostess who ought to know better confess that names go in one ear and out the other. Surnames. Now 'Robbie' I shall never forget, but the rest?"

I told her. She knew who my father was and to what country he was accredited at the time. While we continued to exchange pleasantries, Meta was looking angrily into space. "How is Victor?" Sofie asked softly.

"Thank you," Meta replied tersely, "Victor is well."

"And the children?"

Now Meta's voice betrayed her exasperation. "I have sent Huberta to Rostock with Fräulein von Werthenau. She will live there for some time with my parents." And, with a piercing look that glanced off Sofie as if it had never been launched, "She is getting highly emotional and very difficult to handle. I felt that living in a north German atmosphere for a while would have a sobering effect on her."

"I'm sure it will," said Sofie, the trace of a smile on her lips which seemed to nettle Meta even more.

"I can't help but believe you encouraged her in this infatuation," she said.

"You must believe what you choose," said Sofie. "Personally I am very glad you sent her away. The situation was becoming quite difficult to handle. But I am sorry Fräulein von Werthenau went with her."

Meta frowned. "I can't imagine what you mean by that. Fräulein von Werthenau is an exemplary woman. We have known her for years. She was with a German officer's family before she came to us. We considered ourselves very lucky to get her. I couldn't have brought up the children without her."

"Then I must be mistaken," said Sofie. "But when I asked after your children I was not thinking of Huberta in particular. How are the others?"

Meta, tight-lipped, entered into a hasty account of the activities of the four boys. Floris, I noted, was in Germany, not banished but from choice. This didn't surprise me. I felt he'd make a splendid Nazi. But there was no mention of Susanne. When Meta got to the end of the boys, she shut up like a clam and Sofie didn't question her further.

Just then I missed something Sidonie had said—she had been talking to me all the time—and I had to ask her to repeat it. She laughed and said, "You are busy listening to Sofie's conversation with Meta, aren't you? So am I." She tapped me on the shoulder with a small fan she was carrying and brought her face close to mine. "When you are as old as I and as experienced socially, you will be able to listen to all the conversations going on around you and conduct a quite brilliant one of your own at the same time. All it needs is practice."

She and Sofie laughed as if this were a huge joke. I had to laugh, too, but Meta's expression remained relentlessly grim.

"I'd like to know how Susanne is," I said. "The last time I saw her she was hugging a gash in her forehead."

There was something wrong about the remark. The moment's silence that followed it was rather like the silence after a sharp explosion. Then Meta said, "And how do you happen to know Susanne?"

I gave a version of our meeting that I thought suitable for the occasion. It made no mention of Susanne's vicious attack

on me. "Oh," said Meta, "so you are the American boy who inveigled her into skiing in the woods. I thought your name sounded familiar. Robbie." She repeated it harshly, as if she were about to pronounce sentence on me. "Susanne is well, thank you. She talked quite a lot about you at the time. You made an impression on her."

"She made an impression on me, too," I said, grinning, the scar on my hand suddenly feelable.

Sidonie carried on from there and directed the conversation away from all hazardous subject matter. What had brought us here in the middle of the night like prowlers, she wanted to know? And Sofie explained. "But by all means," said Sidonie. "Sepp, you have the key?" The old man nodded.

"No," said Sofie, "not now. We'll go through it tomorrow, all of us. It is much prettier by daylight anyway."

So this was agreed upon. Sidonie wanted to send us home by car but Sofie thanked her and said it was for the walk we had come. Then she turned to Meta. "Will we see you tomorrow?"

"No," said Meta, "we shall be gone." And I wondered if it was not, perhaps, a sudden decision on her part because Sidonie raised her eyebrows in surprise.

Sofie smiled and said, "Our enmity is so old, it is almost as strong a bond as friendship," and that made Sidonie laugh again. But Meta said, "I have never seen anything to laugh at in it," and suddenly I had to think of Glory, whose sympathy would probably have been with Meta, as mine should have been. But as I looked from the stern, arrogant Prussian to the lawbreaker, my beautiful Sofie, all ethics were shattered. My sympathy was with her.

There were enough amusing anecdotes in Sidonie's life to fill the rest of the long walk home. Sofie was just saying, "So this time she married for money," when we heard the

pounding of horse's hoofs behind us and turned around. Victor came galloping up. He had ridden his horse hard.

He dismounted and went up to Sofie and looked at her for a long, silent moment. Then he kissed her hand and held it to his heart. "Sidonie told us you were here. Why didn't you come in?"

Whatever Sofie's views may have been at dinner, the old love for him was still there. I could tell by the way she looked at him, the tears in her eyes glistening in the moonlight. He had taken her by surprise.

He didn't let go her hand as he greeted me casually with his left. "I hear your father is here," he said. "That's good. Because I have something to tell him." Then he turned again to face Sofie and said, "Not a little glad to see me?"

"Glad?" she turned away from him. "Oh, Victor, how can I be glad now?"

He said, "I can." And I could not help but feel the old envy for this steadfast love that nothing could shake.

He led his horse and put his free arm around her. Thus we walked the few remaining steps to the hotel where we were staying. Our entry created quite a furor. After surprise greetings were over, Victor said to Father, very quietly but with a seriousness that gave his words importance, "I got it."

Father looked as if he had cracked open a bad egg. "Not Mark?"

"Not Mark. Or I should say, only indirectly through Mark." And Victor mentioned the name of the American to whom Mark had introduced him.

"He is a traitor," said Father.

"Why?" Victor's innocent expression was blatantly insincere. "Germany is not an enemy."

"I think so."

"Perhaps you stand alone in that."

"I know I do not," said Father.

"A friend of mine has just returned from Washington," said Victor, "and he was enchanted by his friendly reception. Altogether he found the atmosphere in the United States distinctly pro-German."

"Then he saw the wrong people," said Father.

It was obvious he did not want to discuss the topic further nor, apparently, did Victor who now turned to Eugene and said, "Why in God's name did you move to Czechoslovakia? Why didn't you accept the professorship for political science at that American university?"

Eugene smiled. "How did you find out about that?"

"It got around," said Victor.

Father said, "I could have arranged it but he turned me down."

"Well," said Victor, facing Eugene again, "my advice to you is, don't go back to Prague. Stay here."

Eugene's smile was bland. "Why?" But Victor was in no mood for this pretended lack of guile. He said, "You know very well why. Thank God that Dollfuss forced you out of Austria before a much worse fate did. And in Prague . . ."

"Yes," said Eugene quietly, "what about Prague? Are you trying to tell me I shall be forced out of Czechoslovakia, too?"

"You," said Victor, "and Sofie," and all his love for her lay in the name.

The pattern of life a man has chosen drives him again and again into the same defense. Just as Father was forced to say over and over again, "I don't like the company we keep," I heard Eugene say now for the second time, "Sofie and I don't count, *not that way.*"

Victor did not stay long. When he left and all good-byes had been said but his to Sofie, he turned to her and asked, "Will you accompany me to the road?"

She went with him and I could see them from the French door that led out onto the terrace. Where the road lay white

in the moonlight they stood for some time under the shelter of a tall fir. Victor was doing most of the talking. Once Sofie shook her head, whereupon Victor took her hand and kissed it formally, then turned it and kissed the palm and wrist. She stood quite still at first but then she covered her face with her free hand and turned away a little.

At that he drew her to him in a fierce embrace and there was something vulnerable, almost impoverished in this sudden move of his. It was like the reaching out and grasping of a very young man, an adolescent. I might have taken her in my arms like that.

She held him like a mother her child, but only at first. When their lips met her arms went around his neck in the passionate embrace of a woman who loved him.

When he had gone she remained standing long after he had disappeared, looking in the direction he had taken. Since she showed no sign of coming in, I went out to her and stood so that the light fell on her face, not mine. The tears gleamed on her cheeks. I had never seen her look quite so beautiful.

She saw me and sighed. "Oh, Robbie," she said, in a tone that was an admission, making me one with her mood, accepting my intrusion into her private life, and it filled me with a satisfaction almost as valid as love.

"Whom do you love most?" I asked. "Victor or Eugene?"

Her eyes widened with astonishment and she said, without hesitation, "Eugene, of course."

"But it is Victor," I said, "who always makes you look so beautiful."

She smiled. "Oh my dear, what has that got to do with it? It isn't important to be beautiful."

seventeen

IF YOU APPROACH THE AUSTRIAN TOWN OF INNSBRUCK FROM the north, you have to drive down a mountain called the Zirlerberg which deposits you sheerly, hundreds of feet below, in the valley of the Inn River. The view from the top is one of the most beautiful in the world because the drop is precipitous and the valley spectacular, with its tree-lined river a silver ribbon between grass and fields, narrowing to a glistening thread as it winds its way through the lower Alps to the higher peaks in the distance.

The Zirlerberg is one of the most dangerous automobile roads in Europe, very steep, with hairpin bends which, however well banked, remain a hazard because of the incredible gradient. The road is used to test cars and for auto racing; and the casual tourist with nothing on his mind but to get from the Bavarian village of Garmisch-Partenkirchen to the Tyrolese capital of Innsbruck, is in for a gruesome surprise when he has to descend the Zirlerberg. At every turn he can

stop his car and read a plaque that tells him who died there.

On this treacherous Alpine highway Victor's wife was killed a few days after our meeting. Victor was at the wheel, they were alone in the car which skidded when a very light rain, a mere drizzle, combined with the dust on the road to create a smooth, slippery surface. The car went over an embankment. Victor emerged from the wreck unharmed but Meta's head was forced through the windshield and she was instantly killed.

When we heard of the accident we did not know how badly Victor was hurt. Beyond the detailed report on Meta's death the paper said very little. Eugene, who read the item aloud to us, said, "I wonder how Victor made out?" and immediately answered the question himself, "Perfectly all right, I am sure. He leads a charmed life. Men like him do."

Mother said, "How dreadful! He will always have it on his conscience," and Eugene said, "He didn't love her so he will never really know whether he could have prevented the accident or, at least, her death."

Mother said, "Whenever I'm driving and have to stop sharply, I instinctively put out my hand to hold back the person sitting next to me. It's the one thing I dread, the windshield. But, oh heavens, Eugene, when your car gets out of control, you have both hands on the wheel, you don't let go. You don't drive, you can't know how impossible it is. . . ." But nobody was denying that Victor had not loved his wife.

Mother looked at Sofie. "I'll call Sidonie," she said. "She may know more about it."

"I will." Sofie got up abruptly and left the room. When she came back she told us, "Sidonie has only just read about it herself, but she is going to make inquiries and will call as soon as she knows more."

Her call came that evening, shortly after dinner. Sofie came back from the telephone and said, "He is all right. Sidonie spoke to him. He is perfectly all right."

She sat down and brushed a hand across her forehead. "My

knees feel shaky," she said and, with a small laugh, "I must have been terribly worried about him."

Eugene was looking at her. Then he held out his hand and said, "Of course you were."

It was our last evening in Château-d'Oex. Next morning we left and after we had said good-by to those two and were speeding north in the direction of the German border, Father said, "Now he can marry her."

"Hardly," said Mother. "She's married to Eugene."

"But now Victor can fight for her with the legal possibility of marriage on his side. It's going to make a difference."

"In what way?"

"Well, look what Victor has to offer. D'you think she'll be able to turn her back on so much security?"

"Security isn't important," said Mother.

It wasn't important to be beautiful, it wasn't important to be passionately in love, security wasn't important, either. Then what was important, what was?

Mother smiled when I put it to her that evening, the most loving smile, always reserved for me. It made her eyes glow with a radiance almost like the radiance of passion, just as brightly but with serenity at its core, not excitement.

"Good heavens," she said. "How did you know so much about Sofie and Victor?"

"I've been around quite a while," I said.

"Yes," said Mother. "I guess you have. Only I never realized how much you took in." (You'd be surprised, I thought.)

We had settled down on the terrace of the hotel where we were spending the night. Mother was sitting in a long chair, looking up into the starless sky and the air, I remember, was saturated with the damp of a recent rainfall. So I brought her a jacket to put on.

"Thank you," she said, leaning back and closing her eyes, and the loving smile faded to an enchanting shadow as she re-

peated my question. "What is most important? I should say wisdom." She opened her eyes again and looked at me, rather like a smart little girl who has answered a riddle. "It can't be gotten for gold, you know, and its price is above rubies. That's the Bible for you. 'The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it,' although I always did think anything as romantic as a topaz of Ethiopia would be strong competition."

But I was not in a joking mood. "How come you know your Bible so well?" I asked.

"I don't. That topaz of Ethiopia was the only thing that stuck with me out of a long, dull sermon years ago."

"So you'd say wisdom was the most important thing."

"Oh, definitely. You can't go wrong, can you, if you're wise? It establishes your foundations. Among other things it makes it possible for you to choose the right companion and what could be more important than that?"

"Like Sofie and Eugene."

"Yes. Like Sofie and Eugene."

"And you and Father."

"No," she said. "Your father and I are not truly wise. We're only headed in that direction."

Did she mean to imply that she hadn't chosen the right companion? Strange how the thought that Father and Mother might not be *d'accord* made one's world crumble. When I was eleven it had done so and it did now, four years later. We take it for granted, the compatibility of Mother and Father, take it for granted like the changing of the seasons and the passing of time, and a disturbance of this norm makes one's world totter. All of a sudden Dick Evans loomed between us, sinister as a ghoul. But he was no ghoul for Mother. Just as I was trying to think of a way to bring the conversation around to him, Mother laughed lightly and said, "I thought I had the best companion once."

She leaned back in the long chair and flung her arms behind her head, pillowing her head on her hands in a very young gesture. With the small smile of reminiscence on her

lips she looked absurdly young, too. There weren't many lines in her face in the best of lights. She'd said once, "That's because I'm not complicated. A face without lines is usually a sign of stupidity," and she had looked as if she didn't mind, as if to be wise were not her goal at all.

"He was exactly suited to me," she went on. "He had my tastes, my inclinations. Marriage with him would have meant an unruffled existence." She looked at me. "You'd never guess who it was. Good old Dick Evans," and, by God, she chuckled.

Was this thing always going to be thrown at me with this abominable indifference? Mother's smile was a little fatuous as she recalled her youth and, watching her, I could feel the agony of the discovery that Dick Evans had loved my mother seeping from me until it was gone. All that marvelous jealousy and anger—gone, the "confrontation" an out-and-out fizzle. Oh, Lord, how dull it was to grow up!

"No kidding," I said feebly, feeling that the height of asininity had been reached.

"Yes. He was my beau until your father came along and swept me off my feet. I guess I wanted to be ruffled." And she laughed.

It wasn't decent. She was way ahead of me with this confession and I felt abused. "Do you still?" I asked, sounding as pompous as a parson.

"Still what?" Her eyes looked far away. She certainly wasn't making things easy for me.

"Want to be ruffled."

She gave me a look that was downright coy as she said, "Yes. And I hope I always will."

eighteen

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, FATHER TREATED ME TO SIGHT-seeing of a different kind. No Alpine passes, but Nazism. We went to rallies, we watched parades, we heard the Führer speak. We drove over the new German highways, we passed through villages where the peasants were getting free dental treatment from itinerant dentists, poor hamlets where they were being dealt out soup from itinerant kitchens, soup with large chunks of meat in it. "Look! Look!" the poor folk cried. "Meat! The Führer has brought us meat just as he promised."

We saw girls in cotton dresses with wreaths in their flowing hair, their cheeks red, their eyes shining, their skin light, their hair golden, their arms swinging, their marching sturdy, their voices lusty, singing new songs, a new spirit in their hearts. And everywhere the same sunshine, the same laughter, the same hope. Germany had found its destiny.

I watched them and I watched Father watching them and

for the first time in my life saw in his eyes—fear. Why? I wanted to know. Why did he look like the crack of doom?

"You could have expressed it in a worse way," he said, "for they walk in the sunshine of their madness on a foundation that is rotten. It will collapse and, like an earthquake, the shock will be felt to the farthest corners of the earth. Come along, I'll show you the other side of the picture," and he took me to see the hunted. Not only Jews, but the pitifully few who had dedicated themselves to resistance, the woeful minority.

So when the news of Austria's annexation reached us in America in the spring of 1938, I could see the same ebullient horde flooding the beautiful land and its cities, not a grim, brown flood of tyrants as they were pictured in our papers, but an exultant flood of laughing, sunbathed men, women, and children united in madness.

Sofie wrote, "My homeland is lost, and it hurts. I didn't know it would mean so much to have the ground which holds my roots inundated. Perhaps what has made it so unbearable is the fact that it has been accompanied by so much joy. All letters tell the same thing. Oh, I know, plenty have chosen death, plenty are weeping, but why are there so many smiling faces? My father writes: 'Now I can die happy.' Didn't I always say, Sylvia, that the human race deserves to be wiped out?"

"I have often wondered," said Mother, "why Sofie, who despises the human race, does not love animals. Oh, I know, she feels for them but she doesn't particularly care for them. She has never had a pet."

"I don't think she despises the human race," said Father. "I think she is simply in despair over it."

And where was I on this fateful week end? In another world. I was spending the week end in Boston and I went to see Glory work for the first time.

She had begged me to come and watch this particular class because it was to be a gala affair. Some of the members of a

visiting ballet company were going to be practicing right along with the regular pupils. Her teacher was so good, they came to practice with her.

She was a Madame Orlova, a surprisingly agile old woman, exile of another revolution, another outburst of man's cruelty. In a high-pitched voice that resounded shrilly in the large, unfurnished studio she gave directions to the strangest assortment of humans I had ever seen. "What on earth have they got on their legs?" I wanted to know.

"The sleeves of old sweaters," Glory explained. "It's to make their legs sweat and keep them thin." And they were sweating. In the sparsely heated room they steamed like race horses. They wore sweaters where they belonged, too, threadbare cardigans, the ends stretched long and tied around their waists. Gyrating bundles of wool and energy. They were very pale, and some of them looked incredibly old to be jumping around with so much youthful energy. The men I didn't look at. They embarrassed me.

Madame Orlova did not correct the professionals, who did all the exercises first or in front of everybody else, a most undemocratic procedure, I thought; but she was merciless with her regular pupils. She put one poor breathless girl through a routine of jumps, switching the ground under her feet so that, if she didn't jump two feet high, the switch hit her. The girl ended up in tears and Madame Orlova screamed, "Go home and lose ten pounds, you *v*retched girl!"

"She's killing us," Glory muttered to me in passing. "When we have professionals she always does."

Several of the stars spoke Russian and, during a pause, I knew the conversation concerned Glory from the glances in her direction. "Yes," said Madame Orlova, "she has *verri* good elevation. Gloria Evans, step forward please. I want you to show Madame Karenskaya your *entrechats.*"

Glory stepped forward, no leg thinner than the other now, both like steel and exquisitely shaped, and she began to jump as if the ground rejected her, bouncing like a rubber

ball up again into her proper element—the air. Madame Orlova beat out the rhythm with her stick, the accompanist picked it up, softly at first then louder, rather like a good circus orchestra drumming in the big act. Still Madame Orlova beat her stick.

Glory did the jump thirty-two times and was about to stop when Madame Orlova snapped, "*Seexty*-four," and Glory went right on, getting red in the face, then purple, the sweat breaking out on her face and trickling down it, her teeth showing in a small, white line of exertion. When she was done, she made a formal curtsey, the aristocracy applauded, and Madame Orlova said curtly, "Thank you."

Glory came over to where I was sitting, wiping her face with a towel. She wasn't even out of breath. "Dear God," I said, "how do you do it?"

"I got my second wind," she said. "It's a wonderful feeling. Haven't you ever had it? You think you won't draw another breath, you think you're going to burst and all of a sudden, bingo, you can breathe deeply, deeper than you've ever breathed before. It gives you such a feeling of . . . of power."

That evening I took her to dinner at the Ritz where I had Grandmother's permission to sign the check and we could eat in style for all of a seventy-five-cent tip. "Now don't disgrace me by stinting on the tip," Grandmother had said, "and don't make a fool of me by giving too much."

Glory was wearing a party dress but it wasn't a childish one. I was pleased to see she looked every bit of sixteen and I, of course, much older than that. We were doing all right. She had filled out a lot, too, good heavens, she had breasts! Well, anyway, there was definitely something there under the tight bodice of her dress. "You'd think dancing would make you thinner," I said, "but you're filling out."

"I eat like a horse," she said, helping herself to a second roll.

She had cheeks, too. Gone were the gaunt hollows. I decided she might yet grow up to be quite nice looking. Of course she was smoothed out now with powder and the faintest trace of lipstick giving her face life. The fact that her eyes were so light made her look serene, almost clairvoyant, and she'd always been demure. Now all this made her appear quite adult. Every now and then I had the feeling she was older than I. Robert, I told myself, you're slipping.

After dinner we went to the ballet—another concession to her—and I tried to pick out the dancers I'd seen in class that morning, not always with success. They were so changed. Under the enamel of their make-up, the glitter of headdress and costume, the sleek smoothness of tights, the sagging bags under the eyes had disappeared, the pasty unwholesome complexions had given way to a pink and white radiance, the slouch with which they had strolled away after an exercise was replaced by the dignified pacing of royalty, the sweat, the disordered hair, all gone.

Glory was happy to have lured me into her world. Never had I seen her so animated. She explained the things that looked easy and were really very difficult, what high spots to look out for, what parts had been made famous by this or that dancer. I said the men were awful, no man who was a man would take up ballet, but she defended them. They were men all right, she said. Under Diaghileff a lot of them had been degenerates, but he had made the male dancer a real force in ballet and with that dancers had become men again, just as they had been in the great ballet days of czarist Russia. "So you see," she concluded, in that quaint, solemn way of hers, "how something good can come out of something bad."

I stared at her. "Lord Almighty," I said. "Who'd have thought you'd find out about things like *that* in Boston!"

During the intermission I told her about Sofie's letter. "How dreadful," she said, shaking her head. And I spoke a

little about Austria's terrible inundation under the brown flood, but it all seemed so remote, it couldn't really touch us, dear Lord, it was far away!

March, 1939. Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia.

After the agony of the Munich settlement, during which my father got jaundice and had to go away to recoup, the actual seizure of the young republic that had made such a success of its freedom, came almost as an anticlimax. And this time there was no letter from Sofie. There was no word at all from her or Eugene, and Mother's and Father's efforts to find out what had happened to them proved unavailing. Finally Mother wrote to Victor, hating to do it but overcoming the aversion she felt for this man who, under Hitler, had grown even more powerful.

Victor wrote, "I share your anxiety. I have done everything in my power to ascertain their whereabouts, without success. A faint unreliable trace leads to Poland and ends there. I am inclined to believe it is correct. It would be like Eugene to choose such a poor escape."

Father flung the letter on the table. "There is a man I could cheerfully kill," he said. "How dare he criticize Eugene?"

I picked up the letter and looked at it. Victor had had the courtesy to write by hand, an incredibly fine, foreign hand. It might have been the small, precise writing of a monk, somebody used to the exquisite calligraphy of illuminated scripts, the handwriting of an esthete.

"What does he mean by a poor escape?" I asked.

"What everybody knows. That Poland will be next."

"If only they have gone south through Yugoslavia or Italy," said Mother. "Then we might still hear from them." But we didn't.

And where was I during those fateful days? At prep school, getting ready to take Glory to the senior prom. Even though she was two years younger than I and every other boy in my

class was trying desperately to produce a female as old, if not older, than he, I felt I owed it to Glory to take her. Besides, there wasn't really anybody I cared about sufficiently to waste a whole evening on.

I was mad about that, as if Glory's cloying affection had made it impossible for me to get close to other girls, as if it had erected some intangible barrier that I would never be able to hurdle. Oddly enough her confession of love that night included just that.

We managed the age problem quite adroitly, I thought. She'd been in Boston so long now and at home only for vacations, none of the boys at school knew her. I made her swear to say she was eighteen and a high school senior.

"Why make me dumber than I am?" she asked. "I'll be graduating when I'm seventeen."

"Look," I said. "Do you want to go or don't you?"

"Okay," she said. "Brief me."

It took some time. "Do you really think you can carry it off?"

"Of course, I can, don't look so worried."

When I saw her that night I worried a lot less. She attracted plenty of attention with her strange, light green eyes and her boyish face with the sudden, friendly smile. She was wearing her hair curled on top of her head, a grown woman's hair-do, and there were always golden glints in it now. She groomed herself a lot, I guess. Anyway, the rag doll was gone for good.

Of course, her dress helped. I wondered how her aunt had ever let her buy it until she explained that she'd picked it out herself. It wasn't a young girl's dress. You could tell by the way it was cut and the material—I think it was moiré—and the color, a dull gold.

"The salesgirl called it Ripe Banana." Glory giggled. "I ought to be peeled."

"I thought ripe bananas were black," said I and "So did I," said she, and both of us roared laughing.

But the dress was all right. Somehow she managed to act up to it. The fact that she carried herself so well, back straight, neck long, chin up, gave her dignity. And dancing had given her a very slight but attractive bounce in her gait. Whatever her mood, by the way she walked she could make you think she was on top of the world.

She had the whole senior class fooled. Nobody would have dreamed she was only fifteen. "Gloria Evans?" one boy said. "Any relation to Old Dingbat? He's our Latin prof. His name's Evans."

"Distantly related," said Glory, and veiled her eyes with her lids.

"What'll you give me if I don't tell," she said later.

"Tell what?"

"About 'Old Dingbat.' "

He came over to us just then and said to Glory, "I promised to back you up on the eighteen, but Vassar!"

"It was the first college that came to my mind," said Glory.

"With a sister at Bryn Mawr? Muriel isn't going to like it."

Glory hooked her arm in his and looked at him with such adoration, I was sure it would give the whole show away. "Muriel doesn't have to find out," she said.

Old Dingbat. Where was the jealous torment of years ago? "When you can think dispassionately of your mother loving somebody besides yourself, you have grown up." But I hadn't grown up, not by a long shot. I found that out when Glory dragged me outside, "to cool off," so she said. She looked as if nothing short of Niagara Falls could cool her off, her eyes and cheeks were aglow. "How am I doing?" she wanted to know.

"Fine," I said. "I'm almost ready to believe you're growing up."

"I am." She took my face between her hands with what seemed to me a strange new courage, and looked into my eyes for a moment with a clear tranquil gaze. Then she kissed me.

Her lips were cool and dry and I felt her body touch mine, almost imperceptibly, like a sudden breeze. "There," she

said, letting me go and moving away a little. "I made up my mind to do that tonight."

I stared at her. How could she look so pleased with herself when I was feeling so indescribably glum? I could still feel her lips on mine and they told me I was still a child. A child, a child, a child, they seemed to hammer into my cranium, as if the kiss hadn't been a fleeting thing at all. Where was the yearning, the desire, the quenching of a great thirst? In another world from which I seemed to be eternally banished with my feeble groping emotions. For suddenly I was all thumbs. I stood there with my arms dangling at my sides, a gawk.

Meanwhile Glory sat down on an old glider. It had taken an awful licking throughout the years from us kids. I sat down on it beside her and could have groaned, I felt so abused.

Glory was leaning back, her face upturned to the sky, imperturbable, sharing evidently none of my anguish, satisfied with herself, with me, with life in general.

"Goddam foolishness, that's what it is," I said.

"What is?"

"That kiss."

"Didn't you like it?"

"You're not supposed to *like* a kiss. It's not exactly the word for it."

Still she wasn't looking at me, still she was looking at the black, starless sky and smiling. "I liked it," she said.

I laughed. To me it sounded like an old man's bitter laugh. "It was a kid's kiss."

"Sure," she said. "And that's what we are."

"Let me tell you something," I said. "There are kids our age and a lot younger that kiss quite different to that."

"I know. Would you like to kiss me that way?"

"I would not."

"Well, that's fine," she said, "because I wouldn't want you to kiss me that way."

"So everybody's happy," I said, feeling miserable as hell.

"I'm happy," she said, still leaning back and looking up, away from me. "But then I'm always happy when I'm with you."

It gave me the same sharp twist in the region of my stomach that I'd felt when I'd heard she had infantile paralysis. It made me put my hand over hers and then I felt queerer still, but it didn't make me feel like doing any of the things I'd tried out on a few other girls whose names and faces I couldn't even recall. Not with Glory. It would have been incestuous, that was it, downright incestuous, to try any of those things on her. Still I felt strange holding her hand. For the first time in my life I felt strange with Glory.

"You've always loved me, haven't you?" I said, sounding slightly savage about it.

"Always," she said, and somehow it precluded asking, "And you always will?" Instead I said, "For God's sake, why?"

"Because you're so handsome."

"Oh, don't be asinine!"

"Well, then, don't ask silly questions.

"All right," I fumed. "But seriously now, don't you think it's a bad habit you ought to break?"

"Goodness, *no!*"

"What if I fell in love?"

"Have you?"

No anxiety in the question. It infuriated me. "There's always Sofie."

"Oh, that's kid stuff." What a lot of things were, suddenly. And then, after a little pause. "You know what?"

"What?"

"I don't think you'll ever fall in love."

"For God's sake, why not?"

"Because I love you so much, it must create some sort of barrier."

"Not fall in love with you, either?" My voice was savage.

She looked at me. Without bringing her head any closer, she just turned it and looked at me. "Yes, with me," she said, her voice low and a little unsteady. "Please fall in love with me, Robbie, please." And it made me feel queer as hell.

nineteen

"DON'T ENLIST, ROBBIE," FATHER SAID WHEN WE SETTLED DOWN to a serious talk after my graduation from prep school. "Go ahead with what we've planned. What we need more than anything else are minds trained to cope with our problems. Diplomats. Dear God in heaven, Robbie, *statesmen!*"

So that was the plan. Four years of college, three of Harvard Law School, then a job in Washington as the secretary of a secretary of a secretary . . . the diplomatic service. It had sounded fine when decided upon, but it didn't look so good to me any more to fight the fight I had seen grow distasteful to my father, who had succeeded, who had gone right to the top and been able to prevent none of this. Was I

going to do so much better? Hardly. I wasn't the eternal hero any more, I knew I couldn't save the world. Why waste a lifetime trying?

I talked it over with Dick Evans. He said, "I always thought you'd write."

"So did I," I said. "But what?"

"If you can get away from yourself, if you can cross that hurdle, recreate at first, not report what you've experienced but recreate it. Go on from there to create a world of your own and learn how to communicate that world to others, learn how to make them *care.*"

It was what I wanted most to do but I couldn't keep my mind on that goal, either. "You're lucky," I told Glory. "You've always known exactly what you wanted."

"That doesn't mean it always turns out right," said Glory. "I'm not entirely pleased with the way things are going."

"What on earth do you mean by that?"

I couldn't imagine. When her sister Judy had moved to New York the year before, Glory had gone with her and enrolled in a first-rate ballet school there. "It's the best chance," she explained, "of working your way into something good." And, as usual, she had been right. Her strength and elevation had brought her her first job when she was only sixteen. And what excitement that had caused.

"You can't do it," Judy declared. "You're still in school. And you couldn't quit even if you wanted to, not at sixteen."

"Who's talking about quitting school?" Glory said indignantly. "You can fix it with the principal that I can study privately. And my marks won't suffer for it, I promise they won't. Good heavens, it's only for six weeks. Then I'll babysit for you again."

Judy had fixed it and Glory's marks hadn't retrogressed. I guess she was the only dancer in America who was reading Latin and geometry in her dressing room between flitting on and off stage, and with a big sister to pick her up every night

after the show. "You'd better get this over with soon," said Judy. "You're messing up my married life." But Glory didn't care. "With a husband in the insurance business," she said, "it's the least you can do for the arts."

We got most of this from Judy's letters. "I don't really mind," she wrote. "Every time I see her dance and think what she's been through, I'm ready to give up anything for her."

I felt the same respect for Glory's achievement, foreign as the art remained to me, and I still like to recall the oh's and ah's in the audience when she leaped across the stage in a ballet called *Les Sylphides*. "She's an American. Did you know she was an American?"

Her audience not only liked her, they could be proud of her. She was forging an American place in ranks that had been occupied for the most part by foreigners until now. She was a pioneer in the field of dancing, this New England girl who had conquered infantile paralysis. The souvenir program mentioned that. It told a tale of doggedness and fortitude, real Americana, and it netted her a feature article in one of our leading magazines. The story of a fight bravely fought and won in a country where one still stood a fair chance of winning. What more could Glory want? How could she possibly not be pleased with the way things were going? That was why I said, "What on earth do you mean by that?"

"Oh, don't worry," she said. "I'm going to go on with it. I wouldn't really know what to do without it." She frowned. "Imagine getting up in the morning with no class to go to, no rehearsals, no conceptions in your mind of how to mold this or that theme into the right shape. . . ." She shook her head and spread her hands wide in a comic little gesture of dismay. "Dear heaven, what would I do with my day? But to spend the rest of my life on the stage . . . I don't know." She looked at me as she said, "And you really shouldn't have anything else on your mind."

"And you have?"

"Yes."

I was careful not to ask what it was. I had only to look into her eyes to know she still wanted me and me she would never have. I was passing out of her life, in every respect. She divided her time these days between Orlova's studio in Boston and New York, when her group was in rehearsal or performing there, and I was as uprooted as ever with Father in war-torn Europe most of the time and Mother on prolonged visits here, there, and everywhere. Every vacation was spent in a different place. Glory and I saw very little of each other. But if she was frustrated about this, she was bearing up under it very well or she was putting on a good show. Which was more than could be said of me. For I was suffering acutely and obviously from the torturous growing pains of the emotions.

To me youth is synonymous with anguish, with boredom or the idiotic, unaccountable elation that could be relied upon to leave me feeling flatter than ever once past. I wouldn't retrace any of it for anything in the world. The disquieting dreams. The seeking for an understanding that is balked by the confusion of the demand. The mistaking of the roused identity for an attraction that simply isn't there, that dissolves into nothingness in the placidity of companionship. The always being two years ahead of yourself. The dreary disappointments of the first efforts to make love, the shabby subterfuges that accompany it, the miserable settings imposed by convention.

The resentment next toward the inadequate strength, tried too soon, egged on by one's own roused blood, pitted so unequally against one's ignorance, recognized in less bitter moments as "innocence." The prowess, the boastful, lying prowess of older boys and the knowledge, the watchful knowledge of older love. The old feeling of being left out. Memories of Sofie and Victor came back to me with a renewed demand for the unattainable wonder of their passion. And the result of all this? A surly vengeance on my immedi-

ate surroundings, on home, on everything familiar that had gone to make up this inadequate personality which was myself.

The Germans have a name for it—*die Flegeljahre*. The rude years. And there is, in a way, something quite natural about them. First we go through the years of helplessness when satisfaction is synonymous with a feeling of security, with the assurance of physical help from Mother or whatever female is taking her place and moral support from Father. From the morning when we are rammed into our snowsuits to the evening's assistance with play or work we accept, if not gratefully, then naturally. Then comes the urge for independence, the I-can-do-this-just-as-well-as-you phase, soon to be succeeded by the obnoxious I-can-do-this-a-darn-sight-better-than-you attitude and the hot urge to have big responsibilities of one's own. The one with the helping hand not realizing she is through, the only way to get rid of her being rebuff, and the rude years have set in.

"I simply don't know what to do with you, Robbie," said Mother, hands folded in her lap, always a sign of miserable resignation. "If only your father were here!"

"Oh, Sylvia, let him go," said Grandmother.

"I can't get used to the idea," said Mother. "I'm afraid."

"Don't be," said Dick Evans. "The boy's all right. So what can go wrong?" Leaning forward, his hand on her arm and me not caring a damn. "The cord is cut, Sylvia."

"I know, I know. But it's as if the child I'd always known were gone. In his place there's a stranger."

All this was precipitated by my refusal to say any more where I was going when I was going anywhere, nor when I would be back. "But we have to know whether to have a meal ready for you," wailed Mother.

"Good God! I can get myself something if I'm hungry. I won't starve!" Bellowing now. "I'm too old for this sort of thing. Can't you realize that?" Made angrier by the knowledge that if they'd known what I was up to, there would cer-

tainly have been ructions. For I'd told nobody that I'd come across an old acquaintance a few weeks before when I'd stopped at a gas station in a suburb of Boston. The boy who came over to attend to the chore was Feeny.

I recognized his fine Italian face at once. He was almost unchanged by manhood, the young down still on his upper lip, the eyes just as burning, the lashes still girlishly long. But it took him a while to place me. Then he was surprisingly pleased.

Again he suited me, he was what I was looking for. Because I was sick to death now as then of my milieu, of its conventional continuity, of the soft sweet cushion of life and the blithe horizon, yes, even now, in the face of a war that could not really touch our foundations. Feeny stood for something quite different.

I made a date with him, a dive on the outskirts of Boston. "I live near there," said he.

It was a curiously dreary place, poorly lit, smelling of stale beer and cheap liquor. The few people assembled there all seemed to know each other in a sullen sort of way. Under the influence of liquor they brightened up or darkened, laughed or quarreled, but nothing got out of hand. It was a good place to talk.

Feeny had changed a lot. Now he was articulate, with a string of yarns that simply did not jell. I had outgrown my yen to fabricate but he seemed to have just entered that stage, and it didn't take me long to realize that he was a pathological liar.

Hopeless to extricate truth from fantasy. Possible only to draw inferences as to what he was out of what he made up. The fabulous jobs he'd held down and quit. "Nobody's going to push me around." (The same old childhood refrain.) The girl he'd married and divorced. She was an obscure night club singer; he had pictures of her. The child that had been born after their separation. "An' I'm gonna get that kid, soon's I've decided where I'm gonna settle down," and I feel-

ing curiously at home with his jargon, dropping into it myself every now and then as if I had walked back into one of the small closed rooms of my past.

He wasn't any too clear about the child's name. First she was "Dolores," in a later version she was "Janet." Why did he need all these things? The traveling he'd done, the cars he'd owned, the property he'd bought in San Francisco. "I think I'll build a motel on it." The man he'd killed out there in a bar. "It was self-defense, so I got off all right." The Big Bad Powerful Boy he wanted to be and wasn't.

It would have been nice, in a corny sort of way, to find out that we'd had some sort of influence on his life, but we hadn't. "You never did anything about the drawing?" I asked.

A derogatory gesture with his hand. "I coulda got into a lotta colleges. They offered me scholarships from all over. Nah. It don't interest me no more."

What did interest him? What had he done to make so much money? What would he do now? The service station job would hardly build a motel. But his face darkened when I edged close to reality, he became surly, so I avoided the future as a topic and we stuck to the fantastic past.

At our second meeting he said, "Want me to bring along a coupla girls next time?"

I could feel myself redden. I knew what this meant. The girls Feeny would bring along would usher in the ultimate.

Feeny was looking at me. Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed. "I bet you've never . . ."

"Not too successfully," said I, trying to make a joke of it and failing.

Feeny slammed his palm down on the table and roared some more. "Not too successfully," he repeated, mimicking my accent. "Oh, that's rich! Man, oh man, that's rich!"

No wonder I bellowed at my mother that I was going to do as I pleased and what in blazes did she think I was going to do anyway?

Extraordinary discovery—I'd never known anybody poor. Oh yes, Feeny in bygone days. But then my dungarees and sneakers had been as worn from hard wear and the grime of play as his; there had really been very little noticeable difference. These girls were unlike any I had known.

They wore cheap, washed-out blouses and skimpy skirts that had a shiny, worn look. Their jewelry was tarnished and glassy. They worked in a cotton mill and their hands were coarse, their nail polish too vivid and brittle. They were made up brightly enough, but it didn't conceal their unhealthy pallor or their drabness. They were pretty, but in a proletarian way. At sight of them something in me went cold.

Feeny's girl had two-tone hair, blonde at the roots, red at the tips, one dye receding to the other. She was wearing an incredible fur jacket. One of the Evans' barn cats had had a coat just like it, a dusty, rowdy orange. She had a long, sharp, mean but intelligent face, small, pouting lips, and amber-colored eyes. Her name was Carla and she was lively. She took one look at me and said, "Hiya, kid. Watcha doing? Slumming?"

My girl's name was Frances and she was placid. In a low, soft voice she said, "Hello." Her features were blunt, her lips full, her eyes heavily lidded, her face was round. She had on an old camel's hair coat. The nap was worn away but it was clean. Her hair was black and naturally wildly curly and her eyes were beautiful. They were big, brown Italian eyes like Feeny's, with the same luxurious lashes. As soon as I had got over the initial shock of meeting her, I liked her.

At first she wasn't interested in me. I soon grasped the fact that Feeny was on her mind. He was dancing with Carla. They'd put a quarter in the juke box and it was sending forth one popular tune after the other. Frances was watching them. She didn't care to dance yet, she said. "Let's sit a while and get acquainted." But that wasn't what she wanted, she didn't want to talk, either. There was definitely something on her mind.

After a while she said, "Funny guy, that Feeny. Do you know him well?"

"I've known him since both of us were kids."

"D'you think he's a queer?"

"For heaven's sake, no! What makes you say that?"

She gave me a look, a bitter smile twisting her lips. "Whaddayathink?"

It made me flush. She looked away. "He sure gave me plenty of trouble till I shook him off on Carla." She frowned. "I hate anything . . . anything . . ." She looked at me again, puzzlement in her expression now. "Oh, you know what I mean. Anything that isn't the way it was meant to be."

Suddenly I recalled Feeny's rude laughter and his jibes at me and I had to laugh. Frances looked at me quizzically. Then she leaned back in her chair, spread her legs from her, and crossed her arms over her full round breasts. "You're a funny guy, too," she said. "You're different. How'd Feeny ever get a hold of you?"

"What's so different about me?"

She looked me up and down. "You know just as well as I do. You're class. I can tell. I'm not as dumb as you think."

She wasn't dumb at all, nor was she smart. Brains didn't seem to enter into her make-up because she was all heart and good, warm, placid, animal body.

We gave the girls a meal and some dancing, Feeny insistant on paying his share, then we went to where they lived, a drab rooming house in a district I'd driven through often to get out of Boston, sometimes with the banal thought, "And to think people live here!" Here each had her own room and they shared a dingy little kitchen on the same landing. It was clean enough except for the windows, which were so begrimed, you couldn't see through them. "Nothing to see anyway," said Frances.

There was nothing simpler than her poor room. An old brass bedstead with an elaborately crocheted spread flung

across it was the fanciest thing in it. "Ma made that," she said. "She likes to crochet. So do I. But when I'm through working, I have to give my hands a rest," and she flexed them as if they were tired and sore. In the cracks of her fingers I could see they were reddened and later, when she touched me, there were calluses where they had hardened. They struck a cord in my heart and almost made me fall in love with her.

A shabby old Victorian dresser, bought at some second-hand furniture store, her few clothes on a metal rail behind a gaudy chintz curtain, a creaky wicker porch chair with a red-faded cushion, a round table standing near a window that let in no light, a fluted red glass vase, the kind you win at fairs, filled with a few dusty artificial apple blossoms. A hard chair, "Ma's" crocheted doilies scattered about, dust-worn, bright, crude. A hideous alarm clock. A calendar from a liquor store showing a pretty girl from the rear with her skirts blowing up. Joel McCrea, Ann Sheridan, flower pictures out of magazines, wrestlers, a Cadillac, 1938 model, all hiding blotches on the wall paper. I can close my eyes now and far clearer than Frances I can see the room.

I had thought she was going to open up for me the gates to a bright new world, but she didn't. She had a routine approach to love, it didn't seem to give her excitement, only pleasure. She approached it rather like a mother giving her breast to a child. As time went by, her loving became more intense and that seemed to sadden her, but when I drew her attention to it, she brightened at once. "Stupid," she said. "Of course there's nothing on my mind. I'm always happy when I'm with you."

She nearly always had time for me. When she didn't, there was in me an all-right-so-another-day feeling, no frenzy, no enervating longings. I took what she had to offer when she offered it and could postpone it like a temperate habit. I was about as content during those few weeks of our relationship as I had ever been.

When her birthday came around, I asked her what she wanted for a present. She flushed with pleasure and looked down at her hands, clasping and unclasping them in sudden shyness and embarrassment. "There's something I've always wanted."

"What?"

"A studio portrait. There's a man down the square but, gosh, he's expensive. He tints them. My sister had one when she got married. She's blonde, her hair's really honey-colored. It came out beautiful. Oh Robbie, do you think . . ."

Of course she wore her best dress for the sitting, blue satin. The photographer shoved the neckline down to below her shoulders and made her stick some tulle around it and a big cabbage rose with a rhinestone pin over one shoulder. His tinting was more felicitous than her make-up. With her short, plump arms she looked like a pretty, healthy farm girl dressed up for a wedding. She gave me a copy, signed "To Robbie, with love from Frances." I didn't know what to do with it.

Christmas was near. One day I asked Glory to meet me in town. Over lunch I came out with my proposition. Would she help me, please, to buy a complete outfit for a girl, a poor girl I knew? I wanted something good, something *refined.*

Glory eyed me quizzically, then she smiled, a smile that got lost suddenly in her serious little face. "What size does she wear?"

"I don't know. She's your height but stockier."

"Hm," said Glory. "Well, let's see what we can find and you decide if it's all right. I wear size ten. Maybe we'd better get eleven for her."

No questions. Glory was my girl!

There were a couple of suits with matching coats that I thought were pretty, but Glory was more difficult to please. Until she fished out a navy blue item. "If you want something really good and ladylike," she said, "this is it. Just feel

how soft the material is. Do you think you can swing it?"

I reddened suddenly, looked at the price tag. "I can swing it," I said. "I'm using Grandmother's Christmas check." Glory gave me another one of those long, serious looks but no comment. "I'll model it for you," was all she said, and disappeared to put it on.

On her it was a little too large and that made her look like a child, flinging me back years into the old steadfast comradeship. She was wearing her hair in that weird fashion some American dancer had made popular, scraped off her face and tied up high at the back of her head, flopping down from there like a horse's tail to her shoulders. Nobody but Glory could have carried off a hair-do like that, and she was wearing ballet-slipper shoes. They dwarfed her. She looked adorable.

I kissed her on the tip of her nose and said, "That's it then, chick. That's the one we'll take." The saleslady's eyes widened, then she had to turn away and her shoulders shook. I had to laugh, too, and discovered that I didn't mind any longer being considered ridiculous and young.

"She can brighten it up with the right costume jewelry or a flower," Glory was saying. So we went to the novelty counter next, where we purchased accessories, among other things a good handbag, which was important. Frances' cracked green plastic bag had depressed me more than anything else.

"Thanks a million," I said, when the shopping was done. "Time to have dinner with me?"

Something in my tone must have betrayed the fact that I was hoping she'd say no. "Don't you think you'd better get those things to their destination?" she asked. "You'd have an awful time getting by Grandmother with a lot of boxes from Filene's."

"Oh," I said, "that can wait."

She had a little muff. Her hands were in it and now she shoved it up under her chin. "Well, I've got a rehearsal."

(Odd. She hadn't said anything about it before.) "Nothing that'll ever see the light of day, just something I'm trying to work out."

"What?"

"A ballet called *Evangeline.*" Theme of undying love, I thought. She would choose that.

"A young fellow I know's written a darling score for it. I'm just playing at it really. I'm not ready yet for such creative excursions; only doing as I'm told doesn't seem to suffice." She spread her hands in that comic little gesture. "So I try to create."

"A whole ballet?"

"Sure. Of course I'm only working with the principals. I have to figure out the corps de ballet in my head. Some job! Remember that pianist friend of your mother's who played the Brahms Piano Concerto for us all by herself and sang the orchestral parts in that funny nasal voice? Well, that's me. I say, 'Now, here comes the group, here comes the *pas de quatre,* watch it, there's six of them going that way' . . . and all the time only three of us really there!" She laughed and I had to laugh with her.

"So you see, I must run. I can't let them down. The studio and pianist cost us every cent we have. I'm sorry, dear. It's been wonderful seeing you."

She held up her face to be kissed, I pecked her cheek, she said, "Thanks," and left me. And for all of ten seconds I missed her painfully.

Frances' eyes shone. She fluffed up her hair, fixed her face, manicured her nails, and put everything on. It fitted, but it did nothing for her. She looked like the maid who had borrowed her mistress' clothes.

I looked at her and could see Glory in the same outfit, not fitting into it too well but precious from top to toe, and felt something like a heartbreak. My expression gave me away. The glow went out of Frances and she sat down heavily on

the bed. Suddenly she put her face in her hands and began to cry.

"What is it, Frances? Why are you crying?"

She shook her head. She wouldn't say. She cried for a while, softly, forlornly. I loaned her my handkerchief. She wiped her eyes, sniffed, spread a corner of my handkerchief on her knees, and traced the monogram with the blunt forefinger of her pudgy little hand. "Thanks for the things," she said. "I don't want to be ungrateful. But they're not for me, are they?"

"Of course they are. Don't be a dope."

She stroked the cloth of the skirt. "Such beautiful material. Funny. Rich people don't wear their clothes long but they always have the clothes that last forever." She looked at me, her eyes big with recent tears. "Thank you, Robbie." She touched my cheek with her hand. "I'll wear this forever." She kissed me. "You know what? We've gotta see less of each other."

"Why?"

"Because I'm getting too fond of you and that's bad."

"Nonsense."

"Is it gonna break your heart?"

"No. Because we're not going to see less of each other." But we did.

One day Carla came in to see us. "That Feeny," she said.

I hadn't seen much of him lately, not since Frances and I had become close. "Now what?" I asked.

"He's in jail."

"What did he do?"

"Stole a car." She gave herself a little shake. "That windbag! That dumb cluck of a windbag! What's driving him, I'd like to know? What's driving him? God, how I've tried to straighten that feller out. Look, I said, you're okay as you are. You don't have to be Julius Caesar. And a Cadillac. He's got to steal a Cadillac. Maybe in a Chevvy nobody'd ha' noticed him, but no, not Feeny. For him it's gotta be a Cadillac."

She ran her fingers through her two-tone hair nervously. "Gimme a cigarette," she said. I did, and offered her a light.

She looked at me over the flickering flame, lips parted in the astonishment of a sudden revelation, and forgot to light the cigarette. "For Christ sake," she said, "what are you doing here anyway?" And I didn't know.

Neither did Frances. I could tell by the way she was looking at me and her sudden pallor. She walked downstairs with me and out to where I'd parked my car, silent, but then she was often silent.

"You going away for Christmas?" she said, when it was time to say good-by.

"Yes. We finally got together on it. We're going up to Stowe. Skiing."

She poked a finger into a buttonhole of my jacket. "Don't break a leg."

"I won't," I said. "I'm good."

"I'll bet you are. When'll you be back?"

"Around the sixth. I'll send you a postcard."

I bent down to kiss her. Her lips were moist from the fine fog sifting in from the harbor and there was a bleak chill in the air. Under her thin coat she shivered. "Ghost over my grave," she said.

My throat felt tight, and now a tear glistened in the corner of her eye and rolled down her cheek. "It's only two weeks," I said, my voice husky.

"I know," she said. "It's just that I'm feeble-minded."

When I came back I let a week pass before I looked her up. She had gone, moved away, leaving no address. I never saw her again.

twenty

THAT SPRING I TOLD MY FATHER I SIMPLY COULD NOT GO ON studying. My marks spoke for themselves. "Very well," he said. "Finish the semester, then we'll get you into the service where your knowledge of European languages will do the most good." That was how I came to Intelligence.

In the spring of '42 I embarked for Europe. Seasonally my departure was kind to me. The apple trees were in bloom and it was warm. Glory and I went for a picnic. We took our stuff down to a small secluded cove on Glaspell Pond where we'd bathed and skated when we were children. It was really a small lake. In New England they'll call a lake a pond in the economy of their expression. The trees all around us were a fresh yellow-green, blooming apple trees were pink in the distance, but the water lapping at our feet in rhythmic whispers looked gray and winter-cold.

We talked for a while about my work and a little about hers. *Evangeline* was making progress. Her group was letting

her try it out on them, she didn't have to retain the movements of an entire ensemble in her mind any more. We talked some about who was marrying, who was engaged, what new babies had arrived or were on the way, a roster of topics that showed that, by God, if we weren't maturing, our friends were. She asked, "By the way, did that gal like the stuff we picked out for her?" not looking at me as she said it, and I said, "Oh yes. It went over big."

We ate the feast Harriet Evans had prepared for us. Then we sat, replete, dozy, knees hunched up to our chests, arms clasped around them, looking into the deep gold light cast on the opposite shore by a descending sun. "You don't mind going, do you?" said Glory.

"No."

"That's bad."

"Bad? You're a fine patriot. I shouldn't only not mind going, I should be raring to go and you to see me go. That's the prescribed spirit."

"Oh, don't be a goon." She flung herself down flat on her back, her hands behind her head, her eyes closed to the bright day. "Don't be positively medieval."

"Okay. So I'm running away from myself."

"Why?"

"Because myself bores me."

A moment's silence, then she said, "Has Sofie anything to do with it?"

"I'm sure she has. I doubt if anything will ever happen to me that won't be traceable back to her in some way. Oh, I don't mean consciously. If her letters had kept coming I might even have forgotten her, no, not forgotten her, I don't mean that. But she would have fitted into my past like a beautiful dream. I could have written her off as a memory. Now the silence around her prevents that. What do you suppose has become of her? What misery is she undergoing?"

"Do you think of her often?"

"Yes. And atrocity stories haven't helped much. Day-by-

day events have topped anything I ever cooked up, haven't they? And I who saved her from countless imaginary dangers can do nothing for her now that the danger is real. It's maddening. Yes, of course, Sofie has something to do with it."

Glory stretched out on her side and looked up at me. "I wish," she said, "you could get Europe out of your system."

"Why?"

"Because it would settle you."

I didn't ask, "Where?" I knew very well what her idea was of my settling.

"Lie down beside me." Her voice was a whisper. "Just this once. I want to have something to remember. I want to know how to start my dreams." So I lay down beside her.

There hadn't been much of this sort of thing between us in the past years. We'd kissed good-night and good-by since our first kiss, and gradually our kisses had grown more intense—on my part not because of any previous desire, but more out of the thing itself and the sweetness with which she gave herself up to it, the sweetness of her. They still left me feeling that we were brother and sister, a brother and sister who loved each other a great deal, both craving the same consolation of bodily warmth and finding it in each other, a natural, animal warmth. It had nothing to do with what I had found in Frances, nor had it been in any way altered by that. It had nothing to do with the wild, passionate love I had always craved and still did, but it no longer made me feel that the one would prevent the other.

"Hold me, Robbie, hold me tight. I've got to dream up all the rest. Oh, there'll be so much to dream up. Why? Why?"

If she'd put it differently I might not have left her so much to dream up. I was strangely roused that day, ready to give her so much more than we had had before.

She saw the change in my face, felt the change in me, in the force of my seeking hands, the sensuous urge behind them, the new persuasion. But there was no fear in her eyes.

They looked into mine lovingly, happily. She was ready for me, she always had been.

But I wasn't ready for her. My desire was dissipated in the power of her innocence. With it she bound me to her tempo, to her conception of what was right and wrong, of what we might take and what we had to leave for later. She was still childhood, still sister, she was still untouchable.

Who knows? If I had enforced my pace that day instead of accepting hers, it might have bound me to her more strongly and I might not have found myself enslaved, three years later, in 1945.

2 · LOVERS

twenty-one

THAT WAS THE SUMMER I SAW MY FATHER AGAIN FOR THE FIRST time in three years. He came to Potsdam as part of the president's entourage. Although he still didn't like some of the company we were keeping, he was still doing the same work. The war had made his withdrawal impossible.

I was stationed in Munich and I took my first long leave to spend some time with him. I shall never forget the anxiety in his face as he looked for me and how it gave way to happiness at sight of me, then the doubt creeping back again when he saw how changed I was. Except for a little more white around the temples, he hadn't changed at all.

It took us a while to get over the emotional impact of meeting, so we were slow to get down to personal issues. Father talked of the purpose of the Potsdam meetings, the aims they were supposed to achieve, nothing I didn't know already; and he complained bitterly about the intransigeance of the Russian, which precipitated an argument between us be-

cause I was still a starry-eyed believer in the primitive nobility of our ally. But we soon escaped from that thankless topic to talk about my work.

There was little to tell. I'd written home regularly what could be told and there was nothing cloak-and-dagger about my activities. No parachuting into enemy territory, no flying under false colors behind enemy lines. Ten years before I would have raged at the lack of blood and thunder the war had entailed for me personally; now I found it quite enough to move in on the aftermath of battle, to seek lodgings in ruin that hadn't stopped smoking, to see the harassed few, left alive and unfled, poking about in the shambles of their homes for something to salvage, to look into their haunted faces and see mirrored there the chaos of a homeless continent. And even that had come to me only toward the end. Most of the time I'd sat comfortably housed in London, correctly sheltered from the Blitz, sifting and decoding information. I was nothing more than the glorified secretary of one of our highest Intelligence officers. But during the last months of the war, when we began moving into the enemy's land and one felt that now the smoke and ruin and dazed faces wouldn't hurt so much, that they might even bring a little satisfaction—only they didn't—during these last months I'd made some sort of grade. From acting as interpreter for every big-shot Tom, Dick, and Harry, interrogating prisoners, and writing endless reports on the results, I was transfered suddenly or, I should say, catapulted up to Propaganda.

I'd gone all out on those prisoner reports and they apparently attracted the attention of a superior officer of my superior officer, who suggested they be worked up into propaganda broadcasts and beamed to the German people. The order went down the line and arrived on my desk. The job was mine.

I prepared and staged "the show"; not that there was much preparation or staging to it. I just told the poor devils to let

loose as if they were speaking directly to their families which, in fact, they were. "Close your eyes," I said, "imagine you're at home and just let go." Some of the results had been quite heart-rending. Father, who had seen copies of the broadcasts, talked about them now.

"You ought to go on with that sort of thing," he said. "The war's as good as over, but our propaganda needs are just beginning. Only not here. It can be done just as efficiently at home. Come home, Robbie. Mother wants you back, we want you to finish college. Tell me, in God's name, why are you thinking of re-enlisting? What's this idea of switching to OMGUS?"

His face expressed all the bewilderment of a parent whose child has been torn out of his years of learning to go to war. I could see he was wondering how I would ever find my way back. But I wasn't. I had no intention of being a student again. College? Green campuses, Gothic buildings, age-old shade trees standing unravaged by shellfire, by the lightning of war that strikes in a merciless, crushing swath? Bull sessions at which world affairs were settled with sophomoric naïveté, beer parties, springtime excesses of hooliganism, proms, watching the sun rise over the lake, a bottle of champagne to a couple, party-dress girls in pastel shades; with the girls all around me now dressed in meticulously mended rags, their innocence and youth a chapter they hadn't been allowed to read? What was he talking about? Years before, it had been an unsatisfactory, stultifying continuation of prep-school life. It hadn't sufficed then; how could it suffice now?

"Glory wants you back."

He didn't have to tell me that. Her letters, which had been reduced to a mere trickle in recent months, conveyed quite clearly that she was living for my return. The sparseness of our correspondence was entirely my fault. I couldn't bring myself to answer letters that meant so little to me. Sometimes I left them unopened for hours. More and more often they began with the phrase, "I haven't heard from you in ages.

Thank goodness I know from your mother that you're all right." And once, rather pitifully, "It's awfully hard to keep on writing to someone who doesn't reply."

She was still dancing. Mother's letters told all about the success of *Evangeline*. Glory had got it behind footlights at last, and it had rated sufficiently to get a good review out of one of our leading dance critics. Mother had enclosed the clipping. But I couldn't arouse any interest whatsoever in Glory's achievement.

Why had she chosen such a remote career? A dancer. Nothing could have removed her further from the ruin of postwar Europe in which my roots were so deeply mired, as if I had never stood with at least half of me in her world. She may have wanted me back but she couldn't draw me. Even our last encounter in the fading light at Glaspell Pond, where I had almost taken her, had faded in my mind; the feeling that I would one day return to a deeper, richer experience with her was gone.

What did I want? The elegant house in which my mother and father had settled down in Washington? *My Homes in Other People's Houses.* I felt no connection with it whatsoever. Grandmother's place? The rambling Evans house? Settings for childhood. I was ready at last to create my own setting, but where, with half my world a shambles?

Sofie is home, I had told myself once. But there was no Sofie now to straighten me out. That sanctuary was gone.

Forget about her, I told myself. Sofie belongs to a world that is lost, a world as vivid in its horror as it was in its beauty, where by the very depth of its life everything had to become frighteningly intense. *You saw it die.*

You followed the army from one ruined city to the next, from one flattened village to another, through forests blackened by gunfire, along river banks strewn with the dead, across the scorched earth. You were there when they opened the concentration camps, you handed out food to what was left of human beings who came crawling to you for it on their

hands and knees. You saw a young girl who looked like an old woman, whose pale green eyes, alive in a face that had died, reminded you of Glory's. You gave her a can of fat which she was trying to reach with hands that were claws, saw her scoop out a handful and eat it, saw how her stomach, unused to nourishment, used only to the daily inexorable shrinkage of starvation, gave it right back again. You saw skeletons piled high in ditches, some still twitching with the spark of life; you, who once opened the nailed-down cigar-box coffin of a dead canary because Glory had been afraid it mightn't be "quite dead."

From the tower of the town hall you have seen the Bavarian Alps against the bright blue distance of an unadulterated sky, majestic, untouched, impregnable, and they seemed to jeer at the chaos only man can make, at man who has it in him to reduce to waste his own hard, exquisite labor. You looked away from the jeering mountains, down at a city that is partially buried under five million cubic meters of rubble, where hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of water trickle daily out of broken pipes into the soggy streets to mix with the dust of the ruins and form a quagmire, where the only things that can flourish are the grass and weeds in unused car tracks and the rats in the stinking rubble.

"Your bombers did it," the ruins seemed to say.

"*They* did it first," you told them.

"You fought them with their own weapons," said the ruins.

"Of course," you said, "how else?"

"Friendship with evil makes you one with evil, fighting evil should not have the same effect."

How then could we have defeated them, you wanted to know? But the ruins were silent.

It was then that I had begun to miss Sofie with the old longing. If she had been there, she would have answered the ruins, she would have known what to say, and their silence would not have left a string of unanswered questions between us. It was then that I set about the hopeless task of

finding her. Lists of political prisoners were available, but inquiries in that direction brought no results. Communications were destroyed all over Germany; the way to really find a person was to set out on foot, taking a ride when it came one's way: the old prehistoric method of getting where one wanted to go, of finding what one wanted, and that way open only to the intrepid, rootless, expendable civilian. Except for one small inconclusive clue, Sofie and Eugene remained lost.

Since his arrival in Europe, Father had done what he could to track them down, without success. "You're not staying on because you want to find them?" he asked me now. "I think that would be sacrificing yourself for a lost cause."

"No," I said, surprised at the dullness of my voice. "I want to find them, but I'm not staying on just for that."

Then it came, the crucial question. "Is it because of the girl?" And we had come to the root of the matter. It was because of the girl.

twenty-two

IT HAD BEGUN WITH REDBEARD.

Redbeard was a Pole, a colossal fellow, almost seven feet tall and as broad as was necessary to make him well proportioned. The red beard which gave him his name was coarse, thick, and stubby and about four inches long. His mustache hid his mouth but when he drank beer he would smooth it out on either side and expose his lips which were obscenely small, smooth, and shiny. His skin was calloused and ruddy from exposure, his eyes were light blue and had a keen look, his hair was paler than his beard and softer, almost silky. It didn't suit him at all, but he usually wore a cap and that made a Russian mujik of him. His high black boots helped to give the same impression.

How anybody looking so conspicuous could have made a successful business of smuggling human beings out of German-controlled territory into Poland was a puzzle to all of us. But he was renowned for just that. "Find Redbeard.

Get hold of Redbeard," had been the simple directive given to those fleeing from persecution. It must have been just as simple a directive for those eager to capture him but he was never captured.

He had made a fortune before and during the war because he had plied his trade unhampered by political ideologies. He had ferried, waded, rowed, and, like a crude St. Christopher, even carried across the small stream that separated German-held Czech territory from Polish soil, Stalinists, Trotskyites, Socialists, Jews, Protestants, Catholics, and agnostics alike. All they had had to do was pay.

He had taken their valuables first, collecting them in his hut in the Polish marshes, with the promise to return them in good time. But they were never returned, and it was the typewriters that gave him away. When a man who can't read or write turns up almost daily to sell a typewriter in excellent condition, it arouses suspicion. We raided his headquarters on the outskirts of Munich. What was he doing there anyway? How had he got there? What was he living on?

We soon found out. He had got there by retreating with the German army, keeping his distance but within the safe radius of their guns. In the course of the last year he had walked, yes, walked almost four hundred miles, from Katowice to Munich. "You would be surprised," he said, with his disarming smile, "how you get to your destination however far away, given time. And know-how."

And why this trek? Because his business had been shot to hell by the efficiency of the Gestapo; and when victory had begun moving in the opposite direction, he had tagged along with the defeated because he didn't want to come under Russian rule.

So he was never going home? "Never?" The fellow shook his head. "That's a big word." He expected many more changes in Poland, yes, of course in his time, and to go home again. Just as soon as the Bolsheviks got out. And why Mu-

nich? Because he preferred American occupation to any other. This with a twinkle in his eye.

How had he managed to acquire a house of his own in times like these? we wanted to know next. Oh, he had a bill of sale to prove he'd bought it just as legitimately as the man who had owned it before him, a Nazi whose world had crumbled to ruins under American bombardment, and he in turn had bought it for a song from a Jew. It was a typical small Bavarian country villa with colorful murals on the outside and painted in Gothic letters over the front door, *Sei dem lieben Gott befohlen* or "Be recommended to the dear Lord." A Jew had owned the house once? With that inscription? No. The Nazi who had purchased it from the Jew, Redbeard explained, like a tired teacher to particularly dense children, had Christianized the sale by having the inscription painted on the house.

Of course neither bill of sale was legal, and we told him that once the local authorities got around to it he would be thrown out. He shrugged and said by that time he'd be ready to move on anyway. Meanwhile this was what he wanted, peace and quiet, and he covered the whole countryside with a sweeping gesture.

And it was peaceful. Here there were no scars of battle. There might never have been a war, said the green hills, the pleasant valley, the brook tumbling icily down from the mountains, the painted houses, the church with the onion spire and the Christ bleeding in eternal agony on his cross at the side of the road.

Redbeard dug a huge hand into one of his pockets and pulled out a handful of large, flat, black and white veined seeds. "Sunflowers," he said. "I brought them with me all the way from home. I intend to plant them here," and he pointed to the side of the house. "I can't live without sunflowers. I'm used to them."

But what was he living on besides peace and quiet and the promise of a sunflower crop? Well, wasn't that clear? On the

thousands of dollars' worth of valuables he had added on his own initiative to his regular fee for guiding a political refugee to safety. More typewriters, leather suitcases, and handbags, fur coats, a few good paintings, miniatures, *objets d'art* and jewelry. A pirate's loot. How had he ever moved it all? He had a cart and showed it to us, and the strength of an ox to pull it and the strength to defend it, too.

He was livid when we confiscated his treasure, said we had no right to. We told him the things would be kept in safety until the poor devils who had been robbed had had a chance to turn up and repossess them. What wasn't reclaimed at the end of a certain time yet to be stipulated would probably be returned to him.

I couldn't help but admire the brute as I explained this to him. He was such a Goliath of a man and his voice was so booming. What an operatic bass he would have made, what a Boris Godounov!

When we got back to headquarters I began sorting the stuff we'd brought with us from his place. I had the jewelry spread out on a table and was looking through it with another fellow. We were wondering who could have owned this or that.

He picked up a little gold pin with a pearl centered in a four-leaf clover. "Gives you the creeps, doesn't it?" he said. "That must have belonged to a child. It's much too small for a woman," and stared at me and said, "What's the matter? Seen a ghost?"

I was holding Sofie's brooch in the palm of my hand, the "thin brooch," the lover's knot, made of such a small amount of gold, hollow and so light, it felt like nothing in your hand. I looked at it and it seemed to say she was alive.

I went to see Redbeard again.

Last time we had found him surveying his small garden like a country squire. This time he was nowhere in sight. But the door of his house was ajar. I knocked. His booming voice said, "Come in."

Again I was struck by the squalor he had brought to the

place. A bed, unmade, stood in the living room, its linen filthy with the marks of his boots. On the table was spread a fine embroidered cloth, marred by countless stains, and on the buffet that had once been polished shiny the outlines of the things we had carted away on our previous visit were still written in the dust. Dirty dishes, food remainders on them, fat coagulated, beer foam dried on glasses, a room full of smoke and the stench of the salami Redbeard was eating, cutting off thick slices and feeding them directly into his small mouth. The skin he spat out onto a plate before him with extraordinary precision.

He offered me some. I declined with thanks. He cut himself a slice of black bread from a large round loaf with a crust that shone like polished mahogany. Where had he got hold of these treasures? Truly, there was no stopping the man.

"Polish salami," he said, waving it at me. "And I know you would like to find out how I got it. You always want to know where everything comes from, don't you? Well, I'll tell you. A German prisoner brought it to me all the way from Poland with a greeting from my wife. Good of him, wasn't it? And why didn't he eat it on the way? Oh, I can anticipate all your questions, I have had enough practice with the bunch of you. Because my wife was nice to him." He grinned at me as he stuffed another slice into his mouth. "Nothing like it in all Germany." He finished his beer. "What do you want?"

"I'd like a window open," I said.

"Go ahead."

I opened one, the good fresh air blew in and seemed to cleanse the room. Then I went over to where he was sitting, laid the brooch on the table in front of him, and said, "I know hundreds of people passed through your hands and that you saw most of them only at night and that you had other things on your mind at the time than to see what they looked like, but do you happen to remember the woman to whom this brooch belonged and what became of her?"

He looked at me, his small eyes bright with peasant cun-

ning, then he picked up the brooch, turned it between his grimy thumb and forefinger with their stumpy, dirty nails, let it drop into his huge coarse palm, where it looked more fragile than ever, and said, "It isn't worth anything."

"I know it isn't valuable," I said, "but do you remember the owner?"

He closed his eyes a moment, then opened them again. "The brooch is worth nothing, but this information, how much is it worth to you?"

"You name your price."

"In American dollars?"

"In American dollars."

"One hundred American dollars."

I'd been expecting something like this. I had money on me and I paid him the sum.

He looked down at the brooch, letting it catch the sunlight so that it gleamed. "I told her to take it off," he said. "I told her it would catch any light just like that and betray us. She took it off and said I could keep it because I would have to carry her husband across the river, he wasn't strong enough to walk. The water was up to our knees, swollen the river was from the rains we'd had, and the current was strong where we had to ford. We could have crossed over the bridge if it had been a dark night, but it wasn't. The moon was up and sometimes they had their guns trained on the bridge. I lost a man that way once and I only got paid half at the start, you know, the other half at the other end. So you can understand that I didn't want to risk any lives. That was why I made her take off the brooch. So it is really mine. It should not have been taken from me. Not that it's worth anything, as I told you before, but I think my wife would have liked it. The woman, by the way, had red hair, red hair with a little gray in it, like mine. That's one reason why I remember her. I feel affection for people with red hair. Naturally."

"Why did her husband have to be carried?"

"He was a very sick man. The Germans had had him for a while and you know what that means."

"But she was all right?"

"Oh, she was fine. She waded through the river right behind me. Whenever I turned around to see how she was, she'd say, 'Carry him gently, please. He's in great pain. Don't turn around to look at me, it only jolts him unnecessarily. I can keep on my feet and if I can't, I can swim.' I told her, 'You can't swim in this current; nobody can. So you'd better stay on your feet or you'll drown.'

"She stayed on her feet, but I couldn't get my mind off her. Because she was one of the best-looking women I've ever seen. Not my type, mind you. I have no use personally for a woman so fine. But to admire. I'm a monarchist, you know. Now that may seem ridiculous to you coming from a Pole, since we haven't had a king in centuries. Still, I believe in a monarch. You see what we get if we don't have a monarch? Rabble becomes royalty. Not that I'm going to do anything about it. It's just a belief, that's all. Well, this woman reminded me of a queen who lived centuries ago. Can't remember her name but I saw her picture once in a storybook, and this woman looked like her. Her husband, whom I was carrying on my back . . . look here, young man, I worked hard for my money . . . he kept asking me to turn so that he could see she was all right. In the end I waited for her to catch up and put my arm around her and helped her along, too." He looked at me frankly, like a child. "I earned the brooch, don't you think?"

I put the brooch in my pocket and said, "You've just received a hundred dollars for it. If you do half as well on the rest of your ill-gotten booty, you'll be lucky."

Unfortunately he could not take me much farther on Sofie's trail. Arrived at his hut, his wife had given Sofie one of her dresses to replace the one she had on which was soaked and muddy from the river crossing. Redbeard cited this as

another example of his generosity, and I said Sofie's dress was probably worth twice as much as the one his wife had given away. "But it didn't fit her," said he. "My wife is almost as big as I am and she is fat," which was quite a thought. They must have been a formidable couple; and the poor wretches who were received by them must have thought, at first shock, that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. But, as it turned out, beyond extortion and robbery, Redbeard had done them no harm.

They had spent the rest of the night in his hut. First Sofie had watched Eugene fall asleep; then she had lain down at his side, very close, as if to warm him, although it was a warm night. "So maybe she just lay so close to him for comfort," said Redbeard. "I don't like to sleep without a woman at my side." He looked away from me and out the open window. "That air is nice," he said. "A little more rawness in it and I would feel at home. A good idea of yours, Lieutenant, to open the window. Where I come from we don't go in much for fresh air. Our windows are small and we keep them closed. Where I come from warmth is a luxury. One doesn't throw it out the window." And after a thoughtful silence, "You know, it was strange to see such a fine lady lying on a straw pallet on my dirty floorboards. Hadn't had those floorboards long, either. Nothing but the bare earth before that; still, the floor was dirty because in the winter the animals were in the house with us. Oh, I couldn't forget her, not that lady. Because the sight of her lying there where the animals had left their droppings made me realize more than anything else that the world is standing on its ear."

Next morning Sofie and Eugene had set out on foot in the direction of Katowice. The committee, whose headquarters were in London and whose efforts were bent on helping all political fugitives, liberals, Socialists, and Communists alike, was unable to provide any conveyance. For that the threat of war had come too close. Redbeard could recall exactly when

all this had taken place, on August 31, 1939, for on the following day Hitler had begun his invasion of Poland.

"So they had good weather for their walk," he said, "because they moved with Hitler's legions. You can say what you like about him, but he always had good weather for every move he made. And a good thing they walked, too. In any kind of conveyance you were simply conspicuous once the invasion began. Then it was a case of walk by night and hide in the woods or ditches by day. I wondered often who caught up with them first, the Poles retreating or the Germans advancing. Everybody was on everybody's heels in those days; God knows, everybody was on everybody's heels."

"And what was the matter with the husband? Did you ever find out?"

Redbeard shrugged. "He had a fever. He coughed. He was a wreck. You were there when they opened the concentration camps; you know what they looked like when the Germans got through with them. Barbarians," and he spat.

Yes, I thought, watching the lace-edged curtains billow into the room, caught on a sudden breeze, he was right. I looked at the dirt his boots had ground into the floor that had once been waxed shiny. Now it was marred by mud, spilled food, and dried spittle, but in the corners it still glowed with the sheen its German owners had left behind. Yet not he, the Pole, but *they* were the barbarians. Worse than that. There was really nothing barbaric about the systematic, efficient, hygienic German form of murder. Another name would have to be found for them.

It was the end of Redbeard's tale. Not worth a hundred dollars? Indeed, worth a great deal more. It was the first news of Sofie I had had in six years.

As I was leaving, the bell rang. I had closed the door, now Redbeard opened it to let me out and to let in the visitor, a young girl, so I stepped back to let her enter.

Her hair was flaxen blonde and it was cropped short like a

boy's. Against it her skin was unusually brown for early summer and very smooth. Her face was a perfect oval with a pointed chin; she had a nice, straight, stubby little nose and large blue eyes, and she reminded me of somebody I could not place.

She looked me in the eye, a bold, hard, assured look. I was used to that sort of thing. The German girls had only two approaches: simpering and coy or this frank boldness, and neither precluded familiarities.

She was dressed like hundreds of German girls in what was called an *Inselkleid,* probably because it had originated in the islands to the north. A bright-colored bodice with short sleeves and a full white skirt. On her bare brown feet she wore sandals and they were dusty, as if she had walked a long way. In spite of this there was something immaculate about her; and unlike many other German girls, she did not look starved. She wasn't flabbily plump, either, like those who have subsisted for months on a diet of beans and potatoes. She was the picture of glowing health, and the effect of this was quite startling, as if she had descended upon us suddenly from another planet.

She walked past us without a greeting, and I couldn't help hesitating as I watched her move into the next room. There she stopped, her back turned to us, and tapped the table with the long fingers of her brown hand, betraying an impatience that somehow conveyed itself to me.

"Who's that?" I asked Redbeard, wishing the girl would turn around again so that I could figure out of whom she reminded me.

Avid as he was to make money, soliciting was evidently not in his line. "I have no idea," he said, "but who she is seems to be my business, not yours," and with a little prod he hastened my exit.

I forgot about the girl. I wrote home about the small, inconclusive trace of Sofie and Eugene, I made more repeti-

tious inquiries through the Polish authorities, all of which led to nothing.

In the weeks that followed, it began to dawn on us that love of American protection was not the only thing that had moved Redbeard from his home in the Polish marshes to Bavaria, where he stuck out like a sore thumb. It soon became evident that this expert on the new European business of peddling human souls was practicing his trade as busily as ever; only now it was Nazi bigwigs who were seeking his services and being aided by him to hide or get out of the country. Among those who were missing and presumed to have been helped by him was Victor.

When I found Victor's name on the list, I took a look at his dossier. His last domicile had been the small *palais* in Berlin which had once belonged to Meta's parents. I knew its fate. The final battle for the city had reduced it to ashes. The dossier listed all his properties, but a thorough search had revealed not a trace of him at any of them. As for his crime, it was quite genteel. He had not even been a member of the Nazi party; all he had done was help build up the German war machine by procuring the raw materials for it. It was a cold, glittering, metallic record of guilt. We wouldn't hang him for it, not an American military court. Lord, no! If he had made lampshades out of human skin or shot American prisoners in the back or starved and tortured a whole concentration camp to death—yes. But so far we hadn't even passed a law which would cover his arrest; and if we ever did, he wouldn't hang for the refined business of providing Hitler with the potential to unloose hell on earth, not for that. Far too many prominent Americans were stained with the same guilt. Victor might as well have remained in the open.

His sons were mentioned by name in the dossier and that was a sad story. Floris, killed at Stalingrad; the next, a flier, shot down over London; a third, dead of his wounds in an

army hospital, the fourth missing. The wooden dolls in their sailor suits gone down like ninepins and Victor left with nothing but their decorations and his two daughters.

Huberta had been active in the Red Cross during the war and was residing now at Lake Starnberg, near Munich, in a small country house with the peculiar name of *Gottessegen* or "God's Blessing." Here Victor had been seen last a little over a year ago.

I made a mental note to look her up one of these days. Perhaps she had heard something of Sofie, perhaps Victor had before he had disappeared. Not that I promised myself any great results from the visit, or I would have undertaken the short trip right away. But so far as I knew the meager friendship between Sofie and Huberta had been broken when Meta had banished her daughter to Rostock, and could hardly have been resumed in the ensuing turbulent years. Huberta probably knew less than I of Sofie's fate. And when I read that Fräulein von Werthenau was with her at "God's Blessing" I put the idea of a visit out of my mind. That old dragon I certainly didn't want to see again.

With which I had come to the end of Victor's dossier and Susanne. She was listed as a student at the University of Munich and was living in a room she had rented from a war widow, a former schoolteacher who now drove a streetcar. Susanne had been interviewed and had testified to not seeing her father for over a year and having no idea of his present whereabouts. In the margin, just at this point, somebody had scrawled in red pencil, "Beware of the dog!" And with that the dossier ended.

For me, however, the case had just begun. Susanne I definitely wanted to see again. I suggested that, since I knew the whole family well, it might be expedient for me to look her up. Perhaps I could get something more out of her. So I was authorized to go and see her, and when she opened the door to me I saw she was the girl I had encountered at Redbeard's.

twenty-three

HER ROOM WAS SMALL AND IT WAS FURNISHED IN DESSAUER BAUhaus style, with the simplicity and functionalism for which that school of applied arts was famous. There was one very large window and a smaller one at right angles to it, in both of which the glass was still whole. On this pleasant day they were open, offering an undisturbed view of the English Garden, still one of the finest city parks in the world. The total effect was one of spaciousness and light.

The dog I heard before I got in. He set up a devilish barking when I rang the bell, a sleek, white bull terrier. I'd never liked the breed, much as I'd heard about their loyalty and courage. They were fierce and this one was no exception.

She held him by the collar as she opened the door and after she had decided to let me in, she tied him up with a steel chain in a corner where an iron ring had been fastened into the plaster for the purpose. From this banishment he continued to growl at me for some time. Beware of the dog, indeed!

Of course she didn't recognize or remember me, and at first she wasn't inclined to believe we had met before, but when I described our first meeting and showed her the scar on my hand, she smiled—not exactly at me, more to herself, as if at the memory.

"Incredible," she said softly. "But then, I have been told often that I was a beast."

With a little reluctance she gestured to me to sit down in a comfortable chair while she curled up on the day bed, her feet tucked under her, the cushions in a pile behind her back. "Be quiet, Bodo," she called out to the grumbling dog. Then, for a few moments, we just stared at each other, taking stock.

Except for the facial similarity, there was, of course, nothing left of the child Susanne. Everything else about her was new, the long legs, slim hips, broad shoulders, the lithe grace with which she moved, her voice, low and melodious and a little husky, but especially changed was her attitude toward me.

Gone was the straightforward approach of childhood. The young girl chose to draw a veil between us from behind which she eyed me with distrust. Which wasn't surprising. After all, I was the enemy. And she had probably recognized me as the American soldier she had seen at Redbeard's and was connecting my visit now with that.

Her next words told me I was right. "I've seen you before," she said. "A few weeks ago, at the house of that terrible Pole. What were you doing there?"

All right, I thought. It might be disarming to tell her the purpose of my visit first. Asking her what her business with him had been would then come quite naturally. So I told her about the brooch and how it had led me to Redbeard and what he had told me of Sofie and Eugene's harrowing escape to the east.

"You remember Sofie, don't you?"

"How could I forget her? She was the bane of my life."

She remembered the incident in the hotel lobby when Sofie had forced her to say she was sorry, although she couldn't recall my presence there.

"You still hate her, don't you?" I said. "Why?"

"I don't know."

She sat up, legs crossed, elbows on her spread knees, her pretty little face cupped between two fists. "I suppose because of Bertie's silly infatuation which, by the way, she has never got over. You can't imagine how much commotion it caused, although I'll admit I prefer it to her state of bondage to Vally."

"Vally?"

"Fräulein von Werthenau. Don't you remember her?"

"Brünnhilde. Of course, I remember her." Again she laughed at the nickname. Then she shook her head. "How Mother could have entrusted poor, weak, impressionable Bertie to such a woman! But then, Mother's attachment to Vally was never quite normal either," and she chuckled. "Whatever made you want to find Sofie?"

I tried to explain and when I had finished she smiled at me, a friendly, teasing smile. "She is the great love of your life, I take it."

"Oh, I don't know. I'd say she is my conception of love."

"Like a goddess?"

"Yes. Like a goddess."

She looked at me for a few seconds in silence, rather as if she were forming a new picture of me in her mind, then she said, "The war years will have changed her."

"So you think she's alive, too?" I said and was vexed at the foolish eagerness in my voice.

"Of course she's alive," said Susanne. "She's the kind you'll have to kill with an ax," and there was admiration in her tone.

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "She never struck me as particularly strong. I always looked upon her as rather on the frail side."

Susanne threw back her head and laughed. "Sofie frail? Oh, that's wonderful!" She gave me a malevolent look. "You wouldn't call a woman frail who has done exactly what she wanted to do all her life. Where there's that much will power there's physical stamina, too."

She relaxed again into the cushions. "My father was always so anxious that we like her, and my mother was just as busy trying to make us hate her because, according to her, Sofie had married a Red which, God knows, Eugene is not. Now Eugene I like." For a moment she was pensively silent. "No," she said, "to my mind Sofie is synonymous with discord."

"So you took your mother's advice and hated her."

"I never took my mother's advice on anything," said Susanne. "I hate Sofie entirely on my own initiative. It's a part of me, not to be denied." She thumped her chest as if all hatred were seated there. "Anyway," she said in a soft, sullen voice, "It's mutual."

"Whom *do* you love?" I asked.

"My father," she said and looked quickly away. "If anything ever happened to him I don't think I could go on living."

Suddenly, her expression intensely alert, her eyes fixed on me sharply, she said, "You came to find out something about him, didn't you? Don't bother denying it. I'm not going to believe you risked the punishment for fraternization just to renew your acquaintanceship with a girl who once bit you. Well, I can tell you at once, I don't know where he is. I haven't seen him in over a year."

"What were you doing at Redbeard's?" I asked, annoyed that I hadn't been able to introduce the question naturally after all. Now it was futile to ask. If she had gone to the Pole to ask him to help her father escape, she wouldn't be likely to confess it to me; nor would he, if I questioned him. If it was the fellow's intention to set himself up in the old business

with new clients he would hardly start off with a betrayal. Still, I asked. I was curious to see what story she would cook up and if it would tally with Redbeard's once I got around to questioning him again.

She had one ready for me and I found out later that it did tally. She had gone to Redbeard to see if he could help her find her youngest brother, the one who was still missing. She had heard that the Pole had connections with men in the east who had access to the lists of the PW camps. Had she been successful? She shook her head. It had been a wild rumor. Redbeard hadn't been able to do a thing for her.

I picked up a photograph from a nearby shelf. The young man it portrayed was still pitifully like the boy I remembered who had jiggled up and down when he spoke. "This is the one, isn't it?"

"Yes," and when she saw me looking at a picture of herself, arm in arm with a girl whom I recognized as Huberta, "That was taken at Salzburg years ago. Oh God, how Bertie has changed since then!"

There were a lot of family photographs and snapshots all over the room, in frames and stuck into frames so that sometimes they almost covered the original picture, none of her mother, I noticed; and they gave me an opening to ask questions. I let her tell about the fate of her various homes and her sister's whereabouts. She didn't lie. I asked her why she chose to live in this wrecked city rather than with Huberta on the Starnbergesee, where surely one must feel the impact of destruction less.

She said, "Live under the same roof with von Werthenau? No, thank you. I had enough of that when I was a child. I stayed with them before you Americans came, last winter, when Bodo and I would have starved here." She gave the animal a fond look and said, "I couldn't do that to him so I put up with Vally. Bodo, sometimes I wonder if you realize how much I love you."

The animal didn't move his head from his paws but his eyes sought hers for a moment, then he whiffled, a long dog sigh, and seemed to fall asleep.

I let her talk about her family. When she spoke about her brothers she looked dejected; but when she recalled the carefree past before the war, she smiled with her lips closed, a twisted little smile, and since she had slightly protruding teeth, this gave her a curiously enigmatic look. I think I fell in love with her then, with that strange smile, with the charm of its irregularity.

"And what are you doing with yourself now?" I asked, when we had come to the end of reminiscence.

"I am studying," she said. "Law and politics. Perhaps you can tell me—the university will open in September, won't it?"

"Could be," I said, "but you'll find a lot of the old professors gone."

"None that I care about," she said with contempt, and this indirect disavowal of Hitler delighted me, as if it mattered suddenly a great deal that she should not have been a Nazi.

"And this is your ammunition?" I looked up at the shelves beside me that reached from floor to ceiling and were crammed with books. German classics, a few modern German novels, books on philosophy, Fichte, Hegel, a lot of Nietzsche, law books and books on politics, politics, politics.

"Some of it," she said.

I picked out a very worn copy of *Il Principe,* standing beside an equally shabby edition of *The Discourses of Machiavelli,* and leafed through it. "Who wore this out?"

"I did," she said. "And before me, Floris. This was his, too."

She pointed to a picture on the wall that stood out among the few bright modern paintings because it was black and white and gray. It was the photograph of a painting in a *passe-partout* frame, not large but obtrusive. It showed a man with a rather pixilated face, smooth hair receding with a widow's peak from a high, rounded forehead, almond-shaped

black eyes, the brows very close, deep shadows enhancing the round bone structure and a wide, thin-lipped, secretive mouth. An intruder from the Renaissance. Now I knew who he was.

"Machiavelli," I said. "I was wondering where I had seen the picture before, but even now I don't know."

"In the Uffizi."

"And he is your god?"

"One of my gods."

"The master of expediency," I said. "The originator of dictatorship."

"Nonsense," she said. "He originated nothing. He only clarified what was inherent in man, then and now."

She leaned forward and I was painfully aware suddenly of her nearness. Her eyes had deepened to violet with the heat of what we were discussing, enchanting eyes that should have been alive with quite another excitement.

"I would like you to tell me," she said, "what is more honest or workable? A dictatorship where the masses are coerced into doing what has to be done, or your democracy where precious time is wasted in persuading them to do the exact same thing?"

Suddenly I had to laugh at her cockeyed notions. God knows, where I came from, a girl with her looks would have been using quite different ammunition. "Well," I said, "that depends on your conception of the nation. We don't see government and the people as things apart. *We* are the nation."

"I know." She shook her head at me as if I had been a naughty child. "That's why you have no statesmen. No genius can lose his identity as you demand of those who lead you. Oh my! Father used to read what went on in your houses of Congress and howl!"

"I have never been able to understand," I said, "why he wasn't a great admirer of Hitler's."

"Hitler was a disaster," she said, "and Father was one of the few who knew it from the start."

"Because he lost?"

She looked me straight in the eye and said, "Yes. Because he was bound to lose. Because he was a mad fool."

"On that we might agree," I said, "but win or lose, fool or genius, we despise force."

"But there is one thing that redeems force."

"And that is?"

"Faith."

"Faith? In what?"

"In that for which you are applying force. *In your goal.* We have it. The Japanese have it. The Russians have it. The Crusaders had it. It gives one the right to use force."

"And to fight one another?"

"When goals conflict—yes."

"And to despise the loser?"

"Certainly."

"Even if you are the loser?"

"Then most of all."

I stared at her. Vaguely it came back to me how Huberta had said that Susanne was the only one of his children for whom Victor had had time. And this was how he had spent it?

"And I suppose your father's aim was, like Hitler's, to make Germany great."

"No," she said, "it was the most sensible aim of all—to make himself great, something at which, you must admit, he eminently succeeded," said it and seemed to have no idea at all how preposterous her views were.

"And what, may I ask, is to redeem the man who concentrates his faith on himself?"

"Not on himself. On the God in him."

"The God in him?"

"Yes. That which makes him all-powerful."

Again I had to laugh but it didn't exactly sound gay. "I was taught that the God in me was what made me all-loving."

"I was spared that teaching," she said. "I never succumbed to the hypnosis of the New Testament."

"I can see that," I said, and pointed to the wall opposite the picture of Machiavelli where a crucifix had been removed, leaving the pale outlines of a cross.

"I was never on good terms with Him," she said, "but that isn't why the crucifix is gone. It was a present from Father. I put it there because he gave it to me, but it fell down during one of the raids and broke."

She got up, went over to a chest, and opened the bottom drawer. "Here are the pieces," she said. "If you like, you can have them."

I took the broken crucifix in my hand. The Christ had separated from his cross, the INRI tablet was off, all it needed was a good gluing. And it was really a beautiful piece of native Bavarian woodcarving. I looked at the knees, twisted in anguish as in Greco's painting of the crucified Christ in the Louvre. In a good crucifix the suffering is always concentrated in the knees, the eyes can convey it only in a painting.

"Thanks," I said. "I'll take it. And what can I give you in return?"

She pointed to the mark of the cross left by the crucifix. "A pot of paint," she said. "Any color. I want to paint the wall and I don't care if the color isn't the same. I didn't mind the crucifix but I do want to get rid of the mark. It bothers me."

"It shouldn't," I said. "That it does is a sign of vulnerability."

She shrugged and settled down again in her pile of cushions, rounded now like a cat. "Perhaps I am vulnerable," she said. "After all, I'm still very young." And I had to smile at the absurd way she said it, as if the goal of her invulnerability were absolutely assured, its achievement only a matter of time.

"Well," she said, "how about it? Do I get my pot of paint?"

"I don't know whether I can get hold of anything like that at this point," I said, "but I'll work on it."

I offered her a cigarette. She said she didn't smoke but took one "for Bylle," the woman with whom she lived. I said I'd leave her the pack so she stuffed the cigarette back again, and I sat there contemplating her with a feeling of well-being such as I hadn't felt in years.

We continued to haggle over political issues. But every now and then there were silences between us, the silences that fall usually between people who know each other well. They brought with them an air of intimacy not at all in keeping with the brief renewal of what had never exactly been friendship. And every now and then she would look at me in that enigmatic way, smiling that crooked little smile with her lips closed, and it made me feel her presence more keenly than anything that had been said. A sweet sensuousness, pleasantest intrusion imaginable, had arisen between us. It made itself felt like a perfume.

As we talked, the sun set wanly, without an afterglow, and the gray chill of twilight crept into the room. Susanne got up and closed the windows. Then she came and stood beside me, put one hand on my shoulder, and looked into my eyes. She was about to say something, her lips had parted, she had indrawn a breath, when we heard the front door open and close and a woman's voice with a question in it calling, "Susanne?"

Susanne looked up. "Dammit," she said softly, and called out, "Come in. I have a visitor."

It was her landlady, the streetcar conductor who had once been a schoolteacher, a plain woman, or was it the badly fitting uniform with its visored cap that made her seem so unprepossessing? Her hair was very black, her face an unhealthy yellow, and her features too prominent. Susanne introduced us. The woman's name was Sybille Keller.

"Thank God you're home," she said to Susanne, and to me, "I still can't bear to be alone indoors even though it's all over. Not since your bombings."

"I guess a lot of people feel like that," I said, "wherever there have been raids."

I could never let it pass, this insupportable German inability to see any injury but their own. But like most Germans, she was thick-skinned and didn't seem to notice it. She wanted to know when we were going to turn on the gas. "If only for a few hours a day, as they do in Frankfurt," she pleaded, as if it were up to me. "When you've been standing on your feet all day, picking up wood and tracking down a few lumps of coal isn't exactly what you want to do. And what can you cook when you've got it? What is there to cook?"

Susanne had flung herself down on the couch again and closed her eyes. "You haven't had to starve any more than I have," she said. "Bertie saw to that."

"Maybe," said Sybille Keller. "But is that all there is to life, just not to starve?" And to me, "Can you get us some coffee?"

I looked at Susanne and said, "I think so."

"And cigarettes?"

Susanne handed her my pack and said, "Don't beg. Have you no shame?"

"Thanks," said Sybille Keller, pulling a cigarette out of the pack and lighting it greedily. "From a race of conquerors we have been reduced to a race of beggars."

"And are better at it." Susanne spat out the words angrily.

"We're good at everything we do," said Sybille Keller, inhaling deeply. "Lieutenant, you have restored my self-respect. I can't live without coffee and cigarettes. They were my mother's vices and I imbibed them at her breast."

She took off her cap and ran her fingers through her hair and immediately looked more attractive. Her complexion was suddenly less jaundiced, the prominent nose matched the high, intelligent forehead, the mouth was no longer too large nor the lips too thick. Removal of the cap restored beauty to

features that should never have been forced into such a masquerade.

"They're clearing another line," she said, more brightly now, as if the cigarette had really invigorated her. "Your American trucks are moving the rubble."

"So are our men," said I, "and they don't like it."

She shrugged and said we shouldn't have locked up so many Nazis who were sitting comfortably in the jails while the Amis and the honest civilians were left with all the dirty work to do. This led to a mournful recital of the general dreariness of life with all conveniences buried under mountains of waste. "It can never be moved," she said, "never. They should leave it alone and build a new city. Let the ruins stand as a monument to the precision of American bombing. Have you seen the Corinthian columns of the Opera House against a blue sky? Just take away those gangly electric wires and we can put on as good a show as the Greeks."

Eyes still closed, Susanne said, "Of course it can be restored. Don't whine, Bylle."

But Sybille Keller could apparently do nothing but whine. "Is there something to eat?" she pleaded.

"Yes," said Susanne, "Bertie was here."

"She was? How did she get here?"

"She got hold of a horse, if you can call it that. The man who let her have it evidently didn't think it was a traction animal any more or he wouldn't have taken two silver candelabras for it. You should have seen it! She was a sensation all the way from Starnberg. But it pulled in the wagon, and if she can keep the poor beast alive she'll be coming in regularly from now on."

"She'll keep it alive," said Sybille. "Bertie could raise the dead. What did she bring?"

"A whole cheese, eggs, home-baked bread, soap."

"Soap?" Sybille looked as if the Holy Grail had appeared in the void just above her. She turned to me. "We killed our

dog this winter to make soap out of the little fat his body gave us."

"That surprises me," I said. "I thought you had all the fat you needed for soap from the bodies of the Jews you cremated."

Her pale face turned livid. "Lies," she said. "Horrible, perverted lies. I told you about the dog to prove to you what old wives' tales those atrocity stories are. In the end we didn't have enough food to go round so the prisoners in the concentration camps starved. Well, look at me. So did we."

"I see you weren't taken to any of the camps," I said.

Now she was white with agitation, trembling visibly and excited beyond speech. "She was," Susanne said drily, "and she fainted dead away."

The damn fool, I thought, as Sybille Keller suddenly covered her face with her hands. She's ashamed. She's the first one I've met who's ashamed.

"Go away, Bylle," Susanne said in a weary voice and, "I am going, I am going," said Sybille, and left us.

It was time for me to leave, too, but I didn't want to go. I looked down at this girl with whom I had fallen so unexpectedly in love, and wanted desperately to make love to her. The desire left me feeling weak, almost ill. I passed a hand across my eyes and could feel their heat against my fingers, as if I had a fever.

She gave me a look which seemed to say she could read my thoughts, but she said nothing. She only moved her arms a little to cover her body and her hands came to rest on her thighs.

"I want to see you again," I said, surprised at the sudden thickness of my voice.

She smiled. "Are you free on Sunday?"

"I can make myself free."

"Then if you'll come for me before curfew, we could drive out into the country."

"I'll do that," I said.

"Good."

She moved her arms again slowly—it was like an unfolding —and got up. "And now I would like you to make friends with Bodo since we are going to see more of you."

She let the dog off the leash, took my hand in hers, and explained to the animal that I was a friend. "Now put out your fist. That's right." The dog smelled it thoroughly. "Pat him." I did, and the brute tolerated it.

She was still holding my hand. Now she turned it palm-up in hers and said, "You have nice hands, very nice hands," turned my hand over again and rubbed her thumb across the faint scar. "What a bad girl I was."

I couldn't wait until Sunday. I leaned forward to take her in my arms and in the same moment the dog went for me. She held him back just in time.

"I should have warned you," she said. "You must never touch me or he'll bite. You see, he's my protector."

I could have shot the brute. "Won't I ever see you without him?" I asked.

She put her hand on my arm and said quite simply, "You will." But there was nothing simple about the mood it created between us. I didn't think I could exist without seeing her again until Sunday.

So that was how it came to me at last, the grand passion, the great love affair. I called for her the following Sunday morning in plenty of time to get out of the city before curfew. She was wearing the *Inselkleid* again and was carrying a net market bag. "We're going mushrooming," she said, "it rained last night and the woods will be popping."

"And this time you won't bite me?"

She gave me a look and with a gentle push of her hand against my chest propelled me out the door. "No. This time I won't bite you."

Bodo was trotting at her heels. His reception of me today

had been quite mild and I was beginning to get over my aversion to his sleek white body with the small, keen, red-rimmed eyes. "Come on, feller," I said, and he jumped into the jeep and settled down beside Susanne, sitting up very straight and looking absurdly proud.

We drove through the ruined city and talked about the treasures that were lost. I told of my love of the Gothic, the tall, emaciated saints, the bland, doll-like, sugar-sweet Madonnas on half-moons with a halo of stars, and the curlicue elegance of the rococo. And where could you find their equal except in Bavaria? But I couldn't get her to grieve with me for the star-crowned Madonna of St. Anne, impaled against a blazing sun at the feet of her crucified son, completely destroyed, blown to bits.

"I've had argument upon argument on this subject," I said. "Of course, very few of the fellows in my outfit know Europe as well as I do, and none of them seem to have learned to love this or that work of art especially. They think I'm crazy to care about them when so many lives were lost. But I do."

She said softly, "You haven't lost anybody who was dear to you," and I thought of her brothers whom she had loved much and whose loss must have meant a great deal to her, and could feel myself redden with shame because I had emerged from this gigantic destruction so unscathed.

"I suppose that's why I can grieve for the ruined treasures," I said. "I tell myself they can never be replaced. Children will be born again and grow up to be men, and soldiers, goddammit, but there will never be another Madonna of St. Anne."

But Susanne didn't see the ruined city. She had closed her eyes to the sun and looked as if she had known nothing all her life but peace. "I don't grieve for either," she said. "The other day I was in Nürnberg and I saw what had become of that tourist's paradise. As if a child had trampled on a toy. And Hildesheim. Have you ever seen Hildesheim?" She opened her eyes and looked at me. "It's in the north. I had an

aunt there, so I used to visit it often. It was smaller than Nürnberg and less disturbed by modern architecture. I always felt only children should live in Hildesheim and play at being grown-ups in old-fashioned dresses. And what is it now? Wiped off the map, flat with the ground. Your bombers did it. But I'm not going to wail about it like Bylle. I don't grieve for it. I grieve for only one thing," and suddenly her voice was soft with heartbreak, "I grieve for the defeat, the terrible defeat."

The false regret, I thought, always the false regret.

I had driven us into a dead end. A pyramid of stone loomed up in front of us and as I backed the jeep out I thought, that Keller woman is right. It can never be moved.

We circled a badly damaged fountain. Neptune, naked but for his loin cloth, reclined untouched and relaxed, head resting on one hand, the other upheld in a Hermes gesture, and at his feet teetered a Greek goddess, staring at her right hand which now held nothing. A round, rayed, stone sun, its bland mouth petrified in a smile, was still firmly fastened to her stone breast. She reclined gracefully in a pile of bricks and her broad, motherly lap was strewn with dust.

It was a joy to leave the shattered city behind and come to the woods which were redolent with the smell of mushrooms and damp earth after an all-night rain. "You'll have to show me the ones to pick," I said. "I don't know good from poison."

"I do," she said, and explained that the Steinpilz was the prize. "I dry them and Bertie makes marvelous soups and sauces with them."

She found one and showed it to me with its fat, gray-white, sturdy stem and spongy mahogany cap and its wonderful aroma. "Fine," I said, "I won't miss out on that one," and soon found a whole small clump of them.

"You're lucky," she said, coming in answer to my proud outcry, "like me."

Her eyes were bright, suddenly she was standing very close

to me, and I was trembling. "What is it?" she asked, in that husky voice of hers, soft like a whisper now, her breath near and warm.

"You know what it is."

"Well?"

I laughed, a shaky laugh. "If I touch you, do I get that brute's teeth in my neck?" and I gestured toward the dog.

"Not out here," she said. "Try it and see."

She didn't have to wear anything to keep her looking trim and she had scarcely anything on. She undid the buttons of her dress and the small soft mounds of her breasts were under my cupped hands at last and her body was mine. We were beautiful at that moment, that was the way it flashed through my mind with a magnificent feeling of exultation—beautiful.

There was nothing in our loving to compare with what had gone before, nothing could approach this immensity of feeling. I thought it must destroy me, but it didn't. When it was over I lay at her side, disembodied, taking in the beauty of our surroundings and the clarity of the air with new, acute perception. It was then that I experienced for the second time that calm of the spirit that had come upon me after the struggle with Feeny, like a quiet death, like the end of all restlessness forever, like a bloodletting. The same blessed release of every controlled energy, the same sense of liberation and, added to it now, joy, the joy of having found at last the great, absorbing love. It had been worth yearning, worth waiting for, worthy now of my entire dedication. For this I had been given life.

Explain this to my father? Hardly. But I was honest with him. "Yes," I said, "it is the girl."

"Are you going to marry her?"

"She won't marry me."

The relief in his expression was unmistakable. "I'm glad," he said.

"Why? You don't even know her."

"That's true. But I never did like the setup. Nothing good could come of it. And I can see how she's changed you. You don't look well, Robbie, and you've aged a lot."

"The war might have done that."

He shook his head and suddenly his gaze was penetrating. "I think she did it," he said, then asked briskly, "You're not doing yourself any harm by running around with her, are you?"

I said, "No. We're discreet. Anyway, we don't run around together; we're hardly ever seen. Don't worry about it, Dad."

"Well, that's all right then," he said, sounding as if he didn't feel it was all right at all.

"Would you like to meet her?" I asked. "Maybe that would relieve you," but I was the one who was relieved when he replied, "No. I guess not. Because somehow I don't think it would."

twenty-four

I HAD NEVER DREAMED OF GLORY, BUT WHEN I ENTERED INTO this intense relationship with Susanne, I began to dream about her often. She would appear to me dancing barefoot in the open, across fields Technicolor-bright with flowers, leggy as a colt. She would flop down in the high grass and start making a daisy chain. Suddenly the chain was made and she'd crown herself with it, and it made her look like one of those freckled kids they like to put on the covers of women's magazines. Sometimes she'd be singing, low and quaintly out of tune. I'd see her in a visionary flashback, building the fall, tense and serious about it. I was nowhere in sight. Or I was, and we were fishing. Or she was eating an ice cream sandwich with a peculiar technique she'd perfected which I'd forgotten all about. Mostly she was by herself, once, though, Grandmother and I were with her. We were in Boston at a Schnabel concert. He was playing the second movement of the Pathetique Sonata and Glory was crying, her face motion-

less, the large tears coursing down her cheeks. But that dream was all gray and black and somber.

These dreams didn't tend to make me miss her, nor did they start me writing to her again. Once, though, I had to laugh when it occurred to me that Glory, so tenacious in her love, couldn't leave me alone with Susanne and was perhaps trying to lure me back in the only way open to her now, by appearing to me in my dreams. One thing, however, was accomplished by them—they helped to accentuate the contrast between the sweet childish relationship that had been ours and what went on between Susanne and me.

Glory had lived for me, I lived for Susanne. Glory had danced attendance on me, I danced attendance on Susanne. Glory hated conflict in any form, Susanne delighted in it.

I found that out on one of our outings together when Bodo caught a woodchuck. I turned away from the sight but could not look away from Susanne as she watched the unequal battle and in her excitement could see the prolonged agony the small animal was enduring, mirrored not in her compassion but in her delight.

"You're cruel," I said.

She shrugged. "That's nature, the survival of the fittest."

"Of the strongest."

"It's the same thing."

"But nowhere are we told to enjoy it."

"I'm sorry," she said, not sounding sorry at all. "I can't help it. I love a fight. Don't look so aghast. Millions do, only they're not so honest about it. Have you ever seen two stags locked in battle? It's a sight you never forget. You'll just have to take me as I am, Robbie." And I took her. There was nothing else I could do.

In her political views she remained adamant. She insisted that I was relegating to a democratic government functions that could be attributed only to the individual. Democracy was a fiction, she declared. And when I interposed that we were getting quite good results from it, she countered with

the European viewpoint that our country was much too young to be used as an example of a successful democracy. In the end it would fail because liberty inevitably begat the tyrant and only the tyrant begat advancement. It was a question of time, that was all. Some freedoms just died harder.

To illustrate her point she began with ancient history and led me through to the present day and I had to marvel at her knowledge. Only the individual could bestow freedom, only the individual could give vigor and efficiency to government, she declared. Useless for me to put forth the argument that our lack of vigor and efficiency had still not prevented us from winning the war.

"You won the war," she said, "but you will squander the victory."

"The peace, you mean."

"Peace? Oh Robbie, there is no such thing as peace. Only the transient shock of victory or defeat."

The fallacy of peace. She had written a paper on it. But this was too much for me. I was not prepared to give up my belief in peace as something more than a hiatus between battle, whatever she might bring forward historically to prove it. It was the only thing to which I stuck, which I insisted on preserving for myself, which I would not give up to her. I fought her on it through many bitter hours but could not sway her. She was not to be deflected from the limited faith in what *was* humanly possible, whereas I stuck tenaciously to the belief in what man *might* be capable of if he included ethics in his goal.

"As a preacher, perhaps," she granted, "but as a statesman you would fail."

"Why?" I wanted to know, and added, "I shall prove it." And knew suddenly what I had to do. *Not write.*

"I really ought to report you," I said once, "for your cockeyed views."

"Then you would have to report more than half of Germany's youth," she said, and was right.

How, I wondered often, how in the world would we master this incorrigible hydra of Germany's lack of remorse? How defeat it, especially in the young, the ones like Susanne who would not recognize peace, the ones not tempted by security, the ones who had no memories and no inclination toward contentment? Those like Sybille Keller, to whom the brutalities of the Nazi regime were unbelievable or seemed no different and certainly no worse than the holocaust precipitated by our bombings? Those attuned almost from birth to regimentation, privation, and agonizing death, those who had always known the futility of attachment because of the imminence of loss? Those whose thirst for conflict was unquenched, whatever God they worshiped, the nation or the power within them, for whom the challenge of a defeat to be overcome was the starting point from which they could see only one goal—Germany's resurrection after which would come, unfailingly, Germany's omnipotence, whether by crude force or Machiavellian diplomacy. A defeated nation? Not in the small sunlit room where I had been defeated.

My work, meanwhile, had boiled down to the ferreting out of arms dumps and the tracking down of the men who had hidden them, who called themselves "Werewolves" and didn't know that the vast game of "cops and robbers" was over. Or I translated Nazi documents as they were found, checked and rechecked on human beings, displaced persons who wanted to move on, and Germans who were to be permitted to take up their activities in responsible positions again. Between chores such as these and Susanne my life was divided, but the only thing that registered and was real to me, was Susanne.

Together we watched Munich begin to dig out from under the ruins. We heard the first radio broadcasts and what did they give us, these barbarians for whom the word was too good? The sweetest chamber music, ballads, folk songs, and somebody singing Schumann lieder. Together Susanne and I went to the first symphony concerts. A subdued Germany was raising its head and looking wide-eyed at an accusing

world. Who, me? On its knees it held in outstretched, supplicating hands the peace offering of a gentler art than aggression. Forget, forget with Schumann's "Träumerei."

Susanne loved music. It was the only thing that could take her out of her fanatic self, that could bring her the sort of peace in which I believed. She played the violin, she told me; oh, nothing to brag about, but all Victor's children had studied a musical instrument and had played chamber music together quite decently.

If I could capture this aspect of her, I told myself, this was what I wanted to hold. If I could get her away from this war-torn continent where horror was of necessity uppermost in everybody's mind, she would change. Her vitality could be deflected to a happy goal.

Of course there was only one answer to that. But she rejected the idea of marriage just as vehemently as she rejected the idea of peace. Slowly I began to realize that she didn't love me at all (in all honesty she had never said she did) and that this giving of herself meant nothing to her beyond the delight of the act itself. Looking back, I realized this was inherent in the simplicity with which she had accepted me as a lover, and I was filled with dread that she might relinquish me with the same ease.

Why couldn't I welcome this state of detachment? It gave me everything I desired without restricting me in any way. Why couldn't I be satisfied with things as they were? Because I had grown up in a tradition where love meant the surrender of self and the taking possession of the beloved, the tradition where a man called the woman he loved his own. But this girl would not be mine, this girl who with the wonderful inventiveness of her lovemaking could open up to me such indescribable delight, delight that I was beginning to realize she could enjoy with anyone she chose, whereas I could enjoy it only with her. And was fully aware of the bondage this implied.

One day I was to meet her at her place but not before ten

at night. I couldn't get away earlier, I had explained. But I did. I let myself into her apartment shortly before nine-thirty. She wasn't there.

For half an hour it didn't worry me; then curfew time came and went. If she returned now from wherever she was, she risked arrest . . . and if she didn't come? But if she wasn't coming back that night, why hadn't she left a message? I began to search for one but found nothing.

I sat down again in the easy chair and lighted a cigarette. My fingers were trembling. I told myself they were trembling because I was worried about her being out after curfew, but knew worry had nothing to do with it. I wanted her, needed her right away, like a starving man, like a drug addict. It is like a drug, I thought, this love, this addiction. And where was the cure for it? Satiation seemed as far away as death and equally unwelcome.

I looked at the pale cross outlined on the wall by dust. It was fading. In the faint light of the candles I had lighted, it was almost invisible and the flames looked feeble, flickering without the cause of devotion, only to give light. I turned my back on it and laid down on the bed, flat on my stomach, feeling the painful void of her absence until it became almost unendurable. I hadn't had much sleep the night before, so I'd been tired when I got to her room, longing for the release of love and the sweet sleep that followed; and now there was no release. Vulnerable as I was just then, the memory of a perplexing event attacked me. It had happened only ten days ago, yet it seemed to have troubled me much longer than that.

In the warmth of her bed, after the wildness of an embrace and the ecstasy it had brought to both of us, with the clear mountain air blowing in gently through the open window, cooling our heated bodies, with sleep robbing me slowly of the sight of her lying beside me, in illusion so much mine, her voice, strangely loud in the night's silence, insinuated suddenly that this was to be the last time, that it was over between us.

She might just as well have driven a knife into my heart. Anguish awoke me abruptly to complete awareness. I pleaded, I fought with her, she let me take her again, then she laughed softly and said how foolish I was to have believed her, to think she could live without it any more than I could.

"Why," I asked her then, "why did you say it? Why did you torment me with it?"

She traced the outlines of my face with her finger. "Because when a man is unhappy, he is the nicest lover, Robbie, the nicest lover of all." She covered my eyes suddenly with her hand. "How fierce you can be," she said.

It opened up vistas down which I did not want to travel, but a merciless force pushed me on. How had she come by this distorted bit of philosophy? Whom had she made unhappy and driven to love her fiercely before me? Who, before me, had been "the nicest lover of all?"

I had long ago reconciled myself to the fact that there had been others before me, without even bothering to blame for it the promiscuousness encouraged under the Hitler regime. What she had done before I came into her life she had done of her own accord, of that I was certain. And why let it trouble me since I profited by the fact that I was not her first lover? But I could not resign myself to not being the last.

I don't know how long I had lain there on her bed when I heard the front door open and close. I jumped to my feet, but the steps were not Susanne's. They walked past the door, paused, whoever it was saw the light and knocked. "Susanne?"

Sybille Keller's voice. "She's not here," I said.

She opened the door. "Oh," she said, "it's you."

She came in, removing her cap and running her fingers through her black hair as she did always, as if the cap were a painful imprisonment and, as usual, she was beautified by the gesture. Opening her jacket at the neck, she sat down.

"What are you waiting for?" she asked. "Susanne's not likely to come back now, after curfew."

"Where could she be?"

Sybille Keller shrugged. "How do I know? She has friends all over the city. She probably stayed too long somewhere and now has to stay the night. Not that I think she intended to, because she went out early this morning and she didn't take a thing with her, not even a coat." She shivered. "And it's chilly out now. Winter's coming and we haven't had autumn yet. Pour me a glass of wine, Robert, there's a good fellow. You know she wouldn't mind."

I poured a glass for her and for me. Sybille sipped hers thoughtfully. "Never did I know a girl to walk around so free and easy. Now I like to carry a bag, most women do, and it's always full of stuff, even now when nobody's got anything, unless it's something to trade or sell. That's what I miss most when I go out in this hideous uniform. But not Susanne. A purse in her pocket and her hands swinging free, that's the way she likes to go off. And that's the way she went off today."

Suddenly she drank down her wine all at once, stretched herself, and crossed her hands behind her head. She was sitting on the bed and it irritated me to see her reclining in Susanne's cushions. But she seemed unaware of that. She smiled at me affectionately. "I'm glad you're here," she said, "and alone for once. There's something on my mind and I'd like to tell you about it. I'd value your advice."

"Go ahead," I said, "what is it?"

"It's this. My father was a Jew. Not my mother and not my husband, of course. As half-Jewish I might have got by, especially with an Aryan husband, but he'd have lost his job. So my mother declared under oath that I was the illegitimate child of a university professor who had courted her before she married my father. He was dead, the professor, I mean, so there was no protest from that quarter, although his widow and children created quite a fuss at the time. They were stanch Nazis. But it all went through in the end. I was de-

clared a pure Aryan. And when my real father was deported, it didn't affect me at all."

She paused, then, in a slower, thicker voice, she said, "He died in Auschwitz."

Another pause, in which her breathing could be heard, and I knew suddenly why she had fainted when we had forced her to visit a concentration camp, why she reacted to any mention of them so vehemently, why she was the only German I knew who was ashamed. "He's been on my mind lately," she said. "I'd feel better if he were reinstated as my father. Can you understand that, I mean now, when it doesn't really matter any more? But it would help my peace of mind. Have you any idea how I should go about it?"

I stared at her. "Are you sure you're not doing this because right now it's better to have a Jewish father than one who was a Nazi?"

She turned her head away as if I had struck her. She looked down and I could see her eyes and mouth moving to fight tears. "I'm sorry," I said, "but it occurred to me."

"No," she said, her voice a husky whisper. "I wasn't thinking of it for that reason at all."

Suddenly I felt trapped in an alien land and not for the first time. It had come over me often lately, this immense loneliness, this feeling that I was of a different kind, that I didn't belong. Fantastic problems such as these always brought it on, so did my morbid preoccupation with Susanne. Was I homesick? But if so, in God's name for what? Right now I couldn't pin my longing down to any goal except Susanne.

Sybille Keller was watching me. "You can't keep your mind on anything but what's worrying you, can you?" she said. "Well, I won't disturb you any longer. But there's something I would like to tell you, although, God knows, it's none of my business. It's this. I don't think you'll get any happiness out of Susanne. Not that she wouldn't give it if she could, but

she can't. She's not cut out for that. But you, Robert, you're a simple soul. You were meant to be happy."

She got up, swinging her cap. "Anyway, I'm pretty sure she won't be back tonight. Come to think of it, she may have hitched a ride to 'God's Blessing.' That old servant of theirs came this morning with a message and I think it upset her."

She left me alone and I left the house, taking my torment with me. I looked up a friend and turned him out of bed, we went off together and got roaring drunk. I don't remember getting back to my quarters, only being awakened before dawn, bathed in sweat, with a splitting headache and a pounding heart, by, of all people, Redbeard.

It was still dark. What the hell did he want at this unearthly hour? He'd been thrown out of his house recently, I knew that. Somebody else had enjoyed his sunflowers. Meanwhile he had built himself a hut out of the flotsam of the bombings, beside many others like it, in a street where the black market flourished and he, I presumed, with it. The homeless had holed in there like rats, mostly escapees from the concentration camps, Polish and Russian Jews. If he thought I could help him to more elegant quarters, he was mistaken.

But that wasn't on his mind. He said, "I have information that I think might be worth something to you."

"You've gotten every cent out of me you're going to get," I said, to which he made no reply.

I sat up in bed whereupon everything went black before my eyes in a nauseating dizziness. "Whom does it concern?" I asked.

He said, "It concerns the beautiful lady with the red hair."

Mention of Sofie had the most extraordinary effect on me. I could feel the blood rushing back to my head, the color to my cheeks and a sensation of pleasantest warmth. Suddenly my eyes saw with clarity and the sweat felt cool on my skin. The feeling of sickness was gone.

"What about her?" I asked.

He got another fifty dollars out of me. Sofie and Eugene were at "God's Blessing."

twenty-five

WHY HAD THIS BEEN KEPT SECRET FROM ME? ACCORDING TO Redbeard, Sofie and Eugene had been at "God's Blessing" for over a week and Susanne was in constant touch with Huberta. She hadn't found out only that morning, my first guileless conclusion. She had known about it all along, from the day it had been planned, and had wanted it kept from me. Why?

She opened the door to me and, with the question loud on my lips, I stormed into the pretty little chalet Meta had had built on the shores of a Bavarian lake in better days, for better times. "Who told you about it?" Susanne wanted to know.

"Never mind who told me. Where is Sofie? I want to see her."

"If you must come at such an unearthly hour . . . hush, Bodo," as the dog's friendly barking filled the house. "Everybody's still asleep."

"I am not asleep," said a voice from the upper landing, a voice I would have recognized anywhere.

A few steps brought me to the foot of the stairs. At the top stood Sofie. The rays of an early-morning sun were reflected on a window behind her, forming a frame of light that left her face in darkness. But then she came down the stairs and step by step into the gray light of dawn, came down the stairs without looking at them, without a hand on the banister. Once love had made her unaware of them, now tribulation had had the same effect. She came toward me, a completely changed Sofie, a woman who needed no help, no champion at all.

It has been my observation that those Europeans who survived the direct impact of the Second World War were either incredibly aged by the ordeal or toughened by it. Sofie was one of those whom the ordeal had toughened.

She was dressed like a peasant in blue cotton, faded by many washings, a dress with no style to it yet one you would never forget. It seemed to have only one function, to cover her. She was thin but it was a hardy thinness that in some strange way etherealized her. The muscles were clearly visible on her arms, her skin was burned brown, and the hand she held out to me was the rough hand of a farm laborer. Her hair was thicker than I remembered it and it was white.

Somehow the perfection of her features was heightened by this asceticism which told more eloquently than words that she had done without every comfort and luxury for years. Out of her sunburned face her blue eyes blazed with the old, bright keenness, and there was about her a new indomitable expression, an air almost of eternal life. This without any joy. It was a defiant vigor. She looked like an Amazon.

She was smiling, no smile that I knew. It brought no gladness to her features, only thinned her lips.

"You see, my dear old friend," she said, "how the little foibles of life have been knocked out of us. I can walk up and down stairs now without help."

"And you knew me, right off the bat, by nothing more than my voice."

I was glad the simple thought came to me, it helped hide my confusion over the change in her.

"Not only by your voice," she said, "but by the old élan. Oh, Robbie, I'm glad that hasn't changed."

I put my hands on her shoulders. They were hard, I could feel the bone. "Nothing has changed," I said, my voice fierce with emotion. "Nothing."

She led me into a small downstairs room that was gay with chintzes, woodcarved furniture and the bright reds, blues, and greens of Bavarian hearts and flowers. The sunshine had entered ahead of us. Its slanting rays were caught in brass and copper, pottery vases were filled with the last brazen marigolds of autumn and the first crisp chrysanthemums, in the midst of which Sofie stood like a stranger from a somber world.

"I expected to find you frail and broken," I stammered, "but not this . . . this hardiness."

"The sun and wind branded me," she said, and added softly, "Some have been branded much more cruelly."

She sat down and gestured to me to take the chair opposite, the one that faced the light, but first I looked around me and out into the hall. Susanne had disappeared.

"You must forgive me," Sofie said, pressing thumb and forefinger of one hand against her eyeballs as if they pained her. "But there is a yawning abyss between us."

"All the terrible things that have happened?"

"Yes." She looked at me again, a gentler smile on her lips now. "All the terrible things that have happened. You must

have a little patience, Robbie. There is such a long distance to bridge. Seven incredible years."

"Didn't you know I was stationed in Munich? Didn't Susanne tell you?"

"Susanne?" At mention of the name her face became thoughtful. "No. Nobody told me. But then, we arrived only a few days ago and at first we were preoccupied with caring for Eugene. There hasn't been much time for talk." She looked at me for quite a long moment very intently, as if she were trying to recapture the peaceful past. Then, "How is your mother?" she asked.

"Just the same."

"Of course," she said, and added softly, "How wonderful . . . how inconceivable . . . to be just the same."

"She's going to be thrilled to death to know I've found you."

Suddenly the old smile was on her lips and the old warmth in her expression. "I wish I could see her," she said, "I wish she were here. She would restore me." And then, as if she had found her way back at last to the old closeness of our relationship, "Oh Robbie, I could cry. And I never thought I would want to cry again. Welcome, my dear, welcome back into our lives."

I took her face between my hands and kissed her on both cheeks. "You're alive," I said. "Nothing else matters."

"It doesn't matter at all, foolish boy," now the tears were coursing down her cheeks, "it doesn't matter at all."

"But it does. If you survived, then all goodness hasn't vanished from this miserable continent."

She brushed the tears from her eyes with the flat of her rough hand and her lips were thin again. She said, "I assure you, Robbie, that what has survived in me is not the good. Those who preserved the good in them died or are dying, like Eugene."

"He doesn't have to die," I protested. "I can get him anything he needs. We won't let him die."

She got up and held out her hand to me. "Come and see," she said.

Eugene lay between the sheets, a shrunken man, as if illness had eaten away a foot of his stature. He was as emaciated as the men we had freed from the concentration camps who had wasted away with the disease of German brutality. But he sat up in bed and stretched out his hot hand to me with the virile gesture of a healthy man and his smile hadn't changed. "It's good to see you, Robbie," he said. "If I were not past giving any of it a thought, just seeing you would fill me with renewed hope."

He fell back in his pillows, his cheeks bright, his piercing eyes luminous with fever. The brief effort of welcome had exhausted him. "This death of mine is long overdue," he said softly.

He had had a bout of tuberculosis in his youth, he explained. Now, after the hardships he had had to endure, the old scars had broken open and were annihilating him. "That's it in a nutshell," he said. "Doctors take such an unconscionably long time to say the same thing, don't they?"

He looked at Sofie who had sat down in a chair at his bedside. *Now* he saw her, now he was aware of her presence. Gone was the indifference of former years. He looked at her like a young man in love.

He wanted to tell the story of their calvary, but Sofie said, "No. I will. You must rest. You mustn't talk until you have had a long rest."

It was the everyday European tale of escape, of the smuggling of human beings over "the green borders," of inconceivable stretches of land covered on foot, of walking by night to escape enemy strafing and hiding in ditches during the day, of arrest, imprisonment and arbitrary release, of working in the fields, of stealing the left-overs of harvest to survive and, when those were gone, of starvation.

Thus they had fled across Poland as far east as Lemberg

and with Russian victory had begun to move back again toward the west. Finally they had reached Leipzig where they had come under the jurisdiction of a Red Cross friend of Huberta's who had managed, through a series of messages and after the passage of much time, to convey the news to her that Sofie and Eugene had been found. This was where Redbeard had come in. He had helped make the impossible possible. Through him Huberta had known whom to bribe and wheedle in order to move her precious cargo from Russian-occupied Leipzig to "God's Blessing."

As we were talking about her, she appeared in the doorway and came in, her hand outstretched to me, all friendliness. But greeting died on my lips when I saw that her face was covered with a network of fresh red scars.

She laughed at my expression of surprise. "They are honorable scars," she said. "Did Sofie tell you how I got them?"

"I was just coming to that," said Sofie, and she told of their journey from Leipzig to Munich in a truck laden with old farm equipment. Eugene and she had been hidden inside but there had been no room for Huberta. She had ridden on top, and the low branches of trees had given her a merciless whipping. "Come here, my child."

Sofie put out her hand and cupped Huberta's wounded cheek in it with a tenderness of which she would have been incapable years before, and there was fondness in her eyes for the girl she had once despised. Indeed, the foibles of former days were gone. Sofie could walk down a flight of stairs now without a helping hand, and she no longer withdrew from a love she had once considered abnormal. Because now she knew, now all of us knew, what was really abnormal. Never love.

"What are you doing for this poor face of yours?" she said.

Huberta smiled, her face brightening as it had always brightened when she looked at Sofie. "Nothing. It will heal

better that way. The scars are really quite superficial and will disappear, leaving me with the same, horrid face."

But it wasn't a horrid face at all. There was something sweetly old-fashioned about it, like a Victorian miniature. Pinafores would have suited Huberta. How different they were, these two sisters. There was nothing old-fashioned about Susanne.

Now as then, Huberta was overshadowed by Fräulein von Werthenau, "Vally," as she was called, whom I met again at breakfast. She was as much the Walkyrie as ever and she disapproved as much as ever of me. At breakfast, too, I saw Susanne again. She looked stonily everywhere except at me. I was not to be forgiven for having found out that Sofie and Eugene were at "God's Blessing." Suddenly it occurred to me that I was the one who should be unforgiving; wasn't I the one who had been deceived? And rage over my bondage to this girl made the good food stick in my throat.

And it was good food. Fritz, the old servant, the only man left at "God's Blessing," served breakfast. He and the exquisite china and silver gave the meal a prewar elegance, and what was served certainly didn't remind one of rations. Huberta explained why, Huberta who somehow kept the conversation alive between the morose, inimical rest of us. She, Vally, Fritz, and the two women servants had turned into a farm the spacious grounds that sloped up the hill away from villa and lake. Here they grew vegetables, kept chickens and pigs, and there were five cows.

"We have to give off a lot, of course," she explained, "but you can see that we keep enough for ourselves."

"I don't think you keep enough for yourself," I said, looking into her deep-set eyes, taking in the pinchedness of her features, the pale lips, the wan, scarred cheeks, the pallor of the temples where the fine blue veins showed, and could feel Susanne looking at me. I looked at her and she turned her face away, but not before I had seen the fury in her eyes.

Conversation became impossible. I was about as welcome at "God's Blessing" as the plague. Sofie ate little and left us almost at once to take Eugene's breakfast to him. Vally von Werthenau got up and said to Huberta, "Come along," Susanne and I were left alone.

I went and sat down beside her and put an arm across her shoulders but she pushed it off. "Are you coming back with me?" I asked.

She shook her head, "No. I'm staying here."

"For how long?"

"That's my concern."

"Surely," I said, "it isn't a desire to be near Sofie that keeps you here?"

She gave me a look of scorn.

"And why did you keep it from me? I can't believe it was purely malice."

"I had my reasons," she said.

I looked at her, a deadness in my heart over this treacherous withdrawal. "I can't live without you," I said.

"That's your misfortune," she replied, and it was, my great misfortune.

I had to find out what was wrong. I had to find out why I had been deceived and why Susanne had suddenly decided to live at "God's Blessing." Huberta, I thought; she would tell me.

I found her halfway up a hill, cutting the heads of cabbages which she was depositing in a pit for winter burial, and I came right out with what I had to know. Surprising how easy it was to talk to this girl, now as then. She sat down on a hummock when she saw what she was up against, and gestured to me to sit down beside her. Only then did it occur to me how tired I was. I lay back, relaxed suddenly, and found it difficult to keep my eyes open. The white clouds drifting across the sky looked as if they were there to be counted like sheep, a celestial lullaby.

Huberta took off her kerchief, and the light breeze played in the loose straight hairs about her forehead and on the nape of her neck where the sweat of hard work had formed ringlets.

"I shouldn't tell you," she said, "but I'm not any good at this game of hide and seek. I can't grasp all this intrigue. I'm not equal to it."

She looked at me, wide-eyed and infinitely appealing in her honesty. "I try to believe there is danger but I'm so tired, so desperately tired of danger. I tell myself we must simulate and deceive, as Susanne says, but when it comes to the point I can speak only the truth," and she looked as if she might burst into tears over this damnable honesty.

I was leaning on one elbow or I would have fallen asleep and my troubles seemed suddenly smaller. "But what has to be kept from me?" I asked. "Sofie and Eugene were happy to see me. I shall be able to do much for him. There are medical supplies he needs that only I can get for him. Why wasn't I to know they were here?"

"Robbie," she said, giving me a long, intensely serious look, "you won't tell Susanne I told, will you? Promise?"

"I promise."

"Well, then, I'll tell you." She looked away, but not before I had seen the tears of perplexity in her eyes. "It's that Susanne is afraid Father will come to 'God's Blessing' if he finds out Sofie is here."

The obvious reason.

"That's why she and Vally were so against my bringing them here. But I had to. I can't believe Father will find out and come here, but if he does, he won't be arrested, will he? He hasn't done anybody any harm. I'm sure they told me that because Vally is so jealous of Sofie and Susanne has always hated her."

"And where is he now?"

"I don't know." She let the tears fall at last. "Thank God, I don't know where he is."

I laid my hand on her soft, light hair that was dry and disordered by the wind. "Don't cry," I said. "If he does turn up here or if we find him elsewhere, you don't have to worry about him. We won't do him any harm. Thirty days' arrest for interrogation is about the worst that could happen to him." But I could not keep the contempt for our leniency out of my voice.

She didn't notice it. She wiped her eyes with her hand, then remembered that her hands were dirty, and smiled through her tears. "I must look a sight," she said, and wiped her whole face with her skirt. It caused one of the scars to tear open and a thin trickle of blood oozed slowly down her cheek. I gave her my handkerchief to wipe it away. "I forget all about them," she said.

"When did you find out?" I asked.

"Find out what?"

"About . . ." I floundered a little, "about your father's attachment to Sofie. When I spoke to you so many years ago in that hotel corridor—remember?"

"Oh, very well."

"You didn't know about it then, did you?"

"No. But after Mother died, Vally told us. I think Father hoped then that Sofie would get a separation from Eugene and marry him but, of course, she didn't. I suppose she doesn't love Father, although it is incredible, isn't it, to think she should prefer Eugene? Or perhaps it just seems incredible to us because we think Father is so remarkable. But after Mother died, he aged a great deal quite suddenly and I felt pretty sure it wasn't because of her loss. He never loved her. You could feel that. And I think it did something to us, to be raised in a loveless home. All my brothers were cold, so is Susanne."

"It didn't kill your warmth," I said.

A sad little smile played about her lips as she said, "I don't think anything could do that."

"Well, it's nothing to look so sad about," I told her.

She shook her head, "Oh yes it is. In the world we live in it makes you practically useless."

"Not where I come from."

She looked at me, a strangely penetrating look. "Then go back there, Robbie," she said. "Go home."

Just then Susanne appeared at the foot of the small rise on which we were sitting. "What are you two conspiring about?" she asked.

Huberta's lips drooped. "We're not conspiring, Susy," she said, in the voice of a tired old woman.

But Susanne's attitude toward me had changed. She was friendly again, almost affectionate. As she accompanied me to my jeep, she took my hand in hers, slipping her fingers under my jacket and a little way up my arm. I was not to come here again, she said, but she would come to Munich three nights a week and spend them with me. "We can't be together here," she said, as if that were at the bottom of her plan.

I took her in my arms and kissed her full on the mouth, so hard that she murmured with pain. "What's the matter, are you crazy?" she muttered when I let her go.

"No," I said. "I'm not crazy, and I'm coming back here whenever I feel like it and you, my dear, can go to hell."

twenty-six

IT WAS EASIER SAID IN THE VICIOUSNESS OF THE MOMENT THAN sustained as the days and weeks passed by. If she was to go to hell, then I with her. My bondage was not eradicated by this small, understandable act of deceit. I had put up with worse than that. But I would not strike a bargain with her. I continued to visit "God's Blessing" where Huberta, gentle Huberta, somehow managed to make all of us feel at home, even those who hated one another.

I drove out whenever I could be sure of a few hours of freedom, I spent my ten days' leave there. Always when I arrived I changed into a work suit and it changed me into a civilian. I chopped wood, I did repair jobs around the house for which Fritz had grown too old, I helped with the harvesting and putting to sleep of the fertile little garden. I ground flour, I even tried milking the cows, and I learned to make soap.

When she saw there was nothing she could do about it,

Susanne accepted my presence, not very graciously, but with a persistence to monopolize me that was quite childish. We went sailing together, we fished and hunted. Once we took a forester called Anton with us on an overnight expedition and I shot my first deer in the early dawn. He lived nearby in a small house that we passed often on our walks. It lay in a clearing in the woods, not far from "God's Blessing." A large vegetable garden was spread out in front of it.

He and his wife Maria and the two of us became quite friendly. They had known Susanne since she was a child but now, as Maria put it, "The young lady, that is something else altogether."

Sometimes we stopped off at their place to get warm after a long day outdoors and Maria served hot milk. I brought her some chocolate and after that we were served royally with steaming cocoa whenever we put in an appearance.

They had an old German police dog, gray and scrawny like a wolf, a savage-looking beast. His name was Barsch. He was chained to a kennel outside. "I suppose being chained up all the time is what makes him so ferocious," I said.

"That," explained Anton, "and the lean years. He has been hungry now, like all of us, for a long time. Only a dog doesn't understand why he suffers and it makes him wild."

And you understand just as little, I thought, and remain gentle. And was filled with wonder at how stoically this man accepted deprivation and the loss of his two sons in a senseless war. There had been a daughter who had been in a mental institution since her thirteenth year. "She is dead now, too," Anton explained. "All of them had to die under a decree of the Führer's," and added softly, "I didn't think it was right, but what could I do?"

It always took Susanne's entire effort to get Bodo past the door and into the house without having the two dogs fly at each other. "Barsch is jealous of that one," said Anton, nodding in Bodo's direction, "because he's allowed inside the house."

Once Susanne said, "I'd like to see them have a go at each other. Barsch wouldn't have a chance."

"I don't know about that," said Anton, shaking his head. "Your dog is younger and better fed but look at the jaw mine has." He went up to the beast, took hold of its head between his gnarled hands, and showed us the animal's yellow fangs. They made Bodo's teeth look like a puppy's.

"Whoever won," said Anton, "they would both be badly hurt, and you wouldn't want that." He didn't know Susanne.

Autumn came and went. We saw the trees die in a shower of gold and I told Susanne about the flaming death of the trees where I came from, yes, came from, that was how I saw it now, but not where I was heading. "The sugar maples in Vermont," I explained. "At this time of the year they are on fire." And a great satisfaction grew in me as I learned to do without the wild life that had been ours and to take delight again in quiet things, past and present.

But when Susanne sensed that I had conquered myself, she offered herself to me again. Apparently the evidence of a victory she hadn't won was something she couldn't face.

We fixed up a deserted shack in the woods as a home for our love. It must have belonged once to a woodcutter, in days when there had been able-bodied men around to do peaceful work. Some of his tools still lay in a corner, rusted and beyond repair, or they wouldn't have been abandoned. There was a primitive table and a chair, a little potbellied stove that could create the most infernal heat, and an old iron bedstead in a corner. On the wall hung a calendar that had stopped turning in 1941. Yellow, mildewed. This dilapidated hut we made ours. Susanne prettied it up with coverlet, curtains, and a tablecloth pilfered from "God's Blessing," with autumn crocus in an opalescent vase. She washed the two small windows. Sometimes she laughed like a child, as if there were no hidden apprehension on her mind. But our love had

changed. I was the master now, our tempo was mine. And she resented this.

On one particularly dreary day which we had brightened with a roaring fire in the little stove, brightened still further with our love, she turned on me and said she hated me.

It didn't touch me because I knew it wasn't true. With some small part of her, the part that had discovered a new invulnerability in me, she belonged to me. For to defeat her a little was the only way to possess her a little. Resent it as she might, her independence which had been her pride had suffered damage. And suddenly I realized that I could hurt her. The tears she was fighting to control told me that. In a rush it occurred to me that with a little ingenuity I might be able to torment her as she had once tormented me, as one could torment anyone who had given a little of himself away.

I turned my back on her, walked over to a window, and looked out into the dying day. The mist had turned into a soft, cold autumn rain that was infinitely saddening. Dear God, I prayed, don't let me change, don't let her change me, *not like that.*

But the shack with its primitive furnishings and its view of the bleak, denuded trees is dim now in my mind. Clearest in my memory are the evenings spent at "God's Blessing." Often Huberta and Susanne played together, Huberta the piano, Susanne the violin. Both were musical and when my mind strayed from a Beethoven sonata or a Brahms fantasy, the two were delightful to watch.

I would carry Eugene downstairs to listen, as light as a child in my arms. "It's all wrong," he said one evening, "the way things have been planned for us. We should be born old and get progressively younger until we find final oblivion in the mother's womb. It would be an unexplored sanctuary then, a much more fascinating goal, don't you think, than death?"

I laid him down on the couch and we elaborated for a while on the idea until it became absolute nonsense and was lost in our laughter. Only Susanne didn't join us. She rejected the whole silly theory vehemently, calling it "odious."

"It wasn't meant to be taken seriously," said Eugene. "Sometimes, Susanne, I think you have no sense of humor."

"Ask Carl and his father to come over," Susanne said to Huberta on one of my first visits, a demand that seemed to perplex her sister. "Would that be wise?" she asked.

"Why not?" said Susanne.

Huberta shrugged and, flinging a shawl over her shoulders, went to do as she had been told.

Carl and his father were neighbors. They came over and made up the viola and cello. And soon I could see why Huberta had hesitated to invite them.

Carl was what I would call a Rilke German, a poet and a thinker, and looked like one. He had the gaunt, symmetrical features of a woodcarved saint and the hands of a Crivelli angel. And with it all he succeeded in looking like a man. His eyes were serene, sad, and haunting. An ineffable melancholy radiated from him.

The war had crippled him. One could see he was unused to his mechanical leg and, by the fine lines in his face and a distraught expression sometimes in the eyes, that it still pained him; and I wondered how a man like him could have fought in a war at all, how they could have drafted, trained, and sent out into battle such an ethereal specimen.

It soon became evident that he was in love with Susanne and that she had asked him over not only to make music. She, who was undemonstrative unless moved by the excitement of passion, was as openly loving suddenly as a kitten. It was her intention obviously to convey to Carl that I was her lover, and by the sorrow in his face I could tell that he had been her lover, too.

They played quartets and trios, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, but I couldn't keep my mind on the music. I watched

Susanne. Her violin nestled in the curve of her neck, her eyes fixed on the music, her bow moving rhythmically up and down, she looked the soul of virtue and humility. Sometimes I caught Sofie watching her, too, a surprisingly gentle look on her face, as if she were taking to the girl at last, after all these years of animosity. Sometimes I looked at Carl who, when he knew the music by heart, played with his eyes fixed on Susanne. When she got into difficulties, he was the one who helped her out. Then the love in his expression as he explained a passage to her aroused in me a curious feeling of shame.

Eugene listened with his eyes closed, looking like a dead man, and I anxiously watched the slight but rapid rise and fall of his chest to reassure myself by his shallow breathing that he still lived. Vally von Werthenau listened with one hand shielding her face, Bodo lay at Susanne's feet and when the strings played a high passage his ears flattened out and trembled a little. I think he hated the music but was ready to endure any form of torture to be near Susanne.

Tired of music, the others played cards while Eugene read and Carl beat me at chess. Then we settled down with our pipes, he and I, and talked. He explained the mechanics of atonal music to me, making it come clear in my mind for the first time, and we talked about books.

His father had been a publisher. After "the burning of the books" he had retired. One of the last things he had done was publish a small volume of Carl's poems. Carl found it on a shelf when I said I would like to see it, took it down and showed it to me. The first poem was "To my beloved," not so possessive in German with the impersonal article: "To *the* beloved."

It was less a love poem than a confession of bondage. It was filled with the foreboding of loss, a farewell to someone ever present whose going was inevitable and only a matter of time. I might have written it. I turned the book this way and that in my hand. "Are you writing now?"

He shook his head. "Events have silenced me," he said. "It isn't a good impetus, you know, this dreadful shame."

The remorseful German. The only remorseful German who had crossed my path. And he was impotent. Why was everybody on our side impotent? Was there no one to lead our crusade? Why did people like Susanne and Vally von Werthenau have all the strength while the wise were dying, like Eugene, and the gentle were weak, like Carl and Huberta?

There was a bond between those two. Huberta's eyes would follow Carl with compassion and when they were together it seemed as if they were close, like brother and sister. She admitted it. She had always felt Carl to be more a brother than her own. "My brothers were always a little strange to me," she said. "Carl and I are cut of the same cloth."

Recalling what I knew about "brothers and sisters," I wondered if one day Huberta and Carl might not marry. I refused to accept the final consequences of Susanne's insinuations whenever she spoke of Huberta and Vally von Werthenau. Those two had simply never progressed from a governess-child relationship. To assign a perversity to Huberta seemed blasphemy.

There were many such evenings with music, chess, and cards and, later on, talk. Unavoidably we got into political discussions. The Nürnberg trials were on. More interesting than the trials, though, was the lack of interest the German nation took in them. It led to endless argumentation. Present sometimes were political friends of Eugene, visiting him in the steady pilgrimage that had begun as soon as it had leaked out that this great Social Democrat had survived the holocaust and was at "God's Blessing." Dying, he was still a leader, not only for those of his former followers who now found their way back to him but also for members of our occupation forces who sought his advice. Sometimes I brought

some of these fellows out with me, or they came by the trains that were slowly being put back on more or less regular schedules.

There is an evening that I remember with particular clarity because of Eugene's dynamic participation. Susanne had launched us on the topic of Germany's necessity to prepare for the moment when her potential could be bartered between the United States and Soviet Russia. How aware she was, how aware all of them were, of the key position the German still held geographically, which no amount of devastation could alter. So, of course, were we. It was being impressed on us daily; only to us, overwhelmed by the immediate ruination in which we were trying to administrate, it seemed too remote a contingency to be dealt with now. But Susanne was ready to deal with it.

"They will come to blows," she said, "the United States and Russia. That is as inevitable as the downward flow of water."

"What makes you so sure?" I asked. "Right now we are allies. Has it ever occurred to you that we may hold the key to world peace at last because the majority of the world's inhabitants are at last allied?"

"Allied in war," she said, "but in peace?" and spoke aloud those tedious words that we were sick to death of hearing. "One day you Americans will be sorry you let them march into half of Europe. They are Asiatics. You can't make peace with them. Even in alliance they remain the enemy and you can include an enemy only in a power alliance. And of that you Americans are quite incapable, for you have smothered yourselves too much in mawkish, unrealizable precepts. Anyway, there is no such thing as an ally, only the friend of expedience; and you are far too naïve to handle the Russian in that role. You can accept his help in battle, that doesn't even take gumption; but you couldn't live at peace with him any more than you could live at peace with a cobra. The cobra may strike down your foe for you, yes, but what when he

turns on you? I'll tell you what. Then *we Germans* will hold the key to the entire situation. All we have to do is *be ready for it.*" She held her clenched fist level with her cheek and closed her eyes in a strange new salute of defiance to reason.

Usually when she held forth like this, Huberta would look at her with the same horror that had turned her to Sofie that night in the Tyrolese hotel when she had whispered, "What makes her say such dreadful things?"

Vally von Werthenau, whose idols had fallen with the Hitler regime, was just as antagonistic to Susanne's wild beliefs. Susanne offered a too intellectual leadership for this bourgeois woman. No Wotans, no Walkyries, no Nibelungen faith, nothing that could be worshiped savagely. Just pure dialectics. Carl's father, from the remote pinnacle to which he had retired with his Old-World traditions, wore an amused, contemptuous smile when he listened to Susanne; Sofie watched and listened with an inscrutable expression on her face, but none of the old hatred. That was gone. Strange, I thought, now when *I* could have hated the girl. But Eugene, the color on his cheeks heightened, his eyes bright, leaned forward from where he lay and listened to her with absorption and, when he disagreed with her, it was without malice, almost with tenderness, more like a teaching than a battle, as if he cared very much about bringing this stray lamb back to the fold of reason.

Only Carl really challenged her and when he did, her hatred for him flared up for all to see. He remained calm, but his knowledge equaled hers and his precise condemnation of her views was deadly. Unlike mine or Eugene's opposition, his riled her. She stormed, she raged, if she had been alone with him I think she would have struck him down. For me it was a duel between Germany's split personality, and there was no doubt at all in my mind as to who would prevail.

Carl challenged her now. "What did I always tell you, Lieutenant?" he said. "Don't let the German of today fool you. His megalomania has been deflected only temporarily

from his innate goal. Today he is forced to concentrate on his immediate physical needs to survive; his aim has been reduced to the simple, essential battle of procuring the necessaries of life—food, drink, clothing—and he is no prettier sight at that than when he was following a metaphysical goal. Still, he is less pernicious now than when his soul was in the saddle. But that will come again, that will come. The Susannes will see to it that his immortal soul takes over again and his goal will once more include world domination. And what then? Then he will face a war-weary world, he will have very vulnerable opponents and weapons at his command that will defy even his murderous imagination."

I knew what he meant. We had dropped our bomb on Hiroshima.

"You are a traitor," said Susanne, glaring at him. "But then, you always were."

"Not at all," said Carl, looking at her with weary indifference. "I have never betrayed Germany because I never felt allegiance to her."

"What have you ever felt allegiance to?" Susanne asked scornfully.

There was a bitter smile on Carl's lips as he said quite simply, "Love," and I have never heard the word spoken with so much sincerity.

"Still," he went on, "I gave my good right leg for its exact opposite, for Germany, for death. And you know why. Because the dreary fight I would have had to put up to refuse battle simply did not seem worth it. That may make a weakling or a fool of me, but not a traitor. To be a traitor, my dear Susanne, you have to be capable of a far greater drive for action than I happen to possess."

"So you still see Germany as enemy number one?"

It was Eugene speaking. Carl looked astonished. "Who else?"

"Perhaps you can't see the forest for the trees," said Eugene. "Without wishing to put myself on Susanne's side, I

must agree with the picture she paints of your ally, Robbie. I, too, see the Russian as the greatest menacer of all. Just now, Carl made Germany synonymous with Death, which I won't contest. But for me Russia is synonymous with Hell, with a living death."

It was not the first time that he brought to our attention the fact that the Russian menace took precedence in his mind above all others; and it surprised me now as always that this man, who had suffered so much at the hands of German ruthlessness, should have returned from the inferno of the Second World War with Germany only secondary on his list of foes. "My colleagues and I," he said, "have faced the Russian threat since 1919, only today I see it more clearly for the simple reason that I have come face to face with it."

He had to stop to cough, then he went on. "There is a difference, a great difference, between rationalization and coming face to face with a thing. Let me tell you a little about the Russian. Then you can take your choice as to who is the most formidable adversary."

He leaned back in his cushions and looked over our heads at an unseen audience of the thousands I am sure he was wishing could hear his words. But nobody could have waited for them with more anticipation than Susanne. Nothing could arouse her participation so keenly as the prospect of facing an enemy.

"The year Sofie and I spent in Lemberg was spent under his jurisdiction," Eugene began, using his voice sparingly as if he were in truth opening a lecture. "He was the host, we were the honored guests, the political refugees. Now, as all of you probably know, we Socialists were always politically and ideologically a little closer to the Russian than your crowd, close enough to understand and hate him uncompromisingly from the start. We did not need to witness the orientalization of the Russian experiment under Stalin, to see Lenin's belief in the internal revolution from below *without* an army cast aside for the belief in the external revolution from above

with an army strong beyond belief. We did not need the purges, the evidences of tyranny, or the Soviet-German pact of '41 to realize what was going on over there. We knew from the beginning that in Russia we were faced with a completely new outlook on life, a new race, another world."

He closed his eyes, exhausted suddenly with the importance of what he was trying to say and the waning strength left him to convey it. I looked at Sofie. Why didn't she stop him? It was bad for him to exert himself like this. But she didn't seem to care. She had joined forces with him at last. He didn't count, *not that way*.

Eugene opened his eyes and went on. "I want to give you a few incidents because they illustrate so well what I mean. They happened while we were the guests of a Russian army unit. For months we lived in barracks with Russian soldiers. One young fellow was especially attractive, we took a great fancy to him. Sofie said he reminded her of you, Robbie, and I could see the resemblance, too, especially in his admiration of her."

Eugene smiled and I could not help marveling at how much he had observed after all, when I had thought he wasn't even looking.

"This young man," he went on, "took us to some sort of political rally. Staring us in the face was the usual inflated picture of Stalin looking like a benign cab driver. Dwarfed by the picture was the speaker, who gesticulated wildly. Neither Sofie nor I speak Russian or Polish, so we couldn't understand a word he said—which is, of course, the only way to attend such a rally.

"So we sat with hundreds of others on collapsible wooden chairs and sprang to our feet every few minutes when everybody else did. I shall never forget the ghastly clatter of those chairs as we jumped up and sat down again, jumped up and sat down. It was a huge stone hall, a dreary place. The sound reverberated in it like the clatter of doom.

"Finally I asked our young man, who spoke Czech, why we

had to jump up every now and then like robots. He explained that we were rising whenever Stalin's name was mentioned and that it was customary to do so."

Eugene closed his eyes again. "Even Hitler didn't demand such worship. They live in an age-old tradition of idolatry and tyranny, this new-old race. A dark history of oppression lies like a yoke about their shoulders. They drag it out of their past into the present, eternally chained. They befoul their future with it and threaten ours."

He was silent for a moment, then he went on. "One day Sofie asked this young Russian where he came from. He shrugged and said something to the effect of 'from all over.' No, Sofie insisted, where did he come from orginally, where were his father and mother? He stared at us, quite taken aback. 'Russia is my mother,' he said.

"You see, he had been brought up by the state like millions of his compatriots. Where there is no marriage, there is no home; and where the state becomes the mother there can be no individuals. Oh, now the powers that be are trying to restore this bourgeois institution of marriage, they have grown a little afraid of the robot they have created. But you will not face their unborn children, you will face *them*. And what are they?

"Body and soul belong to the state. No father, no mother, and, strangest of all, no sweetheart. There are parts of Germany now where the children play a new game. I refer to those parts that are under Russian occupation. The game is called *'Frau komm' mit.'* In Russia the sexual act has been stripped of every emotional involvement. The new Russian feels the urge and satisfies it as you and I go to the bathroom, and he takes the woman nearest him, be she seventeen or seventy. *'Frau komm' mit,'* he says. It is one of the first German phrases he learns. And he takes her into the nearest alleyway."

Eugene looked away. For a moment all of us were forgot-

ten. Then he said, "There must be some old thread of tradition still left as a residue in his veins that he takes her into the nearest alleyway, that he doesn't perpetrate the act openly in the streets. Perhaps he is, after all, not from another world, perhaps he was somehow spawned from ours, the deformed child of absolute monarchy, of absolutism, *per se.*" He shrugged and looked suddenly at me. "Be that as it may, Robbie, this is the new race you are facing. Do they sound like allies? I don't think so. And they will be a formidable enemy. You see, there are so many of them."

Why was he conjuring up new ghosts when the old were scarcely laid? "It is hard for me to see the Russian as the enemy," I said, "although many of my colleagues do. But the few I have met were good-natured children. They never struck me as formidable. And, think—they stemmed the tide for us. They bled for us."

Eugene shook his head, all his weariness in the gesture. "They bleed only for themselves," he said. "And, perhaps their most alarming trait—*they don't even see it as a bleeding.*"

He said the last words in a barely audible whisper, sitting up, supporting himself on his elbow. "Susanne can make the German of the future sound menacing," he said, "and he is. Don't mistake me, he is. But she is right. The day will come when the Soviet Union and the United States will face each other as enemies and at the end of that battle, my friend, *if you lose,* the whole tradition of freedom loses with you. *That must be kept in mind.*"

He lay back in his pillows, his breathing short and uneven. "Don't let yourself be deflected from the ultimate enemy because you cannot see how frightful he is. Do something about it, Robbie. Go home and learn, learn, learn, and do something about it."

Susanne was staring at Eugene as she had once stared in fascination at Floris, as if Eugene had been God; but his

speech had been for me. That is why I remember that particular evening so clearly, because on it I received Eugene's last political will and testament and it put me under the obligation to obey.

twenty-seven

ON ALL SUCH EVENINGS I CARRIED EUGENE UPSTAIRS WHEN IT was time for him to retire and helped Sofie put him to bed. Sometimes I bathed him. He was too weak to take care of anything but his most immediate needs, and it gave me a peculiarly sad sense of purposefulness to minister to this giant with the life going from him. When he was ready for sleep Sofie gave him his sedative. He never took it without some word of gratitude or acknowledgment to me who procured all his medication for him.

On the warmer nights of autumn Sofie and I sat out on the long chairs on the balcony while Eugene was composing himself for sleep. He declared that the unintelligible murmur of

our voices was the pleasantest lullaby. Sometimes we sat there until darkness had begun to make way for the first pale gray of dawn, and I discovered that half the time I had been asleep and that Sofie could do with hardly any sleep at all.

We talked very little when we were alone like this and when we did Sofie usually steered the conversation toward topics that were pleasant. I often read Mother's letters aloud to her, and whenever we talked about Mother, the old smile played about Sofie's lips and the serene beauty of former years was briefly restored. I remarked on it once and she said, "I loved your mother. In my memories of her there is nothing but loveliness."

"Then come to us," I urged, "when . . . when you are no longer needed here." Hard to formulate, this plan of what was to become of her after Eugene's death, hard to suggest life of any sort to her after that. "Mother will want you to." But she shook her head.

"I belong here," she said. "Peace or war or the ruination of war, I am a product of Europe. I wouldn't fit in anywhere else."

"But once you said you would give ten years of your life to live in America."

"That was when I had something to live for," she said. "That was when there was still a point in being safe. America was the right place then."

I didn't press her because I knew she was right. I couldn't see her in America, not now, not after what she had endured. She wouldn't have fitted in.

One evening we got onto the topic of Vally von Werthenau and Meta, and I brought up the fact that Susanne had implied often that an abnormal relationship had existed between the two.

"There was a lot of malicious gossip to that effect," said Sofie. "But if there is any truth in the story, then it must have been because both of them were lonely women."

She said it gently, with a sympathy for Meta which had

been lacking completely that evening long ago when I had seen them together. It made even Vally soften before my eyes.

"Susanne seems to think," I said, "that Vally simply transferred a fanatic love from mother to daughter."

"It is like Susanne to jump to such conclusions," said Sofie. "She is at the age when one does." But she said it without any of the old dislike and changed the subject immediately. She always did whenever Susanne was mentioned; we never discussed her. Yet Sofie must have known of our intimacy. I had seen her looking at us reflectively often and often would have liked to unburden my heart to her about this insidious entanglement. But she avoided the subject and if by chance we hit upon it, as we had done now, she steered us away from it as from a dangerous reef.

But we talked about Glory. Mother's letters never failed to mention her and when Sofie wanted to know more, I suddenly discovered that I did, too. I wanted to know what she was up to. I never dreamed about her any more. Suddenly I wished I did. I would have liked to see her again.

My next letter to her asked questions and her reply, by return mail, was a flood that inundated me.

"You ask about me," she wrote. "Well, let me see. What is there to tell? No more choreography since *Evangeline*. Of course, that was an idea I'd carried around in my mind ever since I'd read the poem and felt it should be danced; I haven't had another. They say some writers have only one book in them. I seem to be the choreographer with only one ballet in her.

"As I guess your mother must have told you, the show I was in folded. The summer wilted us and we died. In a way I was thankful. I was homesick and I spent the summer at home, the only one of our brood. Would you believe it possible? I won't bore you with the whereabouts of the rest." (She wouldn't have bored me. I wished she'd gone into it; I rather wanted to see the whole Evans team in its new line-up.) "Suf-

fice it to say that it was marvelous, perfectly marvelous, to have Mother and Dad to myself. I basked in this concentration on me of those two wonderful people. Only if you've been one of ten can you appreciate what it means. I was so content, I was positively idiotic. But I kept up practice. Bennett put up a barre for me in the barn and we swept the front part clean. It was super. The cement floor has made a positive Nijinsky of me. I'd always heard that a floor with no give was the best thing for your elevation, but it's really incredible. I can fly at last!

"Since the fall I've been teaching. I'm taking Orlova's children's classes. They were getting too much for her to handle. 'American cheeldren are so undeesciplined,' she says, and of course she's right. They're hellions. But I can handle them since my nerves are only twenty-one years old and hers, I bet, every bit of seventy-five! But she's as wonderful as ever, very brittle when she demonstrates a *grand jeté* yet not the least bit puffed. Well, all the great ballet masters lived to be near a hundred so I've chosen the right profession because I don't ever want to die.

"To get back to teaching. I love it. Sometimes I wonder if I'll go back to the stage. I can see your mouth drop open." (She was right, figuratively it did.) "And don't get me wrong. I love to dance. I wouldn't have missed daily practice in my barn for anything in the world. Oh, Lord, the air, and to look out at the limitless sky. Dancing should never be done indoors. And I'm putting in two hours a day with Orlova. But the stage is another story. You will recall perhaps that it was beginning to trouble me as a medium of expressing myself (how pompous can you get?) when we had our last heart-to-heart. But something creeps into stage work, I can't quite explain what, something I hadn't counted on. Take what happened during that last season I did with the National." (That was the group she had started her career with. She still danced with them whenever they had a season.) "I'd been practicing jumps for weeks with the men, just for the fun of

it. *Entre-chats six.* They're what you saw me do, only you bat your feet around a few more times in the air before you come down. Usually only the men do sixteen at a go, it's strenuous. Well, after my barnyard summer, I could do sixteen, too, and it gave me real satisfaction. It was a conquest over tradition, if you get what I mean, over my own weight, over the ordinary human capacity, and what-have-you. And the boys were pleased, too. All of them wanted to come up for the summer and give my barn a try-out. We were just one happy family working together. Then what happens? Tchernov decides I must do the man's variation in this ballet they're reviving because a girl has never done that sort of thing before and he thinks it'll bring down the house. So I do, and it does, but the boy whose solo it was is heartbroken and I've lost a friend. It shouldn't bother me but it does. I tell you, Robbie, I'm not cut out for the stage. Now teaching, that's different.

"Some time ago a child came to Orlova. She was ten. I've never seen such determination to dance before except in myself. But she had bad ankles. They were thin and weak and she kept lopping over on the inside of her feet whatever she tried to do. She strained a ligament in her ankle almost as soon as she started, and the doctor said she couldn't possibly go on unless she took private lessons and was carefully watched. So I gave them to her. She's all right now, she's in regular class again.

"Want to know something? That gave me more satisfaction than any success I've had on the stage. You see, I was so cut out for it. I've had so much practice on myself. The agony of getting a crippled limb to conform with a healthy one, the fear—perhaps you're doing yourself harm. The courage you need to say to yourself, what if I am? It's got to get back its strength or I might as well be dead!"

Did you have pain, Glory? The question came to me now, ten years too late, as a complete surprise. And I wanted to know. In my next letter I asked.

"You're a bit late with that question, aren't you?" was her reply. "Yes, I had a lot of pain. When I got out of that brace and started walking without it, my leg would cramp up. I couldn't move. I could have screamed with pain. Then it would let me go and I'd go, but I could feel myself dragging it. 'You're limping,' somebody'd say. You did, often. Then it took all the concentration of which I was capable *just not to limp.* I used to stare at that leg. It was my enemy, and I had to make it my friend again. I don't think I'd have made it if Mother hadn't told me all the time that it was *supposed* to be well, that there was no reason it shouldn't be, that God meant us to be whole.

"What on earth am I going into all this for now? I suppose because I know you're living in the midst of so much pain and I'd feel ashamed if I hadn't had my small share. Only the pain we suffer over here, however cruel, seems to come mostly from a natural source. It isn't inflicted on us by some outside power, if you get what I mean. God bless us, we're lucky."

I could draw other parallels, ones she knew nothing about. Her battles, for instance, compared with Susanne's, her battleground in comparison, too. The drive for conquest in both of them, in all of us, for that matter, but how different the goals. Glory's to conquer the laws of gravity a little, Susanne's to destroy mankind a little, the drive for struggle in both of them, in one the conquest of pain, in the other the rejection of peace, of contentment, of what I still and always would believe was life.

"It's awful of me to ramble on like this," Glory's letter went on, "as if there were no war. But really, Robbie, the little we civilians are called upon to do is so piffling, I'm ashamed to even mention it. Oh yes, we save fat, collect paper, make dressings, donate blood, do without gas, and it's nothing, nothing compared with what you and Peter are going through. He's better now." (Peter had been wounded at Okinawa.) "At least that's what he says, but I don't know.

His letters don't sound open about it. I can't bear to look at Mother's face when she gets through reading them. We were meant to be whole, I tell myself then, we were meant to be whole, and I know she's thinking the same thing. Robbie, so much concentrated thought can't be wasted, can it?

"Write to me, dear. Write all about yourself. When your letters come, the sun shines in my heart. That's a crummy way of putting it, I know, but it's exactly how I feel. There's a sunburst in my heart. What a one-track heart I've got!"

And it irked me no longer, this dogged affection. It was a comfort. Suddenly I welcomed it.

twenty-eight

THE TIMES SPENT AT "GOD'S BLESSING" RUN TOGETHER IN MY mind as I look back. Impossible any longer to distinguish what happened in chronological order. But I do recall that one of the last nights of my leave fell in late November. I have every reason to.

We had retired upstairs as usual, Eugene, Sofie, and I, to prepare him for the night. After we had helped him to bed, Sofie and I went out on the balcony and stood, our elbows supported on the broad sill of the wooden railing, looking out into the night. It was an unusually warm evening and the moon was riding high, shining brashly white like a naked light bulb, much smaller now than when it had risen golden yellow over the horizon a while ago. With the room behind us in darkness, we could see the barren branches of the trees outlined gracefully against the sky. A silver path rippled uncertainly on the water, and all around the lake the earth lay bare in the seasonal death of autumn.

Suddenly it occurred to me that a Wednesday was ending and a Thursday about to begin. "Tomorrow," I said, "is Thanksgiving." And I told Sofie about Thanksgiving and it resolved itself in the Evans house, of course. What more fitting setting could I find than that harmonious home?

"What will they do to compensate your men for such memories?" she asked.

"They'll get a big turkey dinner," I said, "and be more homesick than ever. That's all they need right now to touch things off. They're taut as hell already about an occupation that's only just begun. They're naïve enough to believe that the end of war means peace."

"And you won't be homesick?"

"Where is home?" I asked.

"Certainly not here," she replied quickly and firmly.

"Why not?" I parried, just as quickly and firmly. "This occupation is going to last for some time and I think I have a better understanding of the issues involved than a lot of Americans here."

"I know that," said Sofie. "But you are handicapped here."

"By what?"

"By your attachment to Susanne."

So we came upon it at last, by her choice. And I discovered that I didn't want to discuss it after all. Just as I had never

wanted to mention the true cause of the scar on my hand to Glory when we were children, I did not want to admit now to the confusion Susanne had inflicted on me.

"I'm getting over that," I said curtly.

"Maybe," she said, with no intention, evidently, of sparing me. "But don't you think the procedure would be hastened considerably if you returned home?"

"I don't think I'm doing so badly right here," I said. "I'm not nearly so obsessed as I used to be."

"Because you can see her whenever you want to. How does the thought of never seeing her again appeal to you?"

It didn't. On the contrary, it caused all the strength to go from me just as the old need of her had always done. "You're anxious for me to get over it, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

I was prepared for an attack on Susanne but it didn't come. Instead Sofie said simply, "Because I don't think you two are right for each other."

"You don't dislike her any more, do you?"

"No."

I was about to ask, "How did that happen?" when she laid a hand on my arm. Pointing with the other, she said, "I thought I saw somebody move. Down there."

We were silent, and the ground below us remained motionless. "I must have been mistaken," said Sofie.

Just then the fringe of a cloud passed like black ribbons of gauze across the round, white moon, plunging us into sudden darkness. After a moment's silence, Sofie said, "When you do go back, Robbie, what are you going to do?"

My short laugh sounded mirthless. "That's a wide-open question," I said. "I thought I wanted to write, but that was long ago, in another era. Since then Eugene said what he did the other night, and I haven't been able to get it out of my mind. Perhaps he's right. Perhaps I should go into my

father's business after all. Susanne has made me feel that way, too, trying to make her see reason."

"You will never make Susanne see reason," Sofie said with a finality I felt all the more keenly because I knew she was right. "And if you decide—like your father, like Eugene—to concentrate on the sickness of the world, then you should not be burdened in your private life with a sick mind." She looked at me and my eyes, accustomed to the dark now, could see the intensity of her gaze as she said, "You could never do it with Susanne."

Just then the cloud passed, freeing the moon, the scene unrolled below us again in all its former serenity and brilliance, and suddenly I, too, saw something move. Before I could say a word, a figure stepped out from behind a clump of trees, turning its face to us and to the light, a man dressed immaculately and elegantly in plus fours, a jaunty Tyrolese hat with a brush perched on the back of his head. It was Victor, and he looked as if he had just strolled home from some grouse hunting.

Sofie's body tensed as she pulled me back out of his sight. Through the slats of the balcony railing I could see him take off his hat and his white hair gleaming like a halo in the moonlight. "Sofie," he called softly, his voice carrying up to us like a faraway echo. "Sofie."

She said nothing to him but in a whisper she said to me, "I'll keep him here until you get back."

twenty-nine

VICTOR WAS ONE OF THOSE WHOM THE WAR YEARS HAD AGED, not toughened, and he had been wrong when he had told a six-year-old Sofie that he would not wear as well as she. He was handsomer than ever, almost beautiful now, with the manliness gone from him. His hair was silver-white, even the eyebrows, and he was incredibly thin. But his eyes were bright with the old intensity and intelligence and this gave him a rather prophetic aura. With wings he might have posed as an archangel.

"Thank you for coming," he said.

I was sitting opposite him and there was a rough table between us. Three weeks had passed since his arrest.

"I always thought you'd get out of the country before this happened," I said. "A great many in your position have found their way to South America, haven't they? After all, it's only a question of money and good connections, both of which you have."

He said, "I preferred to stay here."

"You sound like Eugene."

A small smile twisted his lips. "Not at all. I am not afraid of the verdict of an American military court. I have every reason to believe it will be mild. A few years' imprisonment at most." (He overestimated us.) "That would be well worth the preservation of my properties and the right to remain a citizen of my country. And I may even escape imprisonment, if you will help me."

"I? What in heaven's name can I do?"

"I would like you to go to Eugene and find out from him whether he is prepared to make a statement in my favor. It might save me a lot of inconvenience."

"It might," I said. "But what makes you think Eugene will move a finger to save you?"

"I saved his life once," said Victor, "and he is the sort of man who pays his debts."

"But he is first and foremost a man of political integrity. I don't think he will help you."

"Would you like to bet on it?"

I said nothing. His conceit infuriated me.

"I could write to him," Victor went on, "but it is too delicate a thing for that. I want you to put the matter before him, if you will be so kind."

"What do you think he is going to do? Perjure himself for you?"

"Not perjure himself," said Victor. "Just state the facts: that I have always been true to myself and that this has kept me head and shoulders above the machinations of politics."

Suddenly I remembered Eugene's judgment of Victor that day in Switzerland, long ago. "I'll not bet," I said.

Victor smiled fleetingly. "How are things at 'God's Blessing'?" he asked.

"I couldn't tell you," I said. "I haven't been there since your arrest. I didn't feel I would be welcome."

"With Sofie you would have been welcome. Without

her help you might never have caught me." And a bitter smile as he said, "I want you to give her my love, my undying love."

He was looking straight into my eyes as he spoke; his were quite dark with the intensity of his feelings, and suddenly I had to like him. His love for Sofie bound me to him. It was his strongest weapon, the strongest weapon, I decided, in any battle. Only love was truly invincible.

It was Christmas Eve when I finally headed my jeep toward "God's Blessing" for the first time in almost five weeks. I would have carried out Victor's request earlier, not because I was anxious to do him the favor but because I was tormented by the old corroding desire to see Susanne again. A severe attack of grippe, however, had kept me hospitalized for the last ten days, and during my illness the old longing had grown big in me again. I was filled with it now and with the singular depression and hopelessness that any illness with fever brings with it.

I hadn't seen Susanne since the night Victor had been taken into custody right there in his own garden. That was where we had found him when, after a mad drive through the moonlit night, I had got back from Munich with Colonel Haight, who wanted to make the arrest himself.

We needn't have hurried. We found Victor sitting peacefully beside Sofie in a small alcove that was shaded by a clematis vine in summer. Dead and leafless now, it let the moonlight through fitfully. Sofie had wrapped a shawl around her shoulders. There they sat like an old married couple, the picture of harmony.

"I didn't expect you back so soon," said Victor, rising as we came up to him. "I had no idea you could drive so fast in that foolish little contraption you call a jeep."

"We didn't return in a jeep," I said, and introduced Colonel Haight, who informed Victor that he was under arrest.

I had been present at innumerable such occasions but never had I seen old Haight take over with quite so much deference. It was Victor, of course, who somehow enforced this kid-glove atmosphere. "I haven't seen my daughters," he said. "Have I time for that?"

"I think so," said the colonel, "if you can make it brief."

"I will call them," said Sofie.

They came straight from their beds, Huberta still fastening the sash of her dressing gown. She ran to her father as soon as she caught sight of him, but Susanne stood still for a moment and gave me a look of implacable hatred.

It was quite evident that Victor had said "daughters" out of a sense of duty, for Susanne alone was the object of his deepest concern. That was obvious, although it was Huberta whom he held close in the shelter of his right arm as she clung to him, weeping softly. He didn't touch Susanne. But suddenly she grasped his left hand in hers and they stood there in a position that looked almost inimical, yet in their eyes was a bond that was feelable to any onlooker. Just then I would have given anything in the world to be her comrade, as her father was. I would have sold my soul for it.

They murmured platitudes to one another. Victor kissed his daughters on the forehead. Over Susanne his lips and eyes lingered, almost as if he were bidding Sofie farewell. I looked around for her. She had disappeared. I closed my eyes for a moment and it was as if I fell asleep standing up. When I opened them again a few seconds later the girls, too, were gone and Victor was standing between us. "I am ready," he said.

Since then Susanne and Huberta had been permitted to visit him, and Huberta had come to my office for the key to Susanne's apartment, which Susanne wanted back. Through Huberta I received news of Sofie and Eugene and sent them the medication he needed.

Huberta had forgiven me. "Nothing is going to happen to Papa," she said. "You were right. And you had to do

what you did. I'm glad we're getting it over with, all this hiding and deceit. You know, Robbie, only then will the war have ended for me." But for Susanne I knew it would never end.

I drove the short distance to Starnberg on Christmas Eve, making first tracks in snow that had fallen a few hours before. It carpeted the countryside thinly and cast light into a night that was otherwise impenetrably dark. And the rotating wheels sang, Susanne, Susanne, Susanne.

But she wasn't at "God's Blessing" to greet me; she was nowhere about, and when I asked after her Huberta told me, "She won't see you. When she heard your jeep coming up the drive she ran out of the house."

Fritz had cut down a short fir with long, heavy branches. A piece of the forest, it stood in the living room, decorated with home-made candles and old Christmas baubles that had been stored at "God's Blessing." Father Christmases, angels in baroque flight blowing trumpets, balls in tinseled net, and little colored-paper cornucopias filled with cheap Christmas candy. These were for the children from the countryside who would call on Christmas Day. "As they always have done," Huberta explained. "Some of them are mothers themselves now, with a new crop of children, and almost all the children are fatherless."

They had spent many Christmases here, she explained. "Mother said we were more *'vertraut'* at 'God's Blessing' than anywhere else." *Vertraut,* for which there is no adequate translation. "At home. Full of trust in one another and one's surroundings," will do, perhaps. "Still," Huberta went on, "like Ibsen's Nora, we were merry, never happy."

She looked at me wistfully. "Do you suppose we will ever be really happy? Do you suppose we have it in us?" At that moment I wondered if any of us would know true happiness again.

I had brought various delicacies as a present for everyone at "God's Blessing," no individual gifts, but I felt that my presence there was preventing whatever sense of holiday might have filled the house. Huberta asked me to stay the night but I said no, I had to return right away, as soon as I had discussed a certain matter with Eugene. I would leave without seeing Susanne, I told myself. If I could do that, if I could bring myself to do it, it would be the beginning of her defeat within me.

Eugene was no longer able to leave his bed, and it seemed to me there was even less of him now than there had been a few weeks ago. His illness had consumed him until he looked no bigger than a twelve-year-old boy. His eyes glittered, his pallor was ghastly, his breathing short, and he coughed almost incessantly, a small, high, hacking cough.

"It's good to see you," he said, and wanted to know what had kept me away from "God's Blessing" so long. So I told them about my illness, reassuring them that I was quite well again, warmed by their concern, aware suddenly of a homesickness for just such consideration. Then I gave them Victor's message.

They listened quietly to what I had to say. When I was done, Eugene said, "And you wanted to bet I would not do it?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you didn't waste your money.'

I had to laugh. "So you're going to give him what he wants?"

"Of course."

"Because he saved your life?"

"Because he stuck out his neck to save my life, yes. That among other reasons."

He asked for pen and paper. Sofie brought them to him. "You weren't saving your life when you left Vienna with him on that dreadful night," she said, indignation in her

tone. "You would never have left if you hadn't thought Bernard had gone. You went because it was politically expedient."

"Oh, no, I didn't." Eugene was smiling. "Victor gave his word of honor for a lie. What more can one man do for another? You see, I knew all the time that Bernard had not left Vienna."

Sofie's face came to life suddenly in an expression of surprise. "Then why did you go?"

"For you," he said, "because you wanted it so much."

He held out his hand to her and his face was alight with the most beautiful expression of love I have ever seen.

It drove me away from them, out onto the balcony. There had been no desire in that look of Eugene's, yet it had had the same effect on me that desire had had long ago. It was then I realized that I wanted something new, something Susanne could not give, not the clarity, the quiet death that came after struggle, but the purification that came with harmony. And knew who could give it to me. Glory. And for the first time in my life desired her.

So I had progressed—for it was a progression—from the envy of Victor's and Sofie's love to envy of what she shared with Eugene. Gone was the desire to escape into another man's prowess, gone the infatuation with the passionate dream, gone with them the doubt of my own potentialities that had driven me to an acceptance of the lesser thing. I was ready at last to take what was right for me.

I could hear the scratching of pen on paper as Eugene wrote what he had to say in Victor's favor. Before me the snow had begun to fall again, thick and fast, an impenetrable curtain in the air, a blanket on the ground. The silence of it, the indescribable silence.

The balcony ran along the entire side of the house. Other bedrooms opened onto it. Now Huberta stepped out of hers and beckoned to me to come and stand beside her. Her room lay in darkness and as we stood there side by side, the

light from Eugene's streamed out into the night like a beacon, casting a pallid radiance on us.

Huberta put a hand on my arm. "Don't drive back in this weather," she said. "At least stay the night."

I looked into her care-worn face. "I wish there were something I could do for you," I said, wishing it suddenly quite sincerely.

She turned to face me and laid one hand gently against my cheek. "You have done more for me," she said, "than you will ever realize."

I thought of the small luxuries I had been able to contribute to "God's Blessing," the coffee, chocolate, sugar, wine, stockings, tobacco, cigarettes, but, dear heaven, they had never really been in want. They would have survived very well without me. And I said as much.

"I wasn't thinking of those things," she said, and turned away a little. "You see, Robbie, I fell in love with you."

I turned her toward me again, grasping her arms hard. I held her from me and looked into her clear, candid eyes, but found no grief in them. She looked radiantly happy, as if loving me in itself had sufficed.

"A fat lot of good that's done you," I said. "I've been no use to anybody for months now. I have nothing to give. I'm hollowed out. You couldn't have chosen to fall in love with a worse guy."

She smiled at me. "It wasn't important that you should be able to give, but for me to want to give."

"Huberta," I protested, "you do nothing but give. You are the most generous person in the world."

"But not that way," she said. "I've never loved a man before. And it was important that I should. You see, Robbie, you set me free. You'll never understand, I guess, but that doesn't matter. It's entirely my poor affair. Robbie, will you kiss me, please?"

I took her in my arms, she raised her lips to my mouth, and pressed her body gently against mine. And I kissed her

as I had kissed Glory once, with the sweet excitement of the moment that had come without warning and would be gone when she was gone. She let her head drop to my shoulder, resting it there for a moment, then she sighed and said, "Oh, this is hard, this is so much harder than I thought," and looked into my eyes again and still hers showed no suffering. "Stay the night," she pleaded. "I would worry so if you drove back in this," and I said I would.

"I'll get your room ready for you," she said, and left me standing there, all the loneliness of a moment ago gone.

Long after I had gone to bed, perhaps I had already slept a little, I heard voices. I got up and slipped out onto the balcony. The snow cast light enough for me to see Carl and Susanne coming slowly toward the house, he with his clumsy, hobbling gait, she dressed in her ski suit, striding along like a boy with her hands behind her back. They were talking animatedly but so softly, I couldn't hear what was being said. Carl was smoking his pipe. Once he threw back his head and laughed soundlessly.

At the door he made as if to take her in his arms but she shook him off. Quite clearly I could hear her whisper, "Don't touch me. I can't stand it, don't you understand? I don't want it any more," and any more, any more, any more, it echoed in my heart, arousing in me the old, old evil. Would she say it to me? If she did, I wouldn't be able to hobble away in the dark like Carl. I would want to kill her.

I heard her come softly up the stairs and a few minutes later saw the light from her room shine out briefly into the night, then nothing but blackness and the deep silence of a country house on a winter's night. And had to go to her. Denial was as impossible as sleep.

I don't know how she found out I was there or whether she heard my soft steps in the hall, but the knob turned as I touched it. She opened the door of her room to me, then she walked over to the balcony door and closed it.

We loved each other in sullen, savage silence, an ugly,

hurtful love, a satisfaction of all that was evil in us. When it was over, she went to the balcony door again and opened it and stood for a moment with the chill night air full upon her, breathing deeply. Then she hugged herself and shivered, but not from cold. I could see it shaking her, a great revulsion. I had made her hate herself, and could feel the same revulsion in me.

Into the silence, from far away, came the thin, reedy sound of voices singing in harmony, "Silent Night." Strange, I thought, that this frightening people should also have given us the sweetest song in the world.

thirty

I SLEPT LATE THAT CHRISTMAS DAY, THE SLEEP OF EXHAUSTION. When I awoke, Eugene had already breakfasted and was readied for his morning in bed. Fritz was going to carry him downstairs for Christmas dinner. The old fellow could

do it now. Eugene couldn't have weighed much over ninety pounds.

Vally and Huberta were busy in the kitchen. The goose, looking very opulent in its pan with the stuffing oozing obscenely out of its breast, was ready to be put into the oven. The cook was worshiping it. "Now I know there is peace on earth and good will to all men again," she said, and that made even Vally laugh. Where was Sofie? I wanted to know.

"She's gone for a walk with Susanne," said Huberta.

"With Susanne?"

"Yes. Miracles will happen and pigs will yet fly. They have been on quite good terms lately. Now all we need to really have peace and good will on this little bit of earth would be to have Father with us," and her face saddened.

"Cheer up," I said. "You may not have him for Christmas, but you'll have him for *Heilige Drei Koenige,* so leave the tree up."

"You think so?" Her face was radiant and quite childlike in its sudden transition to joy.

With Eugene's statement in my pocket, I felt I could safely say, "Positive." Yes, we would let Victor go before the feast of the Three Wise Men.

"And you won't stay to dinner?" She put a hand on my arm. "It would be so festive. Wait, Robbie. See Susanne and tell her what you have just told me. She will forgive you, too, and all of us can be happy together."

Her expression was pleading, her eyes filled suddenly with tears, and she looked down at her trembling fingers. I said, "All right. I'll stay and see Susanne."

I went back upstairs to get something from my room, I can't remember what. Every bedroom in this house opened out onto a balcony and as I went onto mine for a moment to admire the scene again, my eyes narrowed because of the glare from the snow on the ground and the blue-white sky above, I saw Sofie running toward the house. Every now and

then she stopped to catch her breath, her hand over her heart, and once she stumbled.

I ran downstairs and met her simultaneously with Huberta, who had seen her from the kitchen. She leaned against Huberta who had held out her arms to receive her. There was blood on her dress and hands and when she brushed the hair from her face, there was blood on her face, too.

"The dogs," she said, "the dogs," and to me, "Susanne tried to part them. She's hurt. She's badly hurt. You must get the doctor."

I got the two women into my jeep. Sofie wanted to tell me where to go. "I know where to go," I said. "It's Anton's dog, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Sofie. "He killed Bodo." And I could see again the jaws, as Anton had exposed them, yellow fangs.

By car the way was longer. As we tore through the countryside, Sofie explained what had happened. "We came out of the woods, into the clearing. There was the dog in front of his kennel. He looked exactly like a wolf when he stood up on his hind legs and growled." Sofie closed her eyes. You could see she was finding it difficult to tell her story.

"Susanne hung onto Bodo but the other dog lunged forward. He was on a chain, but suddenly it snapped and he was free. Susanne said, 'Now you'll see something,' and let Bodo go."

Sofie covered her face with her hands. "It was as if she wanted it," she moaned, "as if she wanted them to fight." Yes, I thought, she wanted them to fight.

"At first she didn't do anything," Sofie went on, "not until she saw Bodo getting the worst of it. Then she interfered with the most dreadful scream I have ever heard." She put her hands over her ears. "I shall always hear it, always."

She dropped her hands into her lap, where they lay listless. "A man came to the door of the house and when he saw what was happening, he went for his gun. But he couldn't

shoot, not until it was too late. Susanne was in the way all the time. I think she might have finished him off—the other dog—it was terrible to see how cleverly she went at it, how unafraid she was. Oh dear God, what a waste of valor!

"She grabbed the dog's head from behind with both hands; she was going to wring his neck, but his chain swung around and caught her in the ankles. It must have hurt her badly. She let go for a second and he had her."

She shook her head from side to side. "After that everything happened too fast to follow. There was blood, blood everywhere but not a sound out of her. Then, at last, the shot, too late, much too late."

"How was she when you left her?" Huberta asked, her face pinched and old.

"Alive," said Sofie, "but that is about all."

We left the highway for a dirt road which led past the clearing. Such a quiet scene. The smoke rising peacefully and straight from the chimney, the sun shining, not a cloud in the sky. The air was still and gathering warmth and the snow was beginning to melt at the edges, staining the ground like rain.

In the foreground, on the wide-open space that had been a vegetable garden when I had seen it last, lay the dead bodies of the two dogs, Bodo, his flank torn, his blood dyeing the white ground red and Barsch, looking in death more than ever like a wolf, the blood trickling slowly and blackly from a small bullet wound in his head. Tracks of blood led to the house.

"The man carried her in," said Sofie. "I did what I could to stanch the blood before I left her but there was no stopping it. You must leave me here and go at once . . ."

Anton came to the door, his face colorless in its anxiety. "I don't know," he stammered, "I don't think there's much time left. She's losing so much blood."

"I want to see her," said Huberta.

"There's no time for that," said Sofie. "Robbie can't find the way alone." Then Anton said, "I'll take the Lieutenant to the doctor if the young lady wants to stay with her sister."

I knew the old doctor; he attended Eugene; but I didn't know where he lived. Anton did, but of course the old man had gone to spend Christmas Day with relatives. We had to drive fifteen miles to get him and then back to his house for the instruments he would need. When he heard what was waiting for him, he shook his head and said, "That's nothing I'm fit for any more. Ach, why must I carry such burdens in my old age? Who's to look after the young now with no doctors left but old idiots like me?"

Between clinging for dear life to the jeep and praying, Anton gave his version of what had happened. "Never thought a good steel chain like that could break," he muttered. "But it's old and worn out, I guess, like everything else. And they're both fighters, those dogs. Never did see anything like it and never want to again. Her interfering with that wild look in her eye as if she was enjoying it. Crazy, that's what I thought when I saw her, crazy. And I never did think that of my daughter. She was touched, of course, touched, but always gentle."

He shook his head mournfully. "My dog didn't know what had hit him when she came rushing at him like the wrath of God and screaming. Dear God, it rent the air, that scream, like an outcry from hell. Barsch got her in the arm first. She tore herself free, then he got her by the throat. That's when I shot, because I knew then that it didn't matter if I hit her or not. She was done for if I didn't try. I didn't even aim. I couldn't. I just fired and it went clean through my dog's head. And there's some people don't believe in the guidance of God."

He crossed himself, looked at me for a moment, then away. "Guess you'll be confiscating my gun, Lieutenant," he said. "Will I be punished for having kept it hidden?"

"Just put it back where it was," I said, "and thank God you had it. That's what guns are for. To shoot down mad dogs."

They had bedded Susanne in the big double bed, the down covers had been laid aside, and over her head a crucified Christ spread his arms in eternal charity. So she had not been able to escape him.

Efforts had been made to stanch the flow of blood in arm and neck but it had seeped through the clumsy bandages and the bed linen was stained. Maria apologized, the tears coursing down her cheeks. "How dreadful it looks," she said, "but the *gnaedige* says we can't move her."

Sofie sat beside the bed, bathing Susanne's forehead with something that smelled sweet and fresh in the stale air of the overheated room and I was struck by the sorrow in her face. She looked like a Pièta madonna. Strange, I thought, that she should take so much to heart the death of a girl she had always disliked.

For that Susanne was dying was evident by one look at her face. Yellow where it had once been healthily tanned, the nose and mouth pinched to skull narrowness, white around the nose, the mouth, the temples, and the sweat beading on her face. Her breathing was raspy and uneven, but she was fully conscious and she did not complain.

When she saw me she said, "Bodo is dead," and with the words a small drop of blood appeared at the corner of her mouth. Sofie wiped it away.

"I know," I said, "and I'm sorry." But I couldn't grieve, not for the dog, not for her. My heart was numb.

"If the chain hadn't caught me," Susanne was saying, "I could have saved him," and she looked as if she might cry.

The doctor gave her something that made her lose consciousness, then he worked fast and with what seemed to me great skill. But he was quite evidently dissatisfied with what he was doing, especially when it came to the injuries of the

throat. "I don't know, I don't know," he muttered, shaking his head, and then, looking up for a moment, "If we could get her to a hospital before I close this, but no, she would not survive the trip," and a few minutes later, "If we could give her a transfusion . . ."

"Get Vally," said Huberta. "She has the same blood type. I know. We gave blood so many times during the war." So I went for Vally von Werthenau.

Good or bad, like or dislike, this woman belonged to this family, and in the battle for Susanne's life all differences were submerged. When I saw her reaction to what I had to tell, I saw her for the first time as a human being, as a governess, as a nurse, and Susanne was her child again. However much difficulty she may have had with the girl, the urge to protect and stand by remained undying.

Before we left I ran up to Eugene's room to get some of his sedatives for Susanne. I told him what had happened. "Is Sofie with her?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I won't keep you now," he said. "Go. Go quickly. And when you can, come back and tell me how things are."

As we ran off it occurred to me that it was odd, his asking, "Is Sofie with her?"

After the transfusion it seemed to me that the hue of death receded a little from Susanne's face, but the doctor did not leave. Vally and I drove up to the house to report to Eugene and to bring back something to eat, but nobody felt like eating. Anton, Maria, and the doctor sat down to a dinner of sorts with Vally. On their insistence I joined them. But the food stuck in our throats. They were too preoccupied with grief, I with shame, that I could not feel this thing as they did.

Toward evening Susanne regained consciousness and spoke in a voice that was deep and hoarse like a man's whisper. "I feel as if all life were gone from me," she said. "It flutters,

here." She lifted her hand as if it were a heavy weight and laid it on her heart.

"You've lost a lot of blood," said Sofie, "but Vally gave you some to make up for it."

"That isn't going to agree with mine," said Susanne, the words coming from her as if in a slow motion of sound. "If I'm a split personality from now on, we'll know why," and she tried to smile, a smile that trembled on her bloodless lips. After a moment's silence, broken only by her labored breathing, she said, "Thank her for me."

Her hands on the coverlet were yellow, the nails blue, as if they had already died, her hair, too, was strangely lusterless and her teeth protruded sharply. She was ugly in those final hours, yet infinitely appealing, like a sick child, and a new feeling for her awoke in my heart. Compassion. It had nothing to do with the desire that had gone before. It went deeper, it was a good feeling, and to my immense relief, it filled my numbed heart with life.

"I would like to see Father," she said after a while.

I stepped to the bedside and said, "I'll try and bring him to you."

She looked at me as if I had been a benevolent stranger, as if this terrible destruction of her body had freed her, too, from what had bound us together. "That would be good," she said, "if you could."

I went to the doctor. "Could you give me a certificate of some sort," I asked him, "saying that her condition is serious? I think I can get her father here for her."

The old man said, "I can give you a certificate that she can't live through the night," and I knew he meant it.

"I wonder," he said, as he wrote, "if you could bring back a drug for me, something your hospital may have. We certainly don't have it." He wrote the prescription for me. "Not that I think it will help her but we must try."

As I went in to say I was about to leave, Sofie rose from her seat at Susanne's side. I thought perhaps she was going to

ask me to drive her up to the house to see Eugene; so, evidently, did Susanne, for she said, "Don't leave me."

"I am not going to leave you, child," said Sofie. "I just thought I would get another chair. This one is so hideously high, it has given me a crick in my back."

I got the other chair for her and she sat down again beside Susanne. "Child," she whispered and again, softly, "child," and Susanne opened her eyes, looked at Sofie and smiled, a firm smile now, a sweet, innocent, happy smile. I had never seen her look like that.

Again she laid her hand on her heart. "If this isn't going to carry me any further," she said, in that same low, husky whisper, "it doesn't matter. Sometimes I used to say to myself, living is hard work. Imagine it—at my age." Again that sweet smile. "Everything was of such vital importance." Her lips drooped. "It isn't," she said softly. "It isn't."

Sofie said gently, "You fight too hard."

Susanne began to shake her head, then grimaced with pain. "What else is there to life?" she said. "But I'm not going to fight any more, not even this."

She closed her eyes, opened them again. "I always meant to tell you," she said. "I always thought you were the most beautiful woman in the world."

Sofie's lips trembled. "That was once upon a time," she said.

"No," said Susanne. "*Now.*"

Sofie leaned forward and kissed Susanne, then she closed Susanne's eyes gently with her hand. "Sleep," she said, "try to sleep."

I looked at Huberta, seated red-eyed at the foot of the bed. Her intense gaze included Sofie and Susanne, and there was a mixture of happiness and sadness in her expression that found an echo in my heart. There was comfort in this sudden, surprising harmony between those two. It outweighed death and brought Christmas into a day that had been filled with nothing but tragedy.

With Eugene's statement in his favor and the doctor's certificate, I was able to obtain a release for Victor on bail. I was able to fill the doctor's prescription, too, but the drug did not save Susanne. Victor reached her bedside at midnight, three hours before she had a hemorrhage and died.

I was at "God's Blessing" at the time, alone with Vally von Werthenau. We were waiting for Huberta to come and tell us it was all over. Eugene wasn't asleep, either. From the morning room, where we were, we could see his light streaming out into the night above us. The snow that had fallen the evening before had been melted by that day's sun, the night was unrelievedly dark.

"I will never be able to understand," I said, "what finally drew Sofie and Susanne together so that they became friends. Oh, I know, the old animosity had been fading for quite some time now, but today they looked at each other as if they loved each other."

"And why not?" said Vally von Werthenau. "After all, she is Susanne's mother."

thirty-one

"TO UNDERSTAND A THING," SAID VALLY, "I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE to learn to see it from every viewpoint. But I don't care about other viewpoints, I want you to see mine."

She was looking at me dispassionately, without rancor or malice, and the immense weariness typical of today's European showed in her face. It was drawn in the fine lines around her eyes and lips and in the deep creases in her forehead, in her pale blue eyes and colorless lips, and in the caul of gray that dulled her hair. But no severity was left in her expression, as if sorrow had deleted it. She was no Walkyrie now, she was a woman.

"It is odd," she said, a fleeting smile on her lips, "but I see you always as the lad you were when I first met you, not as the man you are now. I suppose that is the attitude of the eternal governess. Whomever I knew as a child remains with the needs of a child in my mind."

Silence for a moment, then she said, "Wait here. I want to show you something."

She left the room and came back a few moments later with a picture in her hand, the framed photograph of a young girl who looked like Huberta when I had first seen her but with more freshness, more intelligence and determination in the expression, and with a defiant, independent look in the eyes that Huberta had never had.

"That is Meta," said Vally, "as I always see her, as she looked when I knew her first, when she was sixteen." She gave me a long, hard look. "As I am sure you know," she said, "we were close friends."

She put down the picture between us on a low table, making Meta a silent third party in the room.

"She was the only child of parents who doted on each other to the exclusion of everything else, and this threw her much upon herself. That was how she found her way to me. At the time I was governess with the family who owned the estate next to hers. It was my first position. I was very young, too.

"I was looking after three little boys. Meta liked to help me care for them and play with them. She was a born mother." Vally covered her eyes with one hand. "In those days she was very loving and with nowhere else to go, this love fell to me."

She was silent and the girl in the picture seemed to fill the room with her youthful presence. There was no resemblance between her and the austere woman I had met so briefly in Switzerland. I was face to face with Meta for the first time.

"It troubled her," Vally went on, "this closeness of our friendship, but it did not trouble me." Fiercely now, "It was the only good thing she had and she saw it that way, too, when it was too late.

"But she was no rebel. She saw life in the pattern of her forefathers and was prepared to live it no other way. That was why she married Victor when it was arranged for her. Can you imagine a sadder reason for marriage than to go through with it because it is the thing to do?

"Perhaps she married him, too, because the shining example of her father and mother's happiness was constantly before her eyes. Always she felt shut out by it and to feel shut out is a very bad thing for a child. It can lead to disastrous flights. Anyway, our friendship was no compensation to her for the love she saw between mother and father. It was too . . . too different." Bitterly now, "It didn't suffice. Perhaps she thought Victor would weave a pattern of perfect love for her, but she was wrong.

"It didn't take her long to find out that Victor did not love her, that he was in love with Sofie, always had been. It didn't take her long to find out that he and Sofie were having an affair. In her circles one's 'friends' see to that. It was then that she asked me to come and live with them and our life together was restored. But it was not the same. I was able to bring her a measure of peace, but the wounds he had inflicted made it impossible for us to recapture the happiness of earlier days."

She paused and I could see it. She had made me see their friendship; more than that—she had made me feel for them.

"Until she died," Vally went on, "Meta was determined that the right thing should be done, however often it turned out to be wrong. She wouldn't give Victor his freedom, of course. Even I urged her to do so, but she refused. And his affair with Sofie had to stop. But this she could not bring about, not until the day Victor placed a weapon in her hands. Or so she thought.

"That was the day he came to her and told her that Sofie was going to bear his child. If she wouldn't accept it, he said he would leave her. To his surprise she agreed, on one condition, that he never see Sofie again. And to this he agreed.

"Meta kept her end of the bargain. Beyond the fact that Susanne was adopted, none of her children knew anything of her origin, and unless Sofie has revealed it to Susanne, Susanne didn't know, either. She grew up in the belief that Victor and Meta were her father and mother. Meta paid an

immense sum of money to have Susanne's papers read to that effect. And she was a good mother to a most difficult child. But Victor broke his word within the year, and it broke Meta's heart."

She leaned forward suddenly, the old hardness in her expression, all the bitterness life had imposed on her in her voice. "I would like you to see Sofie," she said, "as I saw her, in a small village in the Ticino where she had given birth to Susanne under an assumed name. I went there to take the child from her, and saw her relinquish it without a pang. And then I would like to ask you, *who is unnatural?*"

She leaned back in her chair, suddenly calm again, as if there had been no outburst, no deviation from her dispassionate storytelling.

"Why did she have the child? The crux of her story lies, of course, with Eugene, with his distorted views on the relationship that should exist between two people, his rejection of one man's right to possess another through love, which is the only thing that holds our poor world together.

"Of course he always knew of Sofie's love for Victor, and the freedom he permitted her had as its natural result the fact that she never kept anything from him. When she knew she was pregnant with Victor's child she told Eugene and it precipitated a crisis between them. Oh, not in the orthodox sense. There was never anything orthodox about those three. They lived according to laws of their own, and their laws coincided. That is perhaps why they never fell out.

"Sofie did not want the child. At least she was honest in that, but Eugene was violently opposed to such a revolt against nature. The child was not to be deprived of its right to live. And, of course, Victor wanted the child. If he couldn't have Sofie, he would have this living part of her as proof that, in a way, he had possessed her.

"Soft, I have often heard people call Eugene. But there is nothing soft about his ideas on freedom. They are a weapon of steel in his hands, they make him invincible. He is always

the victor. Sofie, of course, pretends to accede to them, but they wouldn't appeal to her if her two men were not so irrevocably faithful. She could never face unfaithfulness on Eugene's or Victor's part as calmly as Eugene faces her infidelity.

"Of course he never saw it as infidelity. Sofie has never been made to feel the stigma of sin." Again the bitterness in her voice. "No sense of guilt, no qualms of conscience, and that was what she looked like when I came to take the child. Composed. Serene. And beautiful. I hated her then, I hate her now for . . . for going unscathed."

She closed her eyes and the tears formed beneath her lids. "So there you have it," she said, "a story of passion, of lying and deceit. Have your idols toppled?"

"My idols toppled long ago," I said, "but it doesn't make me love them less."

It didn't make me love them less, but it broke a bondage that was older and stronger than mine to Susanne.

Late that night I found Sofie sitting alone in the morning room. It wasn't gay with flowers now but subdued like our lives. Empty boxes that had held Christmas baubles were heaped in a corner, the fire had died in the hearth long ago and the room was cold.

Sofie was sitting with her long legs stretched from her and her head resting on her hand. Her face was lined with grief and distorted with guilt. She had not gone unscathed.

She raised her head when she heard my steps, looked at me, and said, "She's gone."

"I know," I said, and added, "I know all about it now."

She gave me a long look. "Who told you?"

"Vally."

She looked away. "I thought perhaps Eugene had, I would have preferred that. Still, it seems only fair that you should know their side of the story, too."

She laid both hands against her forehead in a gesture of

despair. "I would give anything in the world," she said, "to have her back. I don't know why, but somehow I was counting on her presence in what was left of life. I needed the giving she needed, if you can understand what I mean. Oh, Robbie, we have nothing to say, really. Or have we?"

Now she was looking at me again, intently, and she stretched out her hand in the old gesture of friendship but there was no seductiveness in the move. All that was gone from her.

I took her hand and held it, not needing her any longer and knowing there was nothing I could do for her. The knight in shining armor was dead. "Perhaps we do," she said softly. "Perhaps we have everything to say. Because in a way I can see divine justice in all this, yes, even in the blow that strikes me." She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes and suddenly looked old. Oddly enough she said just then, "How terribly old I must be to see things so objectively. Divine justice in that I should be left with such emptiness."

After quite a long silence she opened her eyes and looked at me again. Now her features were more composed, her glance was more serene. "Once your mother asked me," she said, "why I loved her. If I remember correctly, I was a little impatient with the question. Did there have to be a reason?" She looked away. "Of course there is a reason, there always is. I thought I loved your mother because of her warm, generous nature and I do, still. But there is something even more appealing at the root of my affection. I love her because of the simplicity of her emotions and the placidity that comes with it."

She smiled, without bitterness. "By some strange fate," she said, "we Europeans seem doomed to be complicated. It is as if we could not conform to the broad pattern of life, as if we were fated each to weave his own. And it makes to some extent for the confusion in which we find ourselves. Perhaps it is a measure of how much I love you, Robbie, that I don't want you to become a part of it."

I put my hand on her forehead and brushed a few stray hairs away and looked into her eyes. "I won't," I said. "I'm going home."

She threw a shawl around her shoulders and accompanied me outdoors. The air was cold and clear. The snow that had fallen a few hours before had blanketed the hood of my jeep. With my hand I cut a swath across it and the snow cascaded to the ground, dry as dust. A weak ray of light shone faintly down upon us from the open front door, a spotlight that held us dimly encircled. Instinctively we turned our backs on it and looked out into the impenetrable night, and as we stood there for a silent moment our eyes grew accustomed to the dark. The outlines of lightly covered firs and nearby hills became discernible. Slowly our world was given back to us.

"This reminds me of something," said Sofie, with a gesture that included the scene that had become visible again. "In the Bible we are told that we were created in God's image and only a few verses later that a mist rose out of the ground and that we were created from the dust to which we must return. These two origins of man have always puzzled me. Now I think perhaps they were meant to be symbols for what is real and what is illusion. A moment ago we faced complete darkness but as our eyes become accustomed to it we find we can see after all." She looked at me. "Perhaps that is what the future will be like, a learning to see in the dark, the creation of a light of our own; yours at any rate, Robbie, because you are young."

She laid a hand on my arm. "Eugene is right," she said. "You must do something to dispel the darkness around us or, let me say, something that will help us see in the dark. That's perhaps not quite so ambitious." Now she was smiling. "Who should do it, Robbie, if not your kind?"

It was a broader command than Eugene's, almost like a call from a higher power. "Very well," I said, "but then tell me

this: If I'm to take the simpler course and arm myself in times of peace with . . . well, let's call it happiness, that old-fashioned word . . . with a wife I'll call my own, because I confess to the frailty of the desire to possess," her smile deepened as my words brought back an argument of long ago, "and with a positive goal . . . in other words, if I saddle myself with all those things he hasn't got . . ."

"Who hasn't got?"

"The greatest menacer of all, the new enemy Eugene spoke of. If I stand on such a solid foundation, do you think I will prevail?"

She looked at me for a moment thoughtfully, then she said, "I am quite sure you will."

She was still standing in the faint light from the house, her back to it. Now I turned her to face the light and it gave a faded picture of what I had once thought dazzling. Her shawl was gray, her dress black, she looked what she was—a mourner. I put my hands on her arms and held her, a dream that was past, and I kissed her on her thin bloodless lips, feeling that a part of me had died. "Go into the house, Sofie," I said. "I won't go until you've gone."

She hugged her shawl to her, turned, and walked up the stairs, her head bent a little. Without turning to look back she went in and closed the front door and the small ray of light was gone. I was surrounded by darkness. Until I turned on the headlights of my jeep. They threw an enlightening glare far into the night, the motor jumped into throbbing activity, and I was on my way.