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COUSIN HONORÉ

By the Same Author

THE LOVELY SHIP

THE VOYAGE HOME

RICHER DUST

FAREWELL TO YOUTH

THAT WAS YESTERDAY

WOMEN AGAINST MEN

IN THE SECOND YEAR

THE MIRROR IN DARKNESS

(In Progress)

1. COMPANY PARADE

2. LOVE IN WINTER

3. NONE TURN BACK

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE

EUROPE TO LET

Autobiography

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Criticism

MODERN DRAMA IN EUROPE

CIVIL JOURNEY

KANSAS
NO

COUSIN HONORÉ

By

STORM JAMESON

NEW YORK · 1941

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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Set up and printed.

FIRST PRINTING.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AMERICAN BOOK-STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

For

IRENE RATHBONE

December 1918

WHEN Honoré Burckheim was a child of eleven years, the city he lived in ceased to be French and became German. In December 1918 he was fifty-nine. Strasbourg had been French again for almost a month and he had forgotten the intervening years. He was reminded of them only when he had occasion to visit the general post-office—it had been built by the Germans in an appalling Gothic, in a fond belief that it harmonised with the Cathedral—or when he passed the Kaiser's palace, put up in the eighties in the style of the Florentine Renaissance: Berlin sculptors had done their worst inside; outside, two colossal figures perched on the roof. Burckheim did not go into Strasbourg often. He was the bailiff of the estate belonging to his cousin, the unmarried head of the family, and he preferred to stay in the village of Burckheim, in the dower-house at the edge of the park which was usually allotted to Burckheim widows and impoverished female relatives. The house, breaking open a corner of the park walls, fronted on to the street, with a flight of shallow steps leading to the door sheltering under its delicate pediment. An immensely high gable, fourteen steps a side running up to the base of a slender bell-tower, masked the upper three storeys of the five-storeyed house, its walls cream-washed and the oak shutters to the many windows painted indigo-blue. Burckheim was comfortable here. He left Strasbourg and the management of the family ironworks to his cousin, Richard Burckheim. Estate and ironworks were both Richard's, and Honoré, though he knew himself to be the heir, was first and foremost bailiff to the land that had belonged to Burckheims

for six centuries. Like his cousin he had no children—or none he had given a name to. There were branches of the family in France, in Belfort and Lyons. And in Germany.

Alsace at this moment—and in spite of the welcome offered to French soldiers in the streets and cafés, and in family life to relatives hurrying from every region of France to visit their newly-saved cousins—was proving herself to be what she had always been, neither French nor German, but greenly and strictly Alsatian. A *Commission de triage*, composed of Alsatians, tried fellow-citizens accused of harbouring German ideas, loyalties, wives. Other Alsatians, who had always been known for their French leanings, discovered the virtues of Germany and began to defend their late enemies. Young men who had fought in the German army compared notes with their cousins who were in the opposite trenches and strolled home arm-in-arm, thankful to be alive, and giving each other credit for every virtue, of courage, good-temper, joyousness, each had, secretly, feared lacking in himself.

Under the dancing toe of the deliverer that herb sprang up which the German heel had not been able to crush, but it is an Alsatian herb, its roots planted by Swiss, German, Swedish, and even Italian, as well as by French hands. Its roughness, like its gaiety, is its own.

Honoré Burckheim had been twice married. His first wife, married when he was twenty, had died within the year. After her death, which cut him sharply, he enjoyed himself well for another thirty years. Five years before the War he married a young American woman he had known only a week when he proposed. No Frenchman of his age and wits would have done such a thing. He did not even know she was well-off. He caught sight of her in a friend's house at the moment when the fear of dying without an heir came into his mind. Until this moment he had thought of himself as a young man. A sudden pain in his chest, and the sight of a stupid

healthy recruit, convinced him he was going to die. He turned out of his way to go into a friend's house, to die there, saw Caroline Newstead, and decided to marry her. She was tall, plump, blond, with a magnificent bosom. He could see her as the mother of not less than a dozen children, and he admired in her a dignity and humour, combined with humility—she was partly German—which promised her a fairly high place among those Burckheim women who had amused as well as respected their husbands. Alas, she was barren. Their marriage had lasted nine years—she was now thirty-two—and no sign of an heir.

On this evening in December 1918, she faced him across a round dining-table. She had watched him eat, slowly and like an artist, goose, roast hare, cheese, brandied plums, and drink two and a half bottles of wine of his own growing. He had the appetite of a young healthy peasant, he slept marvellously; he had never had a pain except the one to which she owed it that she was seated here and not presiding in New York at a meeting called to swear 'No more German toys, never, never.' He was strong and could lift her—she weighed eleven and a half stone—and the heavy mahogany dining-chair with one hand. She could not say her marriage was a failure, any more than one can call that day a failure in which one has done nothing but sit, drowsy with warmth, in the Alsatian sun in an orchard. She knew he was unfaithful. In America she would have left a husband who behaved as he did, but the thought of leaving him made her shiver with cold. Where else, where in America, could she have this contented sense of possessing and being possessed by a natural force, a field, a whole valley? A friend writing to her from Boston had said: "I suppose, being French, he is intelligent. . . ." "Not in the least intelligent," Caroline answered: "but he is as naturally honest as a child and completely unmanageable."

Burckheim looked at her across the table.

"I don't like you to cover yourself up in the evening, Caroline."

"It's so cold."

"Nonsense. We have plenty of wood."

A servant came into the room to say there was a message, urgent, from the château. "Well, what is it?" Burckheim demanded. But there was no message yet; someone was telephoning and had refused to speak except to—"Nonsense," interrupted Burckheim, "why should I be disturbed? Send whoever it is to the devil." The man—it was Matthew, his own servant—looked anxiously at Caroline, who got up and in spite of Burckheim's furious protest went out to the telephone. It was in the library at the end of a long corridor. Matthew hurried after her, to explain that he had had a vision of trouble as soon as he touched the telephone.

"Yes, yes," she said, impatiently, dismissing him. Matthew's visions were none the less annoying for being so often fulfilled.

She closed the door of the library. She smiled when she heard the voice at the other end, a pleased alert smile.

"Oh, is it you, René?"

René Hoffmayer was her husband's step-brother, the son of the widow his father had married as his second wife—that is, no relation at all, as Burckheim was fond of pointing out. He was the business manager of the Burckheim ironworks in Strasbourg, and during almost the whole of the war he had been kept in prison by the Germans, suspected of disloyal thoughts. During this time Richard Burckheim had managed the ironworks himself, and seemed to enjoy doing it. Only Caroline fretted, at the absence of a friend.

"My dear René, where are you? In Strasbourg? That idiot Matthew said a message from the château."

"I'm at the château. Isn't your husband at home?"

"Yes." She allowed her disappointment to crush her voice. "He is. But—do you want him?"

"Yes. No. Simply tell him, my dear, that I am coming at once to see him, it's important, he's on no account to go out. Tell him, please."

"Yes. Is it——"

"Don't ask me questions, Caroline. I'll tell you when I can, but just now it's a matter for Honoré, and the only important thing is to prevent his slipping out this evening, as he does, I believe, too often."

Caroline sighed. She had once ventured to ask Honoré why he did not invite to drink with him in his house the farmers and others, excellent persons no doubt, with whom he sat drinking and gossiping every evening in the Dauphin. He stared at her, then laughed so loudly that she was humiliated and cried.

"When you spoke to Matthew he had one of his visions," she said, smiling.

"Go and stop Honoré," her friend said. He rang off.

CHAPTER TWO

HOFFMAYER left the château by a small door at the side. A full white moon showed him the cobblestones of the courtyard covered with ice. He trod carefully. The shadows of the delicate iron balconies round each upper window, of the greater outer staircase curving to the first floor, were frozen and brittle, and he avoided stepping on them. The tall south wing of the house, its long row of shuttered windows without balconies stretched above the great doorway, flung a black shawl across the other wall. Hoffmayer glanced up. A cat was running along the balustrade that surrounded the roof of this wing; it ran as though the cold of the iron burned its feet, and disappeared.

The park lay on the other side of the château, and Hoffmayer preferred not to cross it. He followed the drive. After the first shock, the air exhilarated him; it was like moving within a frozen bubble that sprang from the Vosges to the heavy hills of the Black Forest. A thin icy wind came from beyond the Rhine, from a defeated but still unsubdued country. The seeds are only frozen hard in the soil, he thought. He could believe that over there the bubble was of steel, the sky lower, the rivers bed-ridden with cold. He brought his mind back to the present, and saw the veins of hairy leaves traced with frost.

The small stream that flowed through the park to join the Bruche was frozen. A crystalline noise came from under the ice, reminding him of a verse of Heine's. He read only German, this Alsatian whose smallest gesture was French.

He was told, when he reached the dower-house, that Burck-

heim was in the library. This was the room in which, during the War, he always received German officials who came with complaints or orders. He would sit waiting for them, a book—always the same book, a school edition of Vergil—open in front of him. If they were delayed he fell asleep from boredom and Matthew had to rouse him to attend to them. As firm a Francophile as Hoffmayer, he was much more wary. He enjoyed the difficulties of the war years; on the day when the French soldiers marched through the village he was the only member of the official party of welcome who looked as though he had just had a summer holiday. He had unearthed the uniform worn by his father in 1870, and while the others shivered in thick overcoats he wore it over his naked body—only able to button the jacket by leaving off every undergarment—and stood calm and smiling in the brutal cold, for five hours.

He looked up when Hoffmayer came in, pretending to be still half absorbed in the Vergil—of which in fact he no longer understood a line. René Hoffmayer was a scholar as well as a business man, an authority on certain obscure Middle-German writers, and it was to snub him, as well as to rub in his own distaste for the Germans, that Burckheim kept up his pretence of enjoying the classics.

"Well! What do you want? I hope it's important. I don't get much time to read now, you know."

Hoffmayer walked over to the stove. He rested his hands on it, on the smooth glazed shoulders of the boy in the frieze running along the base. Unsmiling, he let his glance follow the boy's hand raised with the flute in it against the curled leaves.

"Did you know, my dear Honoré, that Richard has been working for the Germans during the last four years?"

"What do you mean? The works were taken over. Naturally he worked for the Germans. We supplied the Ger-

man Government with parts for lorries. What did you expect Richard to do? Blow up the works?"

Hoffmayer turned round. His face, fined down to the bone in prison, was little able to show emotion. But his eyes were alive, and suffered for it.

"Ah, I thought you didn't know," he said gently. "Well—I must tell you, then. Richard was able to get information—valuable for the German High Command—from France. It seems he tapped our cousins in Lyons—who are quite innocent. He learned a great deal that no one would have told an enemy of France, and he passed everything he learned to the authorities, the German authorities, and was paid for it—a part in cash on the spot, but more in promises. He must have been certain the Germans were going to win the war."

Burckheim had started up. He felt confused: he did not understand what his step-brother had said, but he felt that he had been attacked. He was ready to hit back. His head throbbed.

"What did you say?"

Hoffmayer leaned against the stove. For a moment he thought he could not find the energy to repeat what he had said. He repeated it slowly and coldly, in words simple enough to be grasped by a child. Burckheim moved his head slowly from side to side, and lowered it.

"We must take the business out of his hands," he said at last. "He must resign, and leave it to us to manage."

"You haven't understood how serious it is. Proofs—letters from him, and receipts acknowledging the money he got—are in the hands of the *Commission de triage*. He will not simply be punished. They will deport him and probably confiscate the ironworks and Burckheim itself, the land, the château, this house. . . ."

"Impossible."

"My poor Honoré."

Burckheim's face altered curiously, as though its masses were shifting under the surface. He tried to control himself.

"But our family, René." He wetted his lips. "Since you're not a Burckheim you won't feel it."

Hoffmayer smiled. Now that he had managed to get the truth into his step-brother's head he did not care how much malice came out of it. He knew, too, that Burckheim's anguish was real. He remembered at this moment that when Honoré Burckheim was a young man his cousin had paid his debts, rescued him from a lawsuit that would have had very unpleasant consequences for him, and made him bailiff of the estate to give him an income and something to live for. Obligations of this sort are not forgotten in a year. His own dismay and the exhaustion he had been feeling lightened by as much as he had loaded on to Burckheim's far broader back—a back which, after all, belonged strictly to the family.

"What's to be done?" asked Burckheim.

Before he left the château, while he was still walking up and down the unheated drawing-room, past the eight shuttered windows, Hoffmayer had answered this question. He only did not know how to make the answer less shocking.

"Does he know he has—has been found out? Have you talked to him?"

"Not yet," Hoffmayer said. "I telephoned from Strasbourg to say I was coming to see him. His man said he had a chill, and when I got to the château he was in bed and asleep. I could have wakened him. But you are his cousin, Honoré—you will have to tell him—and advise him what to do."

Burckheim rubbed his chin slowly, like a peasant. He rang the bell and told Matthew to bring in a bottle of wine. He filled his step-brother's glass, watching slyly until Hoffmayer had tasted the wine, then asking him brusquely,

"D'you like it?"

They had quarrelled since they were young men about the

merits not of the ordinary wines of Alsace but of the wine from the Burckheim vines. The finest growths, when Burckheim brought them from his cellar, were dismissed by Hoffmayer as trivial. He drank claret, and the only reason Burckheim had wanted the War to last ten years was that long before the end there would not be a drop of Bordeaux left in Alsace.

"So-so. It's pleasant, but no great shakes."

"You and your miserable *Clos*-what's-her-name. You haven't a palate, you."

His explosion of rage steadied Burckheim. He finished the rest of the bottle, and questioned Hoffmayer shrewdly, trying to find a weak place in the story. Colourless from fatigue, Hoffmayer had to prove to him all over again that there was no hope.

"It would be impossible to get him away into Germany. And even if it were possible, that would not save the estate from confiscation. . . . My dear Honoré, you are the heir. If Richard died suddenly, it's just possible the tribunal would leave you in possession. You are not implicated. . . . This is not pleasant. . . . You will have to speak to him. If he doesn't suggest it himself, you will be forced to suggest it to him. . . . There is very little time."

Burckheim's mouth fell open: his lips trembled and he tried to speak, moving his tongue like a paralytic.

"It would have to happen to-night," Hoffmayer said.

CHAPTER THREE

TALL and well-formed when she married, Caroline Burckheim had in nine years developed the figure of a guardsman. She was certainly handsome. Broad shoulders and a fine bosom made her body appear narrower below the waist than it really was: she had long shapely legs, slender wrists and ankles. To please her husband she had learned French, and she spoke it fluently with the tone and accent of a labourer. It gave a flavour to her talk which her friends enjoyed, and did not ruin her dignity.

In America she was used to hearing that she had the mind of a man. She had even thought it was true. She had not lived in Alsace very long, and among people who felt themselves to be French at the bone, before she realised that her solemn enthusiasm for certain things—social reform, peace, novels of a half a million words—was purely feminine. She felt that to an intelligent man it must be boring or ridiculous. And since she could not change herself she began to be robbed of all her American self-confidence. It was at this point that Hoffmayer fell in love with her. She was immensely grateful to him. Absorbed in her husband, she would soon have become bored or afraid if Hoffmayer had made himself a nuisance. But he was too subtle and too intelligent for this. He allowed her to be fond of him. He encouraged and flattered her. When, in October 1914, he was swept up into prison she realised with dismay that she was to all intents and purposes alone in a foreign country.

She had scarcely seen him since his release. She expected him to come to her this evening. While he was shut up with

her husband she changed her dress and sat listening impatiently for his steps in the corridor separating her sitting-room from the library.

He came in, and she was frightened by his looks. He was slightly-made, his face long and delicate, the face of a responsible civil servant. Ten years younger than Burckheim—he was fifty—he had always looked the elder, and not strong. This evening he looked on the point of death.

“René, sit down—you are ill.”

“Only tired. Every conceivable trouble that can take place in a firm that has been turned upside down by the War took place to-day.”

“Oh, it was business you have been discussing with Honoré?”

“Of course. What else?”

“If things are as bad as that——”

“I am like Matthew, I have visions,” Hoffmayer said, smiling. “If I were you, I should go back to the States. I don’t believe Europe will recover from the War because I don’t believe that Germany will recover. At this moment everything German, everything Germany has touched, seems weak, treacherous, mean. You had far better run away.”

“You forget I’m French now.”

“Only by marriage.”

“What is the matter with you?” Caroline said. “You are trying to hurt me. It’s not like you.”

She noticed that his hands—he had very beautiful hands—were shaking. She supposed he was more in love with her than usual, and this did not please her. A passionate scene would be embarrassing. She wanted to feel sure of him, to be able when he was with her to say what she thought and wear out an old dress without disgusting him, but not to have to remember that he had said he adored her. To which she had replied, “I have always wanted an adoring brother.”

"Do you feel like a Frenchwoman?"

"I feel like Honoré's wife." She hesitated and said frankly, "If we'd had children, the children he expected me to have, I should have got used to him. As things are, I feel inferior. I can't bully him—I should have bullied an American husband—and I haven't the trick of managing him as I see Frenchwomen manage their husbands. Though I should like to see them tackling my Honoré!"

Hoffmayer did not answer. He had no illusions about this woman. He admired her honesty and her moral courage but he knew she had never had an original idea. He forgave her—because he was able to see clean through her—for the selfishness with which she made use of him and his love. In spite of her guardsman's body he thought of her as a child, with the credulity, fears, egoism of a child, and a child's fund of goodness. When he was with her he felt everything a philosophical European feels for America—pity, envy, respect for her eager heart, astonishment at her ignorance. He was amazed that she cared so much for things she knew nothing about, disarmament, modern painting, the social habits of the English. He always hoped—if she let him make love to her—to understand America through the instinctive gestures her body would make when she was not thinking of herself. He really loved this smooth ample body, her awkwardness when she believed she was being seductive, her blue slightly staring eyes, her mass of coarse hair. He would like to pass his wrists through it.

His silence worried Caroline. She was afraid he found her dull. Frowning, she said,

"Did you finish your business with Honoré?"

"Not quite. I left him to think it over—and make up his mind."

"About—?"

"Oh, well." He hesitated. "It's a question of dismissing

someone. A long story. I'll tell you when I have time to finish it."

After a moment Caroline said,

"I was very lonely when you were in prison, René."

"Kind of you," he said, smiling. "But you had your husband. And you are not going to tell me you missed our talks, because so far as I know we haven't a single interest in common."

"Then what do we talk about?" she said simply.

"We don't. We chatter. You tell me that Honoré has been in a bad temper, and ask my advice about your investments. You sit facing me with your feet turned in. It makes you look like nothing on earth, and you would never sit in front of Honoré like that. You are over thirty, married, and to a man who doesn't spare you, and yet you look inexperienced. It is what makes me think there is still room for me to write on you, though in my saner moments I know you're covered with indelible marks, every one of them to do with your husband, your relatives in Boston and Germany, the third-rate novels you read. Not a margin I could use. . . ."

He stopped abruptly. Burckheim's firm heavy footsteps were coming closer along the corridor. He opened the door.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN his step-brother left him, Burckheim marched up and down the room, his hands folded together behind his back, a favourite pose: it kept his huge body upright and balanced the stiff thrust of his legs. His mind was licking over what Hoffmayer had said, without being able to make sense of it. He always avoided making decisions, from a sound instinct—he knew that to alter anything in the course of a life involves more and more changes, and since his whole scheme of life was to live in as many things as possible exactly like his father and grandfather, he deliberately avoided change. Two emotions could drive him into action—anger, or a fear that something was threatening Burckheim. You could not say that his mind was really in his body at this moment: it was crossing and recrossing the frozen earth of the park, snuffing against the roots of trees, nosing the ice of the stream, in a blind search for the truth. Was Burckheim really threatened? Was there no way out?

A knock on the door startled him. He was going to let out a shout of anger when the door opened quickly and a woman slipped into the room, through the smallest possible space.

"It's you, Anne-Marie, is it?" he grumbled. "What d'you want?"

"You said I could speak to you this evening."

"Very well—sit down, but wait a minute."

He seized on the interruption with relief. Each time he saw this woman—at least once every day—he made the same reflection. To think I have a daughter who looks as old as I do! And he would look at her with an unfailing curiosity,

at her thin peasant face, deep-set grey eyes and flat cheekbones, and at the lines on it of fear and patience. Less often he remembered her mother. Because it was disturbed this evening, his mind gaped open suddenly and he fell forty-one years. He was a young man of eighteen. He and his cousin had been working the whole day with the vintagers, carrying the full baskets from the row to the large 55-litre wooden baskets that needed two men to lift and carry them to the carts. The heat, the thickening scent of the grapes, the hard prolonged work, excited him; he saw everything with heightened clearness. The colour of a petticoat, a leaf blazing with light, the warmth of the hard earth under his foot, struck hammer-blows on his senses: he felt a violent happiness, yet he was calm. He had never felt so sure of himself.

There was nothing unusual in the girl he noticed at the end of the day; she was strong, with a high colour and large rounded arms: when he knew he must have her it was because suddenly she gathered into herself the warmth of the day, the scent, the hills, all his happiness in breathing and using his body. He wanted to enjoy in her Alsace, the Vosges, and the Bruche he had bathed in before starting work that morning. He spoke to her and she seemed frightened. He coaxed her to come with him beyond the village in the half-darkness, and pushed her in front of him into the real darkness of the narrow wood: she turned on him like a young calf and yielded only with cries and struggles, clinging to him as she struggled.

Staring at his daughter—she was sitting beside the stove, hands folded awkwardly on her knees—he saw the wide throat of the young peasant and her raised hands. They vanished instantly. No trace of her in her forty-year-old daughter, except in the hands. He sighed noisily.

“What d’you want, what d’you want? You always come at the wrong time. What is it?”

"You said you'd help me to get the boy home."

Anne-Marie Eschelmer was a widow. The German customs official she married had died a year before the War, when their son was just on fifteen. He was a surly fellow, her husband, and while he was alive Burckheim did nothing for them. When Eschelmer died he paid for a year's extra schooling for the boy—who failed to get his remove into a higher class, and ran away. Fetched back, he was apprenticed to a stone-mason: in the middle of the War he was called up. He was still somewhere in Germany. His mother wanted him back and she wanted Burckheim to manage it. She had heard of him only once during the War: then he was working as a clerk at the base camp in Westphalia, and so far as she knew he had never been to the front. She took this as a proof that his cleverness had been recognised: she was desperately anxious to get him out of a defeated Germany.

"Do you think I can trace all the missing young men in German uniform?"

"I don't expect you to. I want you to make enquiries for my Henry. He belongs to Alsace. There are ways of finding him, there must be. Perhaps the Americans can look for him. They say Germany is full of Americans now. They get in on the excuse of taking food in, and buy up everything they see."

She stood up. From her childhood she had been afraid of everything, and almost of everybody, but when it was a question of help for her son she would have attacked Clemenceau himself. As she hurried along the village street to Burckheim's house she had been praying, exactly as she prayed before going to the butcher's that he would give her a decent cut of veal for her money, or before sowing parsley or cutting her nails. It was not necessary. She felt certain, when she opened the door of his room, that Burckheim would save Henry for her, and her only fear had been that he would offer her a glass of wine. It always made him angry to see her

drink, he said she drank like a hen. She was relieved to see an empty bottle on the table and took it as a sign that heaven was on her side, and Henry's.

"All right, get out, get out. I'll do what I can. Don't come to me asking every day where he is. If he's alive I'll get him for you. Do you hear?"

"Yes. You promise?"

"I promise to try to find him."

With a clumsy movement, Anne-Marie Eschelmer knelt on the floor and kissed one of his knees. Then she went out of the room without fumbling at the handle of the door.

Burckheim looked after her, astonished. He looked down at his knees. He was moved, and his emotion gave him a sudden energy and strength. He felt like the young man who had wanted to take all the vineyards of the Vosges into his arms, but now it was Burckheim, its park, farms, stream, vines, château, over which he must throw himself. Without thinking about it any longer—what he called thinking was a far more cunning process of his wits—he marched out of the room towards his wife's room, where he knew he would find Hoffmayer.

When he was half way down the corridor he thought clearly for a moment about his cousin, and stopped dead. He saw himself going into his cousin's room, and felt the shame and grief he would feel then. No, I can't do it, he thought, stumbling. He steadied himself with his hand on the wall, and went forward blindly, closing his mind on the idea of Burckheim.

"Are you ready? We must be off," he said, going into Caroline's room.

"Where are you going?" his wife asked.

"I have a message for Richard."

Caroline did not notice that Hoffmayer was dragging his feet. She was looking with admiration and love at her hus-

band. He had a sternly impassive air. She had no idea what decision he had come to, but she knew from his look that it must be painful; she respected him so much that she felt like crying. Instead she offered him one of her scarves. He laughed at her.

"Don't be a goose, Caroline," he said kindly.

As soon as they had gone she was vexed by a timid knock on the door, and Anne-Marie's voice in the corridor. She did not like her. It had shocked her sense of decency at first to know that her husband had a bastard daughter living in the village, and to be expected to remember her when fruit had been bottled or cheese made in the house. She overcame this feeling by calling up all her American politeness and sense of responsibility for defenceless women. And then, to her shocked surprise, she discovered that Anne-Marie did not want to be protected. This older and dull timid woman rejected her patronage. She took jars of bottled plums, cheese, peaches, with an off-hand civility. As time went on, and Caroline had no children, Anne-Marie pitied her behind her back. To her face she was more friendly, and one day gave her a photograph of Henry in his uniform of a German private soldier. Caroline tried to feel touched. She was far from guessing that the other woman hoped it would occur to her that Henry was the natural person for her to leave her money to—the millions of dollars all Americans make by robbing the rest of the world, and particularly France.

"Come in."

Clumsily, Anne-Marie came in, walking like a woman carrying a burden, perhaps a child. She stood awkwardly in front of the stove, refusing to sit down.

"Excuse me for coming this time of the evening. I came to see him. You know, my son is still in Germany. Heaven only knows what they are doing to him there, knowing he's from Alsace. They'll very likely try to kill him or persuade him to

stop there. As if he would, after the way his father treated him. No, he must come home. And you must help."

"But what can I do?" Caroline said. In spite of herself, her voice was dry.

"He promised me to do all he can," Anne-Marie said quietly. "He has other things to think of, however. You can remind him. You can say, for instance, glancing out of the window, 'That youth crossing the street has a look of Henry Eschelmer.' Or you can say, 'I hear the Germans have agreed to send all the men back to Alsace before Easter.' It's not for me to tell a wife what to say to her husband. You have no son of your own. . . ."

Caroline did not suspect the malice behind the words. She would not have believed that this woman could look down on her.

"If I can do anything to help, I will," she said coldly.

She walked across the room to the door with the other woman. Coming back to the stove and her chair she felt tired. This useless body I carry round with me, she thought. In her heart she was surprised that no child had wanted to make use of it.

CHAPTER FIVE

JACOB DIETRICH had farmed Burckheim land, first with his father, then for himself, since he could stand on his broad feet. Since he was fifty this year, that must have been for forty-nine and a quarter years. He had a good farm, two out of his four sons had been killed, he was rich—and he grumbled. It was his second trade. This evening he had come up to the château to ask who was going to repair the barn the Germans damaged before they left. He had put this question to Honoré Burckheim on November 12th, and been told to hold his tongue. He had come to put it to the head of the family. When he heard that Richard Burckheim was in bed, ill, he said he would sit down and wait until he recovered. The message that came back was from the personal secretary, Jules Reuss. If Mr. Dietrich cared to wait an hour he would see him and hear his complaint.

"How does he know I'm going to complain?" Dietrich grinned.

The maid-servant put her tongue out. "He doesn't imagine you've come to give him a medal."

"He, he hasn't earned one."

Both of them sniggered. Jules Reuss was French. He had been personal secretary at the château for a year before the War. He smuggled himself into France—to fight for the liberation of Alsace, he said. Not long after he came back the whole village knew he had spent his War safely in the Foreign Office. Yet he was healthy enough, and not middle-aged—he was only thirty-two now.

"Too clever by half," Dietrich said.

The girl left him. He waited. He saw Honoré Burckheim and Hoffmayer arrive, bailiff and manager, and go up the wide waxed stairs. Listening carefully, he could hear that after they had halted for a time at a point half way along an upper corridor one went on, walking slowly and steadily, to the farther end. Dietrich had never been up the stairs—he finished his errands to the château in the room at the back of this hall—but he knew the plan of the house as well as he knew his own barns. If a time ever came to strip it he would know where to go for the richest haul. He's gone into the bedroom, he said to himself.

He waited. After an hour or less the two men came downstairs again, and left the château. Honoré Burckheim looked at him in passing as he might have looked at a stone lying in the road, and went on. Ah, he can look like that, Dietrich thought, but he'll make no more noise in his coffin than I shall.

Jules Reuss came out to him, and without inviting him into the room at the back began trying to intimidate him. That was a useless trick. The two men were of a height and much the same build, broad, and below middle height, over-large in the head, so that they seemed top-heavy. Dietrich held his tongue, staring, while the secretary told him to repair the barn and wait for the Government to send him money when they had shaken it out of the pockets of the Boches. At the end of it he shook his head.

"Not I," he said rudely. "You must take me for a fool. It comes of living in France. What I want is for you to advance me the money, and take the Government money when it comes. I daresay they'll pay you faster than if they were paying me. You can afford to wait."

Reuss looked at him with a smooth distaste. He was going to begin again arguing and explaining. He had opened his mouth. A sharp noise came from somewhere on the upper

floor, a noise perfectly familiar and yet dangerous. Someone had let off a rifle or a revolver. The sound rattled along the corridor and exploded over their heads, on the open landing with its balustrade thrust over the hall on wooden ribs. Both men gaped upwards, but it was Dietrich who moved first.

He hurried up the stairs to the landing, turned along the corridor and without hesitating marched straight to the end and pushed open the last door. Jules Reuss was coming behind him.

It was a large room, and had the bed set on a platform at the far side. Half way between this platform and the door a man was lying on the floor, his knees drawn up—he must have knelt to shoot himself—hands out of sight under his body. Dietrich turned him over and saw the revolver and the hole it had made. A dry hiccoughing sound came from Richard Burckheim's throat.

"Help me," Reuss said, stooping.

Between them they lifted the heavy man and carried him across the room. He was certainly alive when they started and as certainly dead when they laid him down. Dietrich had blood on his hands, and he rubbed them reflectively on his stockings after looking down at the quilt. They'll wash, he thought. He noticed that the secretary was pale. He's lucky if this is the first dead chap he's seen, he thought: it must have been comfortable in his room the last four years.

A servant opened the door, a woman. There were others behind her, in the corridor. Reuss waved them back.

"You'll wait here," he said to Dietrich. "I must telephone."

He went out, shutting the door behind him. His voice, rising over the voices of the women, came back into the room. Dietrich listened. As soon as he thought he was safe he began looking about the bedroom with a greedy curiosity.

He pressed his thumb against the walls. The upper panels had been painted green and gold, and he scratched the paint

to test the thickness. He knelt down and licked the waxed floor, so that he could say afterwards it was as smooth as a smooth stone. He opened the doors of cupboards and thrust his arm among clothes hanging there and tried to lift the top of a great carved and painted chest, but it was locked. As he crossed and re-crossed the wide room he kept pausing to listen. There was no sound and he went over to the bed to look down at the man there. What the devil you did it for I don't know, he thought. *I* wouldn't have done it, but then, thank God, I have enough to do without making a show of myself; I don't look for trouble; all I've ever had of it you and your sort brought on me, you with your wars and the rest of it—and you can't even enjoy yourself.

There was a dish of apples on the night table. He took one up and set his few black teeth in it. He had swallowed a mouthful when he heard steps coming along the corridor. He pushed the apple into his pocket.

Honoré Burckheim came in. He walked over to the bed and stood looking down at his cousin. His face was severe and calm, but tears rolled down his cheeks and fell on the bed. Oh, he can feel, Dietrich thought. But will he mend my barn?

At nine o'clock the next morning Hoffmayer went into his step-brother's bedroom. Burckheim was still sleeping. In sleep his face was untroubled and young. He had dropped off, exhausted, as soon as his head touched the pillow and not moved since: one hand was doubled under his chin.

Hoffmayer roused him.

"Come, wake up, Honoré. Wake up. I have something to say to you."

Burckheim moved his head slightly, and opened one clear blue eye. His great body under the clothes was inert, not a tremor of life in it.

"What's the matter? Oh, it's you, René. I thought I'd settled everything. What do you want?"

"It's nine o'clock."

"It was after four when I got into bed."

Hoffmayer looked at him with exasperated pity.

"I've told them to fetch you your coffee," he said. "You haven't settled anything yet. We have very little time—what I have to say to you can't wait."

October—November 1929

CHAPTER SIX

ELEVEN years after the Armistice a distant cousin of Burckheim's arrived in Strasbourg. He came from Belfort, from the French side of the family. Ernest Siguenau had an easy charming manner, which allowed him to talk about himself to strangers and social inferiors without losing dignity. In this way he soon made it known in the hotel that he was a Burckheim, and learned a good deal about his cousin—whom he had not seen yet. Moreover, the ordinary civility of the hotel staff warmed into respect the moment they knew who he was. He was surprised and charmed. The manager of the hotel, who had not been in the hall when he arrived, came upstairs to tell him that a suite with a private sitting-room was vacant—naturally at the same price as the bedroom and dressing-room he had engaged—and led the Siguenaus to it, followed by the chambermaid and valet carrying the luggage. He fussed with the shutters, letting in the rich October sun.

"You will be comfortable here, I think."

"It is delightful," Siguenau said.

"Had I been informed of your arrival at once, you would not have been taken—it was a mistake—to the third floor. And now—it is a little late—and Madame is fatigued by the journey—I will order dinner to be sent to you in your room."

"Thanks. You are very kind."

"Not in the least."

He went away, and returned towards the end of the meal to ask whether they had been satisfied. Siguenau was sitting alone—his wife had taken their daughter away to put her to bed—and he invited the manager to drink a glass of the

Riquewihr muscat. As he sat down, the manager unfolded the newspaper he was carrying and handed it to Siguenau.

"No doubt you have seen this?"

"No," Siguenau said. He took it.

It was the day's issue of the *Dernières Nouvelles*. A photograph of Honoré Burckheim—faithful up to the wart on the right eyebrow, the lines masking the heavy nose, lips pressed under the Hindenburg moustache, eyes, the suspicious eyes of a peasant, on watch between two pouches of flesh—appeared side by side with a leading article. Siguenau glanced through it. He learned that ten years ago, in 1919, his cousin had given to the French Government the entire war-profits of his iron-works. The gift had been made secretly. Now, to-day, thanks to the indiscretion of a clerk, the secret was out. Known already as a great Alsatian, Burckheim was revealed as also a noble Frenchman, a patriot of the rarest sort, one who would give away even his money to the State. Interviewed by a special correspondent of the newspaper, he said simply, "I had no wish to put into my pockets, or into the pockets of my heirs, money earned by selling iron to Germany."

"Let us hope," the manager said, "that the gentlemen, *Frenchmen*, who used to send bauxite and cyanamide through Switzerland during the War, have made a note of it. After all, Alsace, and the Burckheim ironworks, were forced to help Germany during the War. Those others did it freely, without shame. I have often wondered whether there are any more disgusting animals in the world."

"My cousin must have given away a large fortune," Siguenau said.

"The figure is not stated."

"It can't have been small."

"And yet—excuse me—the other thing he did at the end of the War was perhaps finer. It is not generally known what he did. Possibly it is not known even to all his relatives. You

yourself may not know. It happens that—in December 1918—I was in a special position to judge Mr. Burckheim's character. He is a very great man. You can believe me."

"I am sure of it. Let me fill your glass, please."

"Thank you."

"You were saying—?"

An extraordinary expression came on the manager's face. It made Siguenau think of a small boy looking at the half-dissolved bull's-eye he has taken out of his mouth. When the man opened his mouth to speak he saw the tongue held ready.

"I was a member, in fact I was the chairman, of the *Commission de triage* before which your cousin appeared one day in December 1918. He was forced to appear—not to answer for anything he had done himself—but because the man who should have appeared, his cousin, had killed himself. As you know. . . . But—forgive me—you must have been very young—"

"I was still in the army," Siguenau smiled. "I was twenty-four. I heard, later, of the suicide."

"It was a question of treachery," the manager said gently. "If he hadn't killed himself he would have been deported. That is quite certain. It's not so certain what would have happened to his property. In fact your cousin, when he was before us, offered—he was the heir—to hand over the iron-works in restitution. He took full responsibility for his cousin's crime. He spoke perfectly calmly. He stood before us like a statue, a rock. 'I take the responsibility on myself,' he said. 'Judge me.' " The manager lifted his hand. "Thank you—but I am drinking too much. . . . As one man, the members of the Commission stood up. We were silent for a moment, out of respect, and then I—as I told you, I was the chairman—voiced the emotions of each of us. I thanked him for his services to us, to Strasbourg, to Alsace. The whole tragic affair, I said, was ended by his cousin's death, we knew

—the documents were all in our hands—that he was absolutely innocent, and we knew that in his hands the honour of Alsace was as safe as with the army. And so it ended. For the others. For me there was a further revelation. I called on him later—it was a question of clearing up a detail—and heard from his own mouth that he had been forced to tell his cousin—he was his friend, too—that he must kill himself. . . . When he told me this I felt—you can believe I am not easily impressed—in my profession one learns too much—I felt love and reverence. To have had the courage to do that. It was superb. I have never forgotten. There are many moments when I am tempted to feel contempt for human beings. At such moments it is only necessary for me to recall your cousin's face when he was telling me this, or to see him pass in the street, and I become ashamed, I am exalted. There is no one I respect as I respect him. No one."

"I didn't know the whole story," Siguenau said.

He spoke with an air of deeper interest than he felt. Through the scarcely opened door he could see his wife standing in the corridor of the suite, between their bedroom and the little girl's. She was looking at him, and he knew she wished he would get rid of the fellow.

"Many know part of it. The common thing for a mother to tell her son is, 'Try to behave like a Burckheim.' It is very moving. I am moved by it."

Siguenau smiled in his most charming way as he stood up. So that the manager should not feel he had been dismissed he walked with him to the door of the room and stood there talking, his hand just touching the man's arm.

"I was in London last year," he said. "I admired the decorative ironwork on the interior of a lift in one of the large shops in Oxford Street—you know London, no doubt?"

"A little. Oxford Street I know."

"It is hideously ugly. . . . This ironwork I was speaking of came from the Burckheim ironworks. So you see that even in England—"

"Well, why not? All the same, you surprise me. I thought they were too jealous. The English are shockingly greedy."

"Not all of them," Siguenau smiled. "My wife is English."

He laughed in a warm friendly way at the manager, closed the door, and hurried across the room to the other door. His wife was just coming into the room and he put his arm round her, smiling a little still.

"I thought he was never going," she said. "Fanny wants you. She won't sleep until you say goodnight."

They went together into the little girl's bedroom. She was lying as straight as possible in the bed, her arms crossed. She was small for her eight years, slender, with slender bones. Her features were clear and delicate, the fine dark arch of the eyebrows drawn over brilliant grey eyes. To look at her was to realise the delicacy of Siguenau's own charm, purely male as it was. Each of his features reappeared in her, in little, unchanged and yet completely different—as though in re-drawing him as his own daughter nature had worked through a hundred copies, each more feminine than the last. The same smile, faithfully reflected from the man's face on to the little girl's, became soft and lively, with a touch of mockery.

"You must go to sleep," Siguenau said.

"I don't like this room," Fanny said, smiling.

"Why not? It's a nice room."

"It's not my room."

"It's yours until I get you another, a better one."

"Will you get it soon?"

"As quickly as I can. Now go to sleep."

He kissed her lightly, and went out. His wife bent over

the little girl, who threw her arms round her while looking over her shoulder at the door, towards her father.

Siguenau was walking about the sitting-room with his light step. He looked smilingly at his wife when she came in. She was tired. He made her lie down on the couch and stood behind her, stroking her forehead with his long fingers. As the feeling of strain left her she forgot, reluctantly, that she ought to be questioning him about their position and she surrendered to the ease of lying here, in a room they could not pay for.

"Feeling better?" Siguenau asked. He stood away from her, to look at her with a warm gay kindness.

"Yes."

"Not worried?"

She did not answer. During the ten years of their marriage she had learned that if she wanted to hear only the truth from her husband she must not give him too restless intelligence anything to play with. It was fatal to begin an argument. In a minute he had led her so far from the starting-point that she had to knock down a dozen walls to get back, and then he reproached her for her roughness.

"You look like a child," Siguenau said.

"I'm thirty-two."

"Poor child."

He began to walk up and down again. She watched him. At last he seated himself beside her on the edge of the couch and looked down with his quick smile, amused and friendly.

"You've forgiven me, haven't you? I know I ought to have told you a year ago that we should have no money if I didn't manage to persuade Maud'huy to put his into the business. But I felt sure I could persuade him. At least we have no debts. And you haven't had to sell your ear-rings."

"They wouldn't keep us here for a week."

"That's true, but before the end of the week I shall have

seen old Burckheim and got some sort of a job out of him. The real question is now, shall I call on him—I've never seen him in my life—or go to Hoffmayer first, whom I did know, years ago. Twenty years."

"I should see Hoffmayer."

"Why?"

Siguenau waited for the answer to his question. Not getting one, he became bored and began stroking his wife's arm. His fingers closed round the bone at her elbow, so flexible he could imagine he was moving it in its socket. He leaned over her, and his knees gripped hers. He began repeating her name, in a tone that from mocking and gentle became anxious.

"Blanche."

In the morning he called on Hoffmayer. He remembered him, from a visit Hoffmayer made to his parents in Belfort, as a quick-witted elegant young man. At that time Hoffmayer must have been forty, but he had looked young, or rather—Siguenau corrected his memory—ageless, his face little lined and his movements sudden and alert. The man who looked up as Siguenau came into his room had the coolness and elegance of a bone. His grey English suit hung on his body. When he smiled his face broke up into as many lines as there were marks of grief, of effort, on the tissue of his brain. His smile was none the less gay, a hand put up to shield his face.

"My dear boy, I should have recognised you across a street. When was it I saw you in Belfort? You've broadened. You've grown a moustache. I don't see any other changes."

"You stayed with us in 1909. I was fifteen."

"And since then——"

"You have been in prison, like others, and I"—Siguenau laughed—"also like others, amused myself by keeping alive for four years, I married—an English girl, by the way—I have a daughter. You will like her, she's mischievous."

There was a window behind Hoffmayer's desk. Through a gap between two buildings Siguenau could see the canal, gleaming, a coin dropped below a column of blue sky. When the works were built, in 1850, a double row of chestnuts was left standing between the manager's office and the water: in the course of time all but one of the trees disappeared; that one sprang immediately below the window, a yellow fountain, as startling in the noise and dust of the works as a crucifix would have been, and as unnoticed, except by Hoffmayer himself. He drew his visitor's attention to it.

"When I was in prison I heard it was going to be cut down, to satisfy the German under-manager—a disciplined old boy who knew that trees are out of place in an ironworks. He was a cousin of Bodo Ebhardt, the architect. It was Ebhardt who destroyed the castle of Haut-Koenigsbourg—for the second time in its history. The Swedish army destroyed it first, in 1633. The next assault—when the Kaiser ordered it to be rebuilt—was fatal. . . . My tree had better luck. The week it was to be cut down was the week of the Armistice, and I was released."

Siguenau had been studying him while he talked. He noticed that Hoffmayer had beautiful hands; they reminded him that he had as well a reputation as a scholar. He remembered a line of Vergil from his schooldays: it was fortunately about trees; he repeated it with an air of spontaneity.

"What are you going to do in Strasbourg?" asked Hoffmayer.

"Look for work," Siguenau said instantly.

He felt that the older man liked him, that he was easily

fatigued, and he decided to speak at once, without waiting to prepare the ground. Besides, he preferred risks.

Hoffmayer began questioning him. The questions were such as would have occurred to a Civil Service examiner, not to a business man. Thus he asked in what regiment Siguenau had been, and learned that the young man had spent three out of his four years in the Press department of G.H.Q.

"But you never had anything to do with journalism or propaganda before the War?"

"No, of course not," Siguenau laughed. "My father had kept me at home; he needed help with the estate. It was mortgaged, and when he died in 1920 there was nothing to pay his debts. I sold everything. Afterwards I went into business in Belfort, as a timber merchant. It was——"

"Yes, yes," Hoffmayer interrupted. He had made up his mind that Siguenau was no good at business, but he liked him. If I had had a son, he thought, he would have been the same age and able to quote at the right moment a Latin poet. A feeling of warmth and happiness possessed him.

"You could manage an estate," he said firmly.

"I think I should be able to," Siguenau said.

"I am certain. But you must let me see what I can do. You are a Burckheim, a second cousin"—he smiled—"not, as my step-brother is fond of calling me, a hanger-on of the family. Since he inherited Burckheim he has been his own bailiff—chiefly, I think, because he wouldn't trust it to anyone outside the family. You have a chance, a fair one. But it will take us a week or two, and in the meantime you must be short of money. Don't worry—I can arrange that, too."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE Burckheim house in Strasbourg, a modest Renaissance dwelling-house, close to the University, was cut off from the street by a courtyard. It would otherwise have been annoyed by tourists coming to gape at the charming double staircase leading to the main door under its clock tower, the open balconies, the magnificent panelled doors of the cellars below the staircase. Behind the house was a small lawn, and along one side of it a cloister led to the orangery in which Hoffmayer wrote. As the manager of the ironworks he lived in a wing of the house. The rest of the house was rarely occupied, Burckheim preferring the château and the village. Less rarely his wife stayed a week or a night in her rooms facing the courtyard and its fountain.

On these occasions she and Hoffmayer dined in uncomfortable state under the chandeliers of Bohemian glass brought by an earlier Burckheim from Prague. They hurried afterwards to the orangery, where Caroline could put her feet up and smoke a cigar. It amused Hoffmayer to watch her, to discover lines deepening under her chin and round her eyes, and to remember that he had suffered from loving her. He spoke about it this evening.

"I was as stupid as a young man. One night I hung about under the window of your room in the dower-house and went moment by moment through a scene with you. Ridiculous. Why would you never let me have you? You would have enjoyed it."

"I should not. I didn't love you."

"Well, it's too late now," Hoffmayer said, smiling. "You

are how old—forty?—you are attractive, but I am past caring. I'm very fond of you, but it no longer matters to me if I don't see you very often."

"Thank you. What do you do in the evening, now that you don't hang about under windows?"

Hoffmayer laughed. "I really am fond of you. . . . I'll show you what I'm writing now—a history of the Burckheims. No doubt it's because, as Honoré says, I have no right to it, that I can live very comfortably in this family's past. It's a remarkable past. A Matthew Burckheim fought at the battle of Hausbergen, in 1262, against the bishop. Two and a half centuries later his great-great-grandson was killed in the choir of the Cathedral, defending it against the Lutherans. I'm hoping to find real traces of a Merovingian Burckheim—I'm certain we had nothing to do with the Romans unless we came in as barbarians from the other side of the Rhine. Or we may have been here first, before the legionaries took possession of what was already a flourishing town. The road along the Rhine and the road coming down from the Vosges crossed here, and that made it a market-place for fishermen, metal-workers, potters, all the other craftsmen who knew more about civilisation than any Roman soldier was able to tell them. I don't want to write a formal history of the family, I want to show you a Burckheim standing here since the beginning of history, his glance turned to the Rhine and the Vosges, French of the oldest France and yet something more, something that became Alsace and might become Europe. It is a tree that sends roots down on both sides of a frontier but puts out leaves in its own air. This Burckheim can speak German but thinks in French. He dreams in French, he usually takes a French wife, so that his child will feel French hands in its cradle and learn the French words for every natural instinct before he learns to speak German to musicians, commercial travellers, and botanists."

"Doesn't he learn English?" asked Caroline.

"Merciful heavens, why should he?"

Caroline knocked the ash off her cigar with a gesture copied from her uncle, the senator from Oregon. As she grew older—she was forty-two—she dropped the few French gestures and intonations she had carefully and painfully learned when she married. The one thing she kept was her appalling accent, so exactly that of an old washerwoman that no one would believe she had learned it.

"Apart from all this, René"—she waved her cigar at the books and manuscripts hiding every wall—"what are you doing at the works? I have an idea things are not going too well. Am I right?"

"Quite right. But it's not serious, or not yet. It's only that we have specialised—except in war time—in wrought ironwork of the finest quality. We sold to England, to America, and what's more to be proud of, to people in Nancy, where they know what good ironwork is. It's not so easy now to sell perfect things. If we are ever to make money again we ought to reorganise the works and try to snatch a cheap market. It could be done. But it would need money, free capital, and that's just what we haven't got. Since your husband inherited he has spent tens of thousands on the land and the vines. Why on the vines, I ask you? If he could fetch in a whole Burgundian vineyard instead of only truckloads of the soil, it wouldn't change the quality of the wine by a single drop in a cellar-full. Not to speak of the money he has wasted in other ways, on—forgive me, Caroline, I don't know whether you care, you're an American, after all—on various women, on new bathrooms in the château——"

"The bathrooms were my fault," Caroline said. "As for the vines, it's what really he lives for. There's no need to feel surprised that he doesn't get any older. All the time, it must be months out of every year, that he spends on them, is so

much time spent going *back*. I've seen him go out—to overlook the pruning or clearing the roots—looking what he is, an old man, and come in not a day over thirty. He forgets everything else when he's out there—”

“I know it,” Hoffmayer said drily. “I send him reports home to read, figures—proving that we can't hold out another year at this rate—and I find them a week later, face downwards on his table, used for making notes about the days for racking the new wine—as if it was worth all that trouble when it's ready to drink.”

“And for the women,” Caroline said, “I'm more worried that they've been cut down to one, a woman he keeps in Sélestat and visits once every two weeks, than I was when he kept two or three at the same time. He”—she stopped, and went on reluctantly—“it would be silly to pretend I like it, but the truth is, René, I'm far more jealous of his first wife. If it weren't for her I should at any rate have been the only woman he was fond of. He isn't fond of this other creature, she's simply part of his regular life.”

Hoffmayer noticed that she was trembling.

“Let's get back to the important thing,” he said. “We ought to get money into the firm. We could have it if we liked—from Düsseldorf. One of our cousins in Cologne married into the Rhine Steel Works, which is part of the German Steel Trust—and still has fingers on this side of the frontier, and wouldn't object to putting one of them into Burckheim's. You look disgusted. Why? The roots of trees are not the only things that reach across frontiers. So do the underground tunnels of mines. So do profits. During the War, French munition works made money for German shareholders, and vice versa, and French airmen were forbidden to drop bombs on mines and ironworks seized by the German troops in August, 1914. Certain imbeciles in the French army and even in the Government began asking questions. A

special plan was drawn up for bombing the region—to avoid hitting, even by an unfortunate accident, the furnaces from which the German munition factories drew their steel. The lieutenant put in charge of the squadron was an employee in civil life of the Comité des Forges. It's true that this arrangement lengthened the War by at least a year, if not two, but to shorten it would have cut down profits on both sides—not to speak of the damage done to property, the property of really important men, Frenchmen and Germans. I heard the truth about it after the War from one of Thyssen's colleagues who came here to arrange a transfer of German money and machinery to a French arms factory. It was his way of getting round the peace treaty, which forbade Germany to make arms. . . .”

“It's immoral,” Caroline said. She struck her hands together—as though she had the Comité des Forges president's ears between them.

“When a man is being disembowelled he cares wonderfully little who supplied the steel.”

“All the same, I'm glad Honoré is refusing to take German money.”

“What he is really refusing,” Hoffmayer said, smiling, “is to allow a German to interfere in his business.”

“That's quite right, too. Really, René, if I didn't know you, I—”

She broke off, frowning severely. But there was no one to tell her that when she frowned she looked more and more like her mother, the Boston shipowner's daughter.

“What were you going to say?”

Caroline shook her head, not willing to put into words her feeling that Burckheim, in spite of his greed, his lusts, his slow mind, was a great man, noble and honest, and her friend René's subtle intellect the vanity of a smaller man.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CAROLINE saw from a landing window the Mayor walking across the courtyard of the château with as much energy as he put into walking round his farm. A few minutes later she heard him being shown into the library. She waited a quarter of an hour. Then, judging that her husband would have reached just the degree of irritation that made him thankful to be interrupted, she went in. Burckheim had the inevitable Vergil under his hand. He was very red in the face, and it was certain that in another minute he would open the book with the gesture which had broken the spines of six copies, and order the Mayor to get out and leave him to his studies.

"How do you do?" Caroline asked in her countrywoman's rough voice.

The Mayor shook his head. "I came on behalf of the Council," he said loudly. "It is absurd that——"

"What is absurd," Burckheim interrupted, "is that you come here time and time again pestering me, making a damned nuisance of yourself, to do something you know I won't do in any circumstances. Don't you realise, you fool, that there's only one thing worse than being a departmental councillor and having a lot of damned fools and bores in the house every New Year, and that's to let oneself become a Senator. I detest Paris and I detest politics. I have plenty to do here without dipping in that dish. What do you take me for?"

"You have a duty to Alsace, to Burckheim——"

"Exactly," growled Burckheim.

He brought his hand down on the book as though it were

the trunk of an oak. There was a sharp crack as for the seventh time Vergil was martyred. With an air of stupefied rage Burckheim waved both arms.

"Go, get out."

The Mayor went.

"You were very severe with him."

"What, a fellow who makes a habit of attacking the Church!"

"But, my dear Honoré, I've heard you ridicule the priests, you call them Boches in petticoats, you never go near a church, you——"

"I can't see what that has to do with it. That fellow, that Radical, wants to pull down the Church in Alsace as it's been pulled down in France. He wants to turn things upside down. He's such a fool he doesn't see you can't pull down half a house. A society is far stronger when it can rely on priests and policemen. I may be an atheist but I know what a Church is good for. In any case, I won't go to Paris. You can't get any decent food there."

Perhaps he felt some remorse for having murdered a book—certainly he felt none about the Mayor—and he took Caroline to walk in the park, although this was the hour, after a heavy lunch, when he insisted most firmly on his right to shut himself in the library. It was a warm afternoon. They crossed the park as far as the stream, and Burckheim stopped to look at it.

"So long as I have this," he said, "you can have the Rhine, for all I care. Or you could if it weren't infested with Germans. Foch was right—we ought to have had it. Yes, Foch was right. If we hadn't hoped for a sense of responsibility to show itself in America—excuse me, Caroline, but I can't imagine what there is to be said for your countrymen that they haven't said too many times for themselves—we should have kept the Rhine. There's nothing handsome about it—

less than ever since Wagner went and stocked it with yelling women, but it makes a frontier. Well—next time.”

“Why should there be a next time?”

“There’ll be a next time until Germany has been civilised. I remember after Strasbourg was taken in 1870, my father called me into his room, with my step-mother and René: he locked the door, and said, ‘This war is as good as over, and France has lost. Well, we shall have to live here, we can’t go away and starve. I order you to forget, except in this room, that you used to live in a civilised society. You mustn’t speak of it—and you must never think of it. We have gone back a couple of hundred years. More—the Germans have been losing ground rapidly since 1832. And the only way to live in a poorer way is to pretend you are accustomed to it. This room is France. But remember—once you step outside it you are in Berlin or Chicago or a pork butcher’s, I don’t care what you call it so long as you keep a still tongue in your heads.’ He was right. It’s damned inconvenient having the Germans in the middle of Europe. Like all savages, they tell lies and then believe them. We shall have them here again.”

“Why since 1832?” Caroline asked. She was puzzled.

“It was the year Goethe died,” her husband said mildly. “I forgot you were brought up in America. It is unbelievable what the Americans don’t know.”

Caroline forced herself to smile. Burckheim patted her arm; he was in a good humour again.

“When we were boys, René and I used to lie on our stomachs, exactly under this bush, trying to catch trout in our hands.”

Caroline believed she had found the chance she had been waiting for.

“Why won’t you let me ask René to stay here for a few weeks? Strasbourg is still hot and dusty. He looks ill.”

Burckheim turned his back not only on the stream but on

two schoolboys dabbling their hands in the clear water. A look almost of hatred crossed his face.

"I don't want him here," he said coldly. A sudden anger seized him and he struck at the bush with his cane so that a branch snapped off and floated out of sight with his impulse of liking for his step-brother. "He doesn't know a decent wine when it's offered to him. It's simply unbearable. I won't have him in the house again."

Caroline did not answer. She had caught a glimpse, under his ridiculous fury, of something else, a dislike of which this nonsense about René's taste in wines was a reflection. She couldn't understand it. He had never been fond of René, but this dislike—she had noticed it first after Richard Burckheim's funeral, when he struck René's name from the list of mourners before it was sent to the newspapers—was very different from his familiar hot temper. There was something cold and sly in it.

Burckheim turned back to the house. He had seen his secretary in the window of the library and he remembered that Reuss had been preparing a report on the financial position of the firm. He would have let him wait, but—the delicate October sunlight had been spoiled for him by Hoffmayer's shadow—he hurried indoors as though he meant to act on the report, instantly. He had no intention of doing anything of the sort.

The copy of Vergil with its broken spine had vanished from the table. You could trust Reuss. Burckheim sat down, covered his eyes with his hand, and dozed for half an hour while Reuss read aloud from the documents in his hand.

"Good. You are a reliable fellow," Burckheim said.

"Is there anything——"

"My dear fellow," Burckheim interrupted warmly. "You've covered the whole ground. Admirable. Now leave the papers with me. I'll go over it at leisure and let you have my views."

Reuss handed his report across the table. He clasped his hands in front of him and waited, unsmiling, reserved. He had very little hope that Burckheim would look over the pages and ask a question or two before dismissing him. It would take a long time, months, and another couple of reports at least before Burckheim was sufficiently roused to show interest. He knew Burckheim trusted him. If he put wilfully false statements in the reports, the old man would accept them at once. That was not the trouble. The difficulty was to persuade Burckheim that he must act. There was nothing Burckheim distrusted so much as an argument for drastic action. When a friend told him he was going to be operated on to save him from dying, he said, "Don't risk it, my dear chap. We all die in time, but an operation is certain to be fatal." For months now Reuss had been crawling forward, an inch at a time, trying to accustom Burckheim to the sight of something moving.

"Now that Tardieu is going to be Premier—" he began.

"That man's vanity disgusts me," Burckheim exclaimed. "However—if he does his job."

"And that is—?"

"So long as he defends the honour of the franc."

Like all wealthy Frenchmen, Burckheim looked upon the franc as a virgin perpetually in danger of being violated by immoral French socialists and foreigners. He became pale with anger when he thought of what an American might do to this pure creature.

He sent Reuss away. As the door closed he reached behind him in the shelf for a book. It turned out to be a volume of Rousseau. He stared obstinately at the cover for a moment, not certain whether the author were fit to be left anywhere with a franc, then slowly sinking his head on his arm went sound asleep.

CHAPTER NINE

"I BELIEVE," Hoffmayer said, "I've succeeded. I think that when you see Burckheim this afternoon he will offer you a job as bailiff to the estate. It has taken longer than I expected. I had to talk to him about you as a member of the family, then very gently put into his mind that I was afraid he would offer you a job, and then to suggest the very job. If I'd recommended you openly he would have turned you down. The suspicion that I might be jealous of you pleases him no end. Even if you were unsuitable he would want to employ you. And since you will make an excellent bailiff. . . ."

"You've been amazingly kind."

Siguenau really was amazed. He had not been able to imagine a motive for the older man's kindness to him. Hoffmayer had lent him money—and in such a way that it would have been boorish to refuse it. He talked as though Siguenau had a right to expect to be found a job, as though he were a son for whom naturally his father would pull all the strings within reach.

"Why," Siguenau said to his wife, "is he doing it?"

"Obviously because he likes you."

This answer did not satisfy Siguenau. He was a long way from guessing that he had appealed to Hoffmayer at the moment when, with some anguish, Hoffmayer had realised that no one living had any need of him. Caroline did not want him; she had the whole of her American ancestry to draw on when she was in need of advice. Who am I, thought Hoffmayer, to compete with a German-born senator from the Middle West or a Daughter or Niece of the Revolution? He

could not persuade himself that even the unknown German writers he had been working on for thirty years needed his help any longer, now that letters to German colleagues were left unanswered or were returned with a curt note that some Munich or Berlin professor was busy on the texts. Siguenau had walked into the place deserted by the deepest, the only affections of his life. It was easy for Hoffmayer to believe he had found a son—all the easier because he had never in his life expected gratitude or attentions.

"I'd better tell you a little more about Burckheim. In the first place, he cultivates the whole of the estate, except one farm which is let to a farmer named Dietrich. It costs a pretty penny, since he has to pay very high wages to keep the younger men on the land. In fact he is competing with his own ironworks for labour. He spends another fortune on his vines. Not that he sells a cask of the wine. He drinks it himself, and gives it away to a long list of people he doesn't respect, the Prefect, the Sub-Prefect, the Clerk to the Council, the magistrates, the Mayor. He even sends a year's supply to me, because he knows I can't drink it. And then he breeds horses, farm-horses, stallions."

"You mean I ought to talk to him about his wine," Siguenau said, smiling. "What is there so extraordinary about it?"

"Nothing. I've made a list for you, of the references to Alsatian vines. Tisserand in 1866 writes, 'Since the time of Probus vines have covered all the foothills of the Vosges, and the image of Bacchus was carried joyfully past the places where, three hundred years earlier, the Druids made a mystery of cutting the sacred mistletoe from oaks as wrinkled as the earth itself.' A monk of St. Gall praises it in the ninth century. Grandidier, in his History of Strasbourg, says that the Frisians, the first people to navigate the Rhine, carried cargoes of Alsatian wines to Cologne and sent them over

northern Europe. In the sixteenth century Hans Sachs writes about it that it lifted up the hearts of our Lord and his fore-runner St. John the Baptist. In the same century Jean de Munteseid, Bishop of Strasbourg, served it at a feast lasting four days: at the end of the feast only the Bishop could stand up, all the others were under the table."

"Is that all?"

"Heavens, no! If any famous poet or historian is missing from the list it's only because no one up to now has had time to trace what he wrote about Alsace and its vines. And don't forget to speak of the efforts we made before 1918, so that our vines remained all that time French at heart."

Siguenau laughed. He was full of gratitude to Hoffmayer, and still anxious to know what he would have to pay for this unexpected kindness.

"I shan't forget what you've done," he said warmly.

Hoffmayer reddened with pleasure, and shook his hand.

Siguenau's wife was waiting for him at the hotel. She was the only person he trusted. He had no need to be clever with her since she was as direct and practical as a child and disliked cleverness. Soon after their marriage he had discovered to his astonishment that she did not care whether he made any money at all; all she wanted of him was the same sum of money, even if it were only a little, handed over every month, "so that I know where I am." But she never saved anything. If he gave her more she spent it, and when they moved house she left behind every chipped or cracked object, in order, she said, to start new. He began to think that this coming together of carelessness, modesty, extravagance, was purely English.

"If Burckheim doesn't offer me a job, what can we do?" he asked her.

"I shall send Fanny to England, to my sister."

"That won't feed us."

"I shall give English lessons."

"You're an idiot," Siguenau said. "I love you, but you are a fool."

"Very likely you'll get the job," his wife said calmly. "And remember we shall have to live in the village, and ask whether any house is empty. I want a garden for Fanny."

Burckheim is thirty miles from Strasbourg, in the upper valley of the Bruche. It is a handsome village, with few houses younger than the seventeenth century, and all, even those in which a dozen families look out on to the narrow courtyard with its well, in sound order. A fine greyish-green moss covers the walls, the stones of the courtyards, the ruined watch-towers of the ramparts. The Bruche runs some distance below the village, and a small stream, the one that flows through the grounds of the château, runs along the street, for the benefit of the geese. The geraniums on the balconies of the houses are for the benefit of the inhabitants. During the War a woman tried to keep rabbits on her balcony but opinion in the village forced her to go back to geraniums. At the end of every street you meet a slope of the hills, and the paths leading that way are neither more nor less rough than they were when a Roman company commander lived here for a month, recovering from a fever he got in Strasbourg.

Siguenau had come out on the light railway. He was early for his appointment with Burckheim and he walked through the park slowly. The château surprised him. In full sunlight its outer staircase and galleries, and green roof, were charming, and more magnificent than he expected. He felt vexed that only an old man and his American wife lived here. If it were my house, he thought, I should know how to live in it. He remembered at the same moment that Burckheim had no children, and a familiar excitement seized him.

Burckheim talked to him very kindly. He seemed sleepy—it was the middle of the afternoon—but Siguenau had the impression that he was being weighed in two heavy paws. He

felt sure of himself from the first. During the War he had found it easy to satisfy generals and elderly politicians by an air of lively deference, which made them feel that although he respected them they were gay dogs. He made them feel young and reminded them at the same time of their triumphs and the trust humble people had in them. No wonder every effort to shift him from his comfortable room had failed.

"I suppose you'd rather see the park than climb up to look at the vines?" Burckheim said.

"Naturally, I'd rather see the vines, but——"

"Ha, that's the spirit," Burckheim said boisterously. A smile of real amiability softened his face. "Come along." He took a coarse straw hat from the floor, his stick, and pushed the young man in front of him out of the room. "*Apertos amat colles Bacchus*, don't you know. Vergil, my boy, Vergil. Nothing like the side of a hill for vines. I'll give you all the Medoc country for one slope of the Vosges. My step-brother, poor skinny devil, thinks differently. Well, I can't help his troubles. I'll show you the stables first."

A magnificent row of stables backed on to a yard and fronted a paddock. The heavy oak carts used during the grape harvest were housed down the side of the yard.

"Do you know how many men I employ all the year round? You'll believe I'm mad when I tell you. But I've stopped the rot in this district. Why, young men have come back here from the towns to ask for work."

They crossed the paddock to reach the first terraces of the vine, nearest the château, on a slope facing south-east. The slopes rose and fell gently, coming round like a sail so that the farthest faced east. Burckheim believed that light has more to do than warmth with ripening the grapes.

"I had an excellent year"—he spoke as though his had been different from that enjoyed by all the other inhabitants of

Burckheim—"a gentle moist spring, dryness day and evening in June, a warm July, one or two mild storms during August, an early vintage."

He had seemed a heavy old man as they crossed the paddock. Now he walked with a light springy step. It reminded Siguenau of some old generals who appear imbecile and almost dead until they come on the parade ground, then a life-like energy starts in them, they even seem to think.

Siguenau was desperately anxious. A dozen times since they left the château he had tried to bring the conversation round to himself and his need of a job. He had instantly been deflected by one of those irrelevant remarks Burckheim made when he wanted to dodge a question. He would begin talking about horses when his secretary asked him to decide between two estimates for laying down a road, or tell a long pointless story about his youth. Warned by Hoffmayer, Siguenau let him talk. Any attempt to pin him down irritated him. Siguenau was working his charm for all it was worth. He laughed boyishly at the old man's jokes, asked him cunningly about the vines, and at the right moment told him modestly that his father had tried and failed to grow a Rangenwein as milky and powerful as the one celebrated by—he pretended to hesitate—by Ichtersheim, wasn't it?

"I can do better than that," Burckheim said, chuckling.

He stopped to talk to every man at work on the vines replacing the soil trodden out during the harvest, and tearing out the shoots of dog-grass. The pruning had begun on the vines first stripped. Burckheim never allowed his pruners to use shears. They were all highly skilled men; they used the knife, which is slower but allows the most delicate work.

Siguenau was ready to drop he was so tired, walking behind Burckheim, listening to him, careful not to miss a glance or a change of tone. He's as strong as one of his stallions, he thought indignantly. They came back through the

village and as they passed the dower-house at the entrance to the drive Burckheim said carelessly,

"I used to live there when I was bailiff to my cousin."

Siguenau looked at this decent handsome place with envy: he could see Blanche so clearly on the shallow steps, in the courtyard with its flowering bushes, of which he caught a glimpse through the pointed arch with its half-shut oak door. He would have killed Burckheim to get it for her. He said nothing. As they walked through the park Burckheim pointed to a slope where he said he rolled when he was a child. The lowest branch of an oak had come in useful as a rocking-horse.

"Charming," Siguenau said.

It was Fanny he saw there, her thin brown legs dangling on either side of the branch.

As they were entering a side door of the château Burckheim turned round abruptly.

"Would you care for the job of bailiff, young fellow? I think we should get on."

Rather less than a week later Burckheim walked across the park in the early morning. It was one of those first days of November when the air, cleared of the last grain of summer dust, is mild and sparkling. The leaves on distant trees are torn in pieces by the light, and objects near at hand appear smaller and more distinct than is natural, as though this air acts as a diminishing glass. Burckheim caught sight of something yellow on the edge of the stream. It was Fanny Siguenau.

She was lying face downwards, both hands plunged in the clear water. When she heard his heavy foot on the grass she

got up and clasped her hands behind her back. She was wearing a yellow jumper. A smile, friendly and mocking, flew over her face at the widest point, across her eyes.

"Well?" Burckheim said.

"Do you mind me being here?"

"No."

"Mother told me to ask if I saw you," she said lightly.

"Well, suppose I'd said I did mind?"

"I should have gone home."

"Oh." Burckheim never talked down to a child. He was never conscious of any difference between his intelligence and theirs, except that by having lived longer he knew certain things not yet reached by them. He would spend an hour, while his secretary waited with urgent letters, teaching some four-year-old to tie the three kinds of knots he knew—three only: since they will do for every purpose, why out of vanity learn others? Children did not embarrass him, because he had nothing to conceal from them; he had never done anything he was ashamed of, nor pretended to know more than he did.

"You'll get rough hands. Let me see them."

He dried both her hands thoroughly on a silk handkerchief smelling of a cigar he kept in the same pocket. "We must be careful," he said, "you could lose a hand the size of this in one of mine. Now would you like to see a bush that looks like a dog?"

"Is there one?"

"Yes. Come along, I'll show you."

She ran beside him, eager. Suddenly she stopped.

"You wouldn't make fun of me, would you?"

"Good heavens," Burckheim said, shocked. "I never do anything like that. It would be most disgraceful."

CHAPTER TEN

IT WAS Reuss's duty to show the new bailiff the papers relating to the estate, to tell him the names, characters, the wages of the men permanently employed, and the name of the agent—his character, an extremely dubious one, was irrelevant—who supplied the temporary workers, men, women, and children, needed at the grape harvest.

"You realise," Reuss said, "that too much money is spent on the vines. If we sold the wine we should show a heavy loss. We don't even sell it, and that means spending more and more—because one spends on a hobby what would be grudged to a business."

He watched Siguenau as he spoke, trying to sum up the newcomer. The mind—quick, reflective, but as stubborn as a peasant's—behind his broad face, was concentrated on a single point. Was this Belfort second cousin the type who looked for allies or would he try to supplant the man he found happily in office when he came? Reuss had made enquiries about him, and he was not reassured to know that Siguenau had spent most of his war on the Staff. A man so young as he was then, and with no special influence, must be singularly clever to have got himself into such a pleasant place—or singularly ambitious. Reuss had his own ambitions. A born civil servant—in a nation where the first choice of every mother for her son is a career in a government office—he would have stayed in Paris and in the Foreign Office after the War, but for a fatal mistake he made in trying to save from dismissal a colleague suspected, falsely, of being pro-German. It was the only generously reckless act of his life,

and while some men are allowed to commit generous acts during a whole lifetime without being punished Reuss was caught red-handed and thrown out. He came back to Burckheim determined, whatever happened, to be safe. And with all this he really preferred Burckheim to Paris, and Alsace to the rest of France. He kept an anxious watch on the quarters from which dangers might come to Alsace. Since Paris had dished him, it might play some dirty trick on Alsace one of these days. The only thing you can be sure of is a bank balance in a neutral country. Whatever he picked up went straight into Swedish and American bonds.

"The tenant, Dietrich, would like to buy his farm, but Mr. Burckheim refuses to sell. He doesn't like parting with anything."

"I don't blame him," Siguenau said, laughing. "If this were my place I'd hang on to every stone."

"You are Mr. Burckheim's only near relative," Reuss said. "Unless you discourage him a little when he talks of rebuilding and replanting, you may be doing yourself a very bad turn."

Siguenau did not answer at once. He was trying to make up his mind whether the other man's cool polite voice covered an offer of friendship or a secret hostility. He had noticed Burckheim's dependence on his secretary. He would sign without looking at them letters and papers put in front of him by Reuss without even a show of explaining them. "Do you want me to sign this? Right." Among the heap of documents Reuss was spreading out now there must be several only Reuss understood. He could make my position here difficult, thought Siguenau. The shadow of Reuss's arched nose and heavy forehead over the papers struck him as sinister.

"I'm not the heir," he said drily. "Nor am I the only second cousin living."

Reuss looked up. His wide seemingly frank smile gave away nothing, but it was attractive.

"I do apologise. I jumped to conclusions. Still, you know, someone must inherit—some member of the family—and since you're here, and in a position to keep an eye on things, you'll naturally do all you can to check useless spending. Anyhow, I shall bring you every estimate and figure before showing it to Mr. Burckheim himself, and you can make your own judgments."

"Excellent," Siguenau said coolly. "Thank you. We shall be able to work together. I hope I shall help you."

When he left the château to go home he was still pleasantly excited. The idea that he might inherit from the old man—something if not all—had been in his mind since the afternoon when he was given the job of bailiff. But he had kept it out of sight at the back, afraid, if he looked at it closely, to see that it was only silly. That Reuss had spotted it, had gone out of his way deliberately to speak of it, made it as respectable now as it would have become in another year without his help.

He looked across the park, sleeping under a sky tricked by the first frosts of autumn into bringing closer stars smaller and brighter than their reflections lying in the stream. All this glittering pollen, these black motionless trees, these questions started up by the spectacle of so many living worlds sown among so many dead; all this roused in him only a lust to use it.

He found his wife hanging curtains she had bought in Strasbourg. They were of parchment-coloured chintz, with small dark blue stars scattered over it, and the salesman had apologised for it. "It comes from Paris," he said ruefully, "I allowed myself to take it. It was a mistake, I was misled. You can see for yourself it is not likely to please." "It pleases me," Blanche said, "how cheaply can I have it?"

"Look," she said to her husband, "I got a bargain. I felt ashamed to beat him down. He had no idea it was a good pattern and I didn't tell him."

"Is it?" Siguenau said.

It amused him to wrap her in stiff folds of the material. "Now you look like one of Schongauer's Virgins. I shall never be sorry I married you. I don't know why it is, but the sort of innocent cunning which is so irritating in English men is only lovable and touching in English women. I could never be really angry with you."

"Will you let me go and look after your dinner?"

"Very well." He pulled the chintz off her. "Why don't you ask me what I've been doing?"

"Do I ever?"

"No, thank heaven. Blanche, that fellow Reuss is clever, but he won't be in my way. He's very comfortable in the château, he knows his job, and he'll try to keep it. He'll be useful to me."

"How?"

She meant—What are you planning? He was never able to let well alone. The first day she met him, in Paris, in September, 1918, he made her laugh by describing the lengths he had gone to get possession of a desk he coveted, which was being used by another officer at H.Q. After she married him she discovered that he was not happy unless his restless mind was playing with other people like a chess-player with his pieces. It was less the intrigue he delighted in—he was genuinely intelligent—than the sense of power he got from managing people, forcing them to alter their lives, changing, by playing on one man's vanity and another's fears, the course of events in a family, a business, a town. In Belfort he set the county by the ears in his anxiety to get rid of a sub-prefect who had cheated him in a private matter. He got rid of the fellow. The affair did not end there, but spread out into a

network of broken friendships, careers, and marriage contracts. Yet some of the very people—especially women—whose lives he had thrown out of gear were still his admirers, and grieved when he left Belfort.

"I can't say yet. But I want to dig myself in here. Burckheim likes me, I don't bore him. There's no reason I can see why we shouldn't spend a long time here."

"The rest of my life, if you like," Blanche said.

"Heavens, it might be fifty years."

"Well?"

"I don't think I could live anywhere so long as that," Siguenau said smiling. "But there's Strasbourg. We might live there."

"Are you hoping to become manager of the works as well as bailiff?"

"No," Siguenau said, with energy. "I don't want any worse responsibilities than I have now. I shouldn't be happy. A man in René Hoffmayer's position stands to be shot at by every sort of interest, trades union secretaries, journalists, workmen, politicians. A dog's life. No . . . if I can make use of old Burckheim—persuade him to leave us some of his money, or leave Fanny something—so that we're established. But put myself in a position where I should have to answer to a dozen fools for every step I took—no! Not I." He laughed. "If I were invited to become Premier to-morrow I should ask instead to be made a permanent secret Regent of the Bank of France. Think of the power I should have. And no one could touch me. I should be behind and above every so-called great man, every Cabinet Minister, every Corps Commander, and every greengrocer, postman, and novelist in the country."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE most handsome single piece of iron-work in the village was neither at the château with its galleries and elaborate arched grating across the windows, nor at the mairie, nor in any of the discreet charming houses of wine-growers and retired civil servants. It is an inn-sign—that of the Dauphin. The museum at Colmar offered two hundred dollars for it, and the same year an American collector made a bid of five thousand. Its owner refused both with as much firmness. “I answered, ‘Not even if I was to be Emperor!’” (After 1918, he spurned the Presidency in the same spirit.) An oblong frame, semi-circular at the top, encloses a rose-tree, of exquisite fineness, a hart standing before it; above, in the semi-circle, a pair of young male angels hold a finely-wrought crown. So light, subtle, and delicate is the design, you could believe the iron had been woven.

Burckheim never walked under it into the Dauphin without a groan of envy. He was too shrewd to try to buy it.

This evening his self-restraint had been weakened by a twinge of pain, the second he had felt in his life. The first drove him into marriage. He went much farther when he asked the Dauphin’s proprietor to exchange his sign for a supply of wine for fifty years.

“No, thanks,” the other said gently. “Your wine may be the best between here and Thann, but my sign is the finest in the world. There’s no comparison.”

“My wine, let me tell you, is as good as any in France.”

“No doubt. Let’s hope your heirs will know as much about vines as you do.”

"Heirs? Heirs? I'm only seventy. I shall last another fifty years."

"I'm sure of it."

Vexed, Burckheim walked out of the inn and went to look at his vines, walking through the village and up by a paved lane that took him past Jacob Dietrich's farm. It turned its high two-storeyed gable and dove-cot to the street. The great doors into the yard stood open; Burckheim stopped and stared in at the house with its wooden balconies; oak beams poked forward grimacing heads; down two sides of the yard, barns and a stable; the well with its wrought-iron cover, shaded by a huge walnut. Burckheim knew the rooms inside the house as well as he knew his own, low, wide, panelled in waxed oak and walnut, oak benches along the wall nearest the stove.

Far far too good for him, he thought. If he could have lived here himself, and lived at the same time in the dower-house and the château, he would, willingly.

There was not a stone or a leaf of this countryside he loved better than all the others, scarcely a hill. Each when he looked at it was irreplaceable, until he had passed on to the next. The tracks, and the terraces of the vines, followed a plan marked out for them by his own veins. When he shot a woodcock he reflected that it was lucky to die just here and not at the other side of the Vosges or beyond his land. He felt a cool affection for France, a much warmer one for Alsace, but Burckheim in his opinion was worth twice as much; he would have thrown away the whole Central Massif for the hill at his left hand, terraced by vines for which, in a bad year, he grieved more than a father over his son's vices. He took immense trouble to cheat the Government out of income tax; it was money stolen from him, that is, from the château, the vines, the trout stream. Nothing shook his belief that for his sake and theirs he ought to be cherished.

Dietrich came out of one of the barns and crossed the yard, to speak to him. Head and chest shorter than Burckheim, he squinted at him from the entrance for a minute before inviting him into the yard. Burckheim was one of the two persons Dietrich respected—(the other was Foch. . . . "Ah, if only they had let him take Berlin . . ."). It was not that he thought of him as noble, but because Burckheim was shrewd and cunning—or so Dietrich thought.

"This is a nice place I let you have," Burckheim grunted.

"Have I ever been half a day late with my rent?"

"Rent? Rent? You ought to pay me a premium for letting you live here. Heaven knows what you make out of it."

Dietrich did not smile. To the best of his belief heaven did not know. He had no money in the bank, he had not discussed his affairs even with his wife since the day he overheard her offering to lend her sister her train fare; the only time he had boasted was one day when a friend said to him, "You know I have my dad's waistcoats." Dietrich smirked. "Ha, I haven't got anywhere near there, I'm still working through the granddad's." No one knew where he kept his money, nor what he had saved. He had settled in his mind the day and year when he would have enough, without touching securities, to make another offer to buy the farm. His first had been turned down.

"A fellow came out here from Strasbourg two days ago," he said. "He wanted me to buy something—bonds."

"And did you?"

"Not I."

Burckheim sympathised with this distrust of the townsman. Well he knew the manner, of assurance, of false delicacy, that persons from Strasbourg and Paris carry round with them, to infect you with some misfortune before you can get out of range.

He shook his head. On one of the balconies, almost hidden

behind a thick creeper, he caught sight of Dietrich's wife. He could not look at this woman, old, bent, laughing, without feeling a slight shock. She was his first wife's foster-sister, born on the same day, and when he saw her he remembered Geneviève as distinctly as if she were alive. But she was nineteen, a girl, with thin ankles and wrists and dark smiling eyes. She used to laugh at him, and contradicted him as often as herself, which was every time she opened her mouth: the only thing she said to him when she was dying—"How well I feel . . . no, I'm going to die." To look at Mrs. Dietrich, and to reflect that Geneviève if she had lived would have been old, gave him an extraordinary sense of losing his footing on the earth. He leaned against the wall of the stable: it steadied him. When he looked up stealthily Mrs. Dietrich had gone, taking with her the young woman and giving him back the half-century he was in danger of losing.

"Ha, d'you know what I was thinking as I came alongside your door?—of my Colmar grandmother's birthday. What—you think I'm mad? But that was the only day in the year she let me taste my grandfather's vine de paille. It was considered dangerous for children. She served with it a cake made of eggs, butter, almonds, called a gougelhof. It was as light as air, and the wine was a magnificent clear yellow, and tasted, my God, what a superb scent and sweetness. You know, Dietrich, I've never tried to make it. Why shouldn't I?"

"All very well if you can afford it," Dietrich muttered.

Burckheim had turned his back and was already out of hearing. At the door of the yard he turned round, saw that the other was still watching him, and shouted. Dietrich came, slowly and grudgingly, towards him.

"Here, you. Last time I saw you you pretended that the Dietrichs were here first, before the Burckheims——"

Dietrich interrupted him.

"Can you prove they weren't? In fact, you robbed us—"

heaven knows what part you came from, without a name, so that you had to give yourselves the name of our valley when you'd stolen it. A regular habit in those days."

"You poor sinner," said Burckheim mildly, "the proof is perfectly simple. You come when I call you."

And he went off, chuckling. He had wiped out his failure to buy the Dauphin's sign, and he would begin the next day with a balance in hand. It seemed that the wind had gone round from a cold quarter to a warm one and he began to think he was the climate of the Vosges as well as being Burckheim, and he walked past shuttered windows promising the inhabitants a winter of mild frosts, and gentle not too cold rain.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CAROLINE'S sitting-room in the château contained nothing—apart from herself—which had not been made in Alsace: on the chintz curtains peonies, roses, tulips, seemed swollen with the light and echoing with bees. There were Hannong bowls in which it would have been only foolish to put living flowers. Generations of Alsatian women had made use of the elaborately moulded chests and cupboards which now politely made room for Caroline's belongings. Sometimes when she came into the room she felt that the whole past of this province had crowded into it before her, and she had to cross to the window by leaning on the arm of this woman and that man whose praying-chair or mirror or candlesticks she had borrowed. Among these silent dead she never felt herself being pushed out as a stranger. It was a living woman, it was Anne-Marie Eschelmer who did that to her.

She heard Anne-Marie's voice in the library as she came past. It was a dull yet not dead sound, like wood striking wood. The sap was there all the time, hidden.

Half an hour later a servant came to her room. "Mrs. Eschelmer would like to see you if you have time."

Caroline felt the same reluctance and distaste she would feel for a persistent beggar, and the more wretched he was the less she would forgive him for it. But there was no misery on Anne-Marie's face when she came in. It shone with happiness.

"My son is coming to see me," she said.

"How splendid," Caroline said mechanically.

"Yes, he will arrive this afternoon. The train from Metz

to Strasbourg is an express—I have been making enquiries—he will leave Metz at eleven o'clock and be here, in Burckheim, at three."

"How long is it since you have seen him?"

"Eight months and two days. His work keeps him fast in Metz. He's important to his firm, they can't spare him. But think, he's thirty to-day—thirty." Anne-Marie paused. Her face took on an expression of timid surprise. "I've had him thirty years, ten years longer than I lived without him before he was born. I feel to-day as though he were catching up with me, and he'll be the same age soon. I feel young."

She laughed, showing the gaps in her teeth. Her hands, ugly and discoloured, touched one after another the things near her, and a chair, an embroidered shawl, a curtain, ceased pretending to be friendly and reminded Caroline that she was an American. A little more of it and the room would turn against her. She shivered.

"Ah, you are cold? You should wear more. Look at me, even my finger-ends are warm, but then I rub myself every October with winter-green and wash it off in April."

And beside the soiled body of the peasant woman, misshapen, deformed by work, by her single hard child-bearing, Caroline's own body, smooth and powdered after a bath into which she poured pine essence, seemed feeble, like dough set to rise. Her interest in the world, her idealism, all the American virtues she practised and knew how to value, were wiped out by an invincible ignorance and self-assurance. Vexed, she stood up.

"So it's your son's birthday? I should like to give him something. What can I find that a young man would like? It's a little difficult, isn't it?"

"Ah, you're not used to thinking about presents for a son," Anne-Marie said. She smiled. "It was easy when he was a boy. When he was a young man I gave him money, a little—you

understand. Now, when he has money of his own, a man who knows his way about, he would take it badly if I gave him money, I with the little I have. I make a birthday supper for him instead, chicken cooked with oil and wine, cherry tart. We shall be sitting opposite each other this evening at six, just we two, eating and drinking and laughing . . . I can't think of anything better, not if I was to die without knowing it and go straight to heaven."

Caroline had in her hand a small figure in Strasbourg silver. She turned, holding it out.

"Do you think he would be offended if I gave you a small present of money for him—a hundred dollars? If you'd prefer it, I'll give him this instead—it's not worth a great deal."

Anne-Marie's fists, pressed against her shawl, trembled. She was torn between vanity and a wish to take the money. If she took it, it would look as though Henry were not doing so well as she boasted, but—a hundred dollars against a miserable piece of silver. And as though she knew that the other woman had wanted to humiliate her she both hated her and longed to snatch the money from her. The thought that Caroline would be poorer and her son richer by a hundred dollars gave her the sharpest joy. She looked stonily into Caroline's face.

"I will take the money. I will persuade him. Give it to me."

"Take the figure as well," Caroline said.

Henry Eschelmer walked more slowly the nearer he came to his mother's house. She lived—she had lived here since her marriage and he had been born here—in three rooms looking into a courtyard. A narrow half-timbered house fronted

the street, pierced by an old archway. He used to rush under this as a child because of his terror of a family of bats living in the roof. Inside the courtyard you were in a cobbled square of old houses, not one like its neighbour. Here is one with a handsome wooden balcony, as strong and shabby as an old peasant. The next is whitewashed with green shutters, no balcony, but a profusion of window-boxes. The back of the house fronting the street has a semi-circular tower clapped on to it, and empty gaping windows.

Eschelmer waited a minute in the archway, as if the cobble-stones under his feet in town shoes were slippery, a plank thrown across a river. He could see the stone well, its bucket dangling outside next to a hooped wine-funnel. As soon as he stepped into the courtyard his mother would see him from her window, and he needed this moment to remind himself that she was alone. She had been alone now for half his life, but the shadow of the earlier half was still alive and breathing.

He stepped forward. His mother was seated in the open window of her room, wearing a white blouse, the only white garment she possessed, that she ever had possessed—even her confirmation dress had been lent to her by the woman who brought her up—worn on his birthdays, on Easter Sunday, and once a year for the village fête. He smiled and waved. Had she so easily forgotten, he used to wonder, that these were also the very days when his father thrashed him least mercifully—as though to make sure that any superfluous happiness was cancelled by more harshness? He had given her other blouses, in colours, but she wore those only on ordinary Sundays and saints' days.

He ran up the dark ladder-like staircase from the front door, his heart beating with the effort as in those days it beat desperately from fear, and on every stair he pushed aside some image of himself to reach, near the top, the image of a

fifteen-year-old lout, wrists sticking from his sleeves, looking down to hide his crazy joy from the men easing his father's last descent of the awkward staircase.

His mother had come out on to the landing.

"I expected you twenty minutes ago. Did someone get hold of you in the street?"

It was her way of telling him that her life turned round him, from the early morning when she opened her eyes and remembered that he lived in Metz now to the moment when she finished praying for him and got into bed.

Eschelmer went into his own room, narrow, the width of half a dozen waxed boards, holding only the bed, a chest, and the box he had fetched in here, defiantly, when he knew for certain that his father was dying: it had nothing in it but a pocket-knife and a few books he had been keeping in a friend's house, out of reach when his father wanted to punish him: he still kept it here; it marked the limits of his independence and hatred.

He could hear his mother at the stove in the other room. He smelled coffee. Without knowing it he relaxed; a smile, friendly and appealing, came on his face; opening his suitcase to get at the present he had brought for her he felt quickening in him a happiness that belonged of rights to the past, to the candle she used to set inside his room at night when his father was out, to her voice outside the door when he had been thrashed and locked in, to the taste of bread given him on the sly, to lies told to shield him, to jokes he laughed at now when he was alone. He hurried to go to her.

Over supper she gave him Caroline Burckheim's present. She had made up a neat story. Caroline had intended to buy something for him in the proper way, and not knowing what to buy asked her to get it.

"But how could I spend such a sum of money? Ridiculous. Do you see me going into some shop, me, as I am, asking to

be shown gold cuff-links? Why, they'd tell me, I couldn't afford them. No, you must handle the money yourself, I haven't the brains. . . . Here's this silver thing. . . . As she said, nothing; she wanted to make you a present of something of her own. Poor woman—it's surprising she hasn't had children, but they say that Americans—"

She handed the notes to him across the table and watched him push them into his pocket-book as though they were a trifle. She had no idea how well-off he was. On fine days and when she had been lucky herself she believed he was rich. Other days she expected hourly to hear of his bankruptcy. A neighbour on a visit to Metz said she had seen him dining "in a poor sort of place."

"He's abstemious, he doesn't like to spend his money on eating," Anne-Marie said calmly.

Sometimes she believed it.

"Let me give you some more chicken," she said gently. "You look thin. I daresay you don't eat enough."

"Last week," Eschelmer said, "I was dining with a banker and two other millionaires. But they didn't offer me a single course, not one, as delicious as this."

"Are you happy in Metz?" Without waiting for his answer—she had heard it so many times she ought to know it—she began about Burckheim's money. "Can he in decency leave it all to that woman, an American after all, childless? No, it's impossible. Even he couldn't do it. You are his grandson as much as if he'd married my—my mother."

In spite of herself she lowered her voice when she spoke of her mother. It was not only that one cannot think clearly of a woman one has never seen. Her husband, the German customs official, had forbidden her to talk of this mother who had disgraced her. When he had been snubbed by his superior, or he had toothache, he locked her in her room, reminding her that she was nobody at all, a bastard. Then why did

he marry her—unless he expected favours from her father, from Burckheim? I was not pretty, the poor woman thought.

“Let him keep his money,” Eschelmer growled.

He was humiliated and angry. He felt all the grief of a child not strong enough to defend his mother from a bullying husband. It swelled in him so that he wanted to roll on the floor.

“Let him keep it, I have money of my own, in a year or two I shall be a rich man. Then I’ll tell Honoré Burckheim and his wife what I think of them. I’ll ruin him. I’ll squeeze him until his pips squeak, there’ll be nothing there when I’m through with him. Then I’ll buy the estate, you shall live in that woman’s rooms, you shall laugh at her. I’ll alter everything. You’ll see, I shall be the greatest man in Alsace. . . . You’ll see. . . .”

He stopped. He was crimson with excitement, sweating, exhausted. His mother knew these moods. Without speaking she got up and came round the table to him, and took his head in her hands, stroking it. Eschelmer burst into tears. In a few minutes he recovered and began eating cherries as though nothing had happened.

The next morning Eschelmer called at the château to thank Caroline. She was in Strasbourg. He had to see Burckheim without anything to take the edge off the ordeal. His usual feeling towards his grandfather veered between respect and a pumped-up hatred for old men. But if his German father had been a kind instead of a brutal man he would have worshipped him, and he was always fighting in himself a weak longing to be the beloved son of God the Father. Cheated of such a father, he wanted to cast down all old men from their

seats; whether they knew it or not, he was going to rule in their stead. When he shook hands with Burckheim he was a great man, nobody could get the better of him: as he turned to the chair pointed at he became a quaking clumsy lout. Burckheim did not see either of these persons. He saw a youngish plump man, in a common suit. Henry Eschelmer had nothing of his mother in him, except his fine eyes, and nothing, not a gesture, that could remind an old man of a September evening more than fifty years under the earth.

"Well, young man? Well, Henry? How are you getting on?"

The bluff slow voice made Eschelmer quiver. It searched him out and followed him to his lodging in Metz; to the office of the dubious financial house where he worked; even to the narrow room in which he used to kneel down for his father to thrash him. He drew himself up.

"Splendidly, thank you. I've been promoted—and promised another move next year."

"Good," Burckheim said affably. "I like a young man to work well, and be rewarded for it. You must do your duty, my boy. You must always do your duty."

Eschelmer doubled his fists on his knees. He had no objection to these sentiments, they were very proper. What infuriated him was the way in which they were drawled at him, and the old man's placid indifference. I might be one of his labourers or a chair, he said to himself. If he won't look on me as his grandson he ought to respect me as a remarkable man—one or the other. He felt a murderous dislike of Burckheim; a nerve in his body was stretched to the point of ripping across like a flag. He forced himself to look at the window with an air of polite interest, and from the corner of his eye he saw Burckheim yawn widely. The old man did not trouble to put his hand to his mouth. This was too much for Eschelmer. His voice shook.

"Excuse me—you're tired: I'll go now."

"Yes, yes, you'd better go," Burckheim said in a genial voice. "I usually go out at this time, but that fellow Reuss is after me. Well, my boy—I may see you again."

He held out two fingers, thick and solid, as though made of some substance harder and less living than flesh. Eschelmer barely touched them. Smiling in a mortified way he walked—strutted—to the door and escaped. His knees were giving way.

His mother was waiting for him at home. Before he arrived he had altered the interview to suit himself, and he believed the new version when he began telling her.

"How did you get on?"

"Oh, splendidly. He asked my advice about the ironworks, and I gave it to him, and he seemed impressed. That fellow Reuss was there, but he said nothing. He seems rather a stick. When I came away I arranged to see him again. . . ."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"MY DEAR Siguenau," said Reuss, "I'm going to tell you about the—absolutely secret—negotiations with our friends in Cologne." He paused to see the effect on Siguenau, whose face showed only a mild interest. But Reuss noticed his right foot, which had been tapping the floor and now became rigid. Satisfied, he went on. "I have been corresponding for some months with the younger of Mr. Burckheim's second cousins there—by the way, you must be related to them in someway."

"I daresay. I don't know them," Siguenau said lightly.

"This one, I'll call him C, is a partner in Rhine Steel Works—of course you know all about it"—he waited again to see whether Siguenau would give away his complete ignorance—"What you don't know is that Rhine Steel Works has just sold half its shares to the Moselle Steel Company of Metz, and bought half the shares of the French firm. The two firms, French and German, will work independently—you couldn't expect a German company to get orders from French arms firms, though why not?—but they will have a joint Board and share profits. Very well. All that concerns us"—he emphasised the *us*—"is C's interest in the Burckheim ironworks. You know that when the business manager, when Hoffmayer sends his reports to Mr. Burckheim he hardly ever reads them. He throws them to me. In fact, I know as much about the works as Hoffmayer himself, and a thousand times more than Mr. Burckheim, who isn't interested. He likes to sit here and grow wine."

"Which costs us more every year."

"Exactly." Reuss had a delightful smile—without a touch of warmth: it was as though the sun struck across a wooden figure. "These reports—I'll show them to you—make it clear that we have time to save things, but not a great deal of time. Last month Hoffmayer wrote, Choose: you can alter the policy of the works, get in fresh money from somewhere, fight for cheap markets; or you can go on as we are now for eight, ten, perhaps a dozen years, then realise that you are beaten and close down at a moment when no one will be willing to buy up a bankrupt ironworks." Reuss struck the table. "So we have less than eight years." He saw that the other man was puzzled, and added patiently, "The change must come before then. No one will put money into a firm at the last minute. Now we have something to offer. In eight years . . . you understand. . . ."

Vexed that he had missed the obvious, Siguenau sat up. He had been lolling in his chair to give an impression that he knew everything about the Burckheim ironworks. In fact, he had no head for business. Nails could stick out a mile from a business report without his seeing one of them. He knew what Reuss was thinking, and like the grass-snake he had left Fanny watching in the park he turned head to tail.

"Yes, yes, I understand that. But you haven't told me why it's necessary to look to German capital, to this fellow C, for help. Why not get in French money at once?"

Reuss made a gesture he was fond of: he opened both hands so that you noticed they were as small and delicate as a girl's.

"Because, my dear fellow, we owe more money to the Strasbourg Bank than we could repay in fifty years of rising profits. Only Honoré Burckheim could have squeezed so much money from them. Even he could not get a penny more."

Siguenau did not answer. Ignorant about business and rather despising it—he thought economics was something taught in night schools—he was a politician in his cradle. But merely professional politics bored him—again, he thought of them as a job for clever lower-middle class young men. He would have enjoyed being the secretary of a powerful Minister, able to ruin other men's careers, perhaps make them.

"What would this fellow C get out of it?"

"The part control of a thoroughly well-organised iron-works. A footing in Strasbourg business."

Excited, certain he knew what was coming, Siguenau crept forward.

"He is a German."

"Well?"

"Are you so anxious to help a German to get his foot into Alsace?"

Reuss's heavy impassive face did not lose its look of patient contemplative energy. He answered with great gentleness.

"My dear Siguenau. Will you tell me just how France is going to keep herself ahead of Germany in the next ten years? Yes, yes, I know we're making more motor-cars than we even did before—and more cocktail bars, more tables like metal spiders, millions of water-closets to attract tourists. And we have money in hand. And let me tell you, Tardieu is going to chuck it out faster than we earn it. I know him. . . . In less than ten years, in six, we shall have touched that line scrawled across the future by the War—in 1935 there will be gaps in every battalion in France, the children who weren't born in 1914. And in factories. . . . We can no more keep up with the Germans—now they are getting to their feet—than a dwarf can run races with giants. . . . If the English had stuck to us. . . . I tell you we can't keep ahead. We have got—heaven help us—to make terms with Germany. And

in good time. If we wait, they will turn on us and crush us—while the English look the other way. Heavens, you know all this.”

“The Germans are a barbarous race,” Siguenau said.

“Of course.”

“And you want to join them?”

Reuss said nothing for a minute. “I want to rescue Alsace.” He picked up a fold of the curtain blowing against the back of his chair. Its magnificent crimson birds moved in his hand, chattering. “Look.”

“Charming.”

“It was made here. Everything the French do well we do better. We Alsations. Every civilisation in Europe has left a drop of its pure essence in our cup. We are as supple as the English, as mature as the French, as orderly as the Germans; we sing as they used to sing in Italy; we keep ourselves clean like the Swedes. The one thing we cannot do, civilised though we are, is make war on the rest of Europe. For that we must be grouped with another nation . . . less civilised, grosser. . . . We are a battalion in the regiment called France . . . I’m content with that. So long as Europe is at peace, and France behaves herself with us. But if there is another war—and the Germans destroy us”—he looked up with a smile full of horror and anger—“Why should I be glad that Bordeaux is being defended if Strasbourg and this house are a heap of dust?”

Siguenau shook his head. He is a *provincial*, he thought. He hid a smile.

But he was moved by the argument. “Yes,” he said gravely, “we ought to make our peace with Germany.”

Reuss’s cold smile had a touch of irony.

“Let’s talk about the ironworks.”

He read out part of one of Hoffmayer’s reports. Noticing that Siguenau was bored by it, he showed him letters

in which C wrote about enlarging and modernising the works.

Siguenau looked up suddenly.

"Why didn't he write openly to Burckheim?"

"He did. And to Hoffmayer. Hoffmayer sent his letters on to Mr. Burckheim—who chucked them in the wastepaper-basket."

"Well?"

"I answered one of them myself," Reuss said calmly.

He looked steadily into Siguenau's face. He felt no impulse to add that he had shares in the Burckheim ironworks. It was only part of his reason for wanting to help the German to get his hands on them.

"What one man can do to bring France and Germany together, I . . . but we are discussing the ironworks . . . without German money we shall begin to go down. Burckheim is a wilful stubborn old man. The thought of sharing the business with Cologne exasperates him."

"And Hoffmayer?" Siguenau asked.

"He's a man of sixty—ten years younger than Burckheim—and heaven knows how much frailer, more tired, more intelligent. We ought to get him on our side. I say we—I mean you ought. He is friendly with you. You are"—his cold charming smile—"a member of the family."

A whole series of movements flashed in Siguenau's mind. He was a fencer at the opening of an attack: half his excitement sprang from his knowledge of his own skill. The fate of the ironworks scarcely interested him. If they were his he would sell them to C and take the money. His excitement, the delicious feeling of tension and ecstasy, sprang in him from sources part sexual part mental. He enjoyed no keener pleasure than the pleasure of handling human beings.

"Excellent. Leave Hoffmayer to me," he said, with a light-hearted smile.

He had a visitor in the evening. Henry Eschelmer's excuse for coming to see him—he had talked to Fanny when he saw her playing by herself in the park; she told him she collected stamps and he had brought one for her—was so trifling that Siguenau was faintly curious. He studied Eschelmer, trying to catch him out looking like Burckheim. He had no luck. Eschelmer's grey eyes, loose girlish mouth, and clumsy body were certainly his own. He must have rehearsed his speech. He dropped his stamp—an ordinary American one for one cent—on the table in front of Siguenau, and without paying the least attention to him took up a position between the wall and the table and raised his arm.

"Allow me to say that I have no wish to force myself on you and your wife. Burckheim is your second or fourth cousin and my grandfather on the wrong side of the blanket, as they say. My mother, however, was respectably married. She had only one child—me. She is the best of women, an excellent woman in every sense. As for me, I have a good position in Metz—and I owe no one any thanks for it, least of anyone my grandfather or my father. . . ."

His voice began softly, ingratiatingly, and rose to a peevish whine. Siguenau realised that he was hysterical. In another minute he would begin to cry, or smash something. He stood up.

"It would be impossible to work out our relationship," he smiled. "Certainly we're related. Let's call ourselves cousins." He held his hand out. Eschelmer grasped it, and sat down suddenly. All the air had been let out of him.

"You have a charming house," he said in a normal voice.

"My wife—you must come to dinner and meet her—likes it very much. She decorated several of the rooms herself. Do you like this room?"

Almost at his ease now, Eschelmer pretended to admire plain white walls and a piece of sculpture, a female anatomy

in zinc. His vanity had been soothed by Siguenau's friendly manner. His mind, a polypus with tentacles of feeling straying on all sides, settled down to absorb Siguenau. He showed another side of himself, a shrewd, dreamy, simple fellow.

Siguenau made himself charming. It amused him to practise his skill on this uncouth object. Besides—though at the moment he had nothing in view that he could use him for, an actual grandson, even illegitimate, might be useful one day. It was worth taking a little trouble to make certain of laying hands on him at the right moment.

He would have been startled if he had been able to guess that Eschelmer was summing him up . . . as an adroit pleasant fellow—whom he could use.

"When are you going back to Metz?" Siguenau asked.

"In three days." He frowned. "I have important negotiations in hand."

He reflected that to accuse his landlady of stealing two shirts was a serious enough matter.

"Ah, quite . . . I shall be in Metz one day. I'll look you up, my dear fellow."

"Do," Eschelmer said.

He shuddered at the idea of being discovered, with false sleeves over his cuffs, at the desk he shared with his fellow-clerk. I can send down a message that I am in conference, he thought.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE least its patron saint can do for a village is to make sure of fine weather for his fête. In Burckheim this came in the third week of November—which gave the holy man something to think about. He rarely failed to turn up a mild day. This year the Dauphin's last sunflowers, nursed under a south wall for weeks, were deceived—it might have been August. A glorious tawny sunlight coloured walls, ironwork, cobblestones, the girls' petticoats. Under the pressure of this light the houses stepped back, widening the streets. The blue hills drew in closer, and the stream, flying to join the Bruche, sent out rays of light across those falling from above, so that they met dazzlingly at eye-level.

The meal for the day is rich jugged hare and pancakes, with the new wine. Honoré Burckheim ate his at home. He then called at the Dauphin and joined in the third sitting-down of farmers and wine-growers, at three o'clock—the first is at twelve. He sat at the head of the table and stuffed pancakes into his mouth as fast as the grinning sweating women could fetch them.

He walked home, read a little Vergil for an hour with his head on his arm, then dined and went back into the village. By now the light seemed to be oozing through a honeycomb. Tables and benches were set out in the square, under arbours of branches, and the giddier of the young women had begun dancing. In an hour or so, when dusk came, some of the young men would dance, but not yet.

Burckheim sauntered across the square. He took one young girl and then another by the ears, held her head back

and shook it. The first giggled; the other made herself look stonily indifferent. He saw Dietrich, his black hat almost on his nose, watching from one of the tables. His wife was not with him. Burckheim joined him, and drank three glasses of new wine, making the same comment on each.

"Poor stuff, compared with mine."

"You pour a fortune into yours," said Dietrich.

He spoke in a dry voice, neither hiding nor showing his contempt for Burckheim's extravagance.

Burckheim did not answer. Sprawling against the table, his wits pleasantly muddled, he watched three young women who had stopped beside the fountain: one held her hand under a jet gushing from it and drank. To-morrow they might be washing clothes at the basin, but this evening they were the voice and limbs of Alsace, warm, gay, well-rounded. Burckheim felt himself the husband of this province, able to look after it as well as get children on it. He was happy.

"One of these days I'll tell you how I stayed a week in England," he said. "When I think that poor devils are being born there every minute . . . and I might have been one of them—my God—"

"It may be something in the mother's milk."

"I don't know about that, I didn't try it."

"Or the Church," Dietrich said, showing blackened teeth.

He failed to provoke an argument. Burckheim was too much at his ease. Towards eight o'clock, when it was dark except for the three-branched lamp in the centre of the square and the light from open doorways, they went along to the Dauphin. Henry Eschelmer was sitting at one of the tables in the courtyard, under a lighted window. He stood up with an air of respect.

"Oh, there you are," Burckheim said affably. "Well, come indoors with us."

The sprig isn't much like its tree, Dietrich thought, follow-

ing them into the room. Eschelmer was short, lumpish; he stooped. Walking the length of the room at Burckheim's elbow, he tried to seem impressive by looking sternly in front of him with a fixed solemn gaze. He relaxed a little when he was seated facing his grandfather at a table next the stove. Dietrich saw that the old man thought nothing of him. Why should he? he said to himself: the fellow is as nervous as an old maid. Eschelmer sat biting his nails and smiling; he had nothing to say.

Burckheim made his usual remark on the wine. The young man tasted his, frowned, and pushed the glass from him with a rough movement.

"What's the matter?" his grandfather said. "Don't you like it?"

"I don't drink much."

"You're a fool."

Now if it was my grandson, thought Dietrich, I should have said to him, Only fools empty their money down their throats. But the Burckheims of this world have large ideas, they can afford them. He saw that Eschelmer was in a state of trembling resentment, and for the first time, too, he noticed a trace in the young man's expression of Burckheim's malice. Much good a touch of Burckheim will do him, without the money to keep it up, Dietrich thought. He could not see into the young man's mind. If he could, with surprise and not much pity he would have seen a child on its bare knees, night-shirt coming half way down skinny thighs, still sore and aching, face all blubbered. What child is not the better for a thrashing? For that matter, what woman?

"I have no money to waste," Eschelmer said shrilly. "When I have something important to do I need a clear head. I shall be in Metz to-morrow, at a critical conference."

"Dear, dear," Burckheim mocked.

"Old dodderers like you," Eschelmer said, "can sit swilling, but I have responsibilities."

Better and better, Dietrich thought ironically. Any young fellow in his breeches not a fool would keep his head shut and a warm place for himself—doesn't he know that? He watched the young man get up and shamle out, past a score of heads turning to look at him. Burckheim made a curious noise. He fell forward across the table, his arms knocking the glass. When a man helped Dietrich to lift him up he was livid and choking. They tore open his collar. The proprietor ran out from behind the bar and bent over him on the floor.

"He's had a stroke—it's not much. Look—he's a better colour. Get the doctor, one of you—the rest clear out. Go on."

He cleared the room. Dietrich went outside into the courtyard. He saw that someone else would fetch the doctor. He had a little business to do. Then he went back into the room. Burckheim was lying, still unconscious, on a blanket on the floor. There was no one else in the room. The door into the kitchen was half open, and the proprietor was in there, shouting at the flustered women. Dietrich stepped back behind a tall heavy cupboard. He had seen Jules Reuss come into the kitchen from the door leading to the street. The secretary shut the kitchen door behind him. He glanced round the seemingly empty room, knelt beside Burckheim, and felt in all his pockets. There was a notebook in one of them. He took the papers and letters out of it and began to examine them, quickly and neatly, putting each back when he had read it. It seemed only curiosity. He kept nothing.

March–April 1936

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SIGUENAU crossed the Place Kléber in Strasbourg at a pace which seemed easy, but was rapid enough to take him past cafés before any friend seated in the window could signal to him. Even in such trifles as crossing a street he liked to give the impression of doing nothing. His clothes only happened to fit well, he happened to be at every function noticed in the press, men and women he had made his friends happened to be those who were going to occupy useful positions or come into money or write their memoirs.

This morning in 1936, in March, he was on his way to the station. The only friend he had made without thinking about the future—they were born on the same day and in the same house, to mothers who were close friends—was coming from Belfort to stay with him. Edward Berthelin was also his first cousin. He fitted somewhere into the Burckheim pattern, and had as much and as little right to speak of Honoré Burckheim as a cousin.

The train from Belfort was late. Siguenau wondered how far Berthelin had changed in seventeen years. He had not seen him since June, 1919, in Paris, the day Berthelin was a witness at his marriage—a marriage for which he was responsible, since he it was who introduced Siguenau to an English girl working in the Embassy. He had known her for eight months: they were friends, and when the two young men found themselves on leave together in Paris in the last September of the War it was natural for Berthelin to take his friend to lunch with her. The next day he was recalled. Siguenau took the young Englishwoman out again, this time

alone. He was already in love, but he was uncertain. Who was she? He wrote to Berthelin. But before he had an answer he had proposed, and been accepted, and it was almost without pleasure he discovered that her family was as good as an ambitious young man needed. He would have preferred her—the only time in his life he admitted an unworldly impulse—to be a nobody. She was, however, penniless.

Why, Siguenau wondered, had Berthelin moved heaven and earth to stay in the army after the War? The shy brilliant young man who joined up in 1914 became a capable machine-gun officer; he was decorated three times for acts of cool skill and courage. The men trusted him. . . . Admirable—but why choose to stay in the army? I was tired to death of it long before 1918, Siguenau thought: if I found G.H.Q. boring, how infinitely duller and more unrewarding must the front line have been. It had puzzled him at the time—in 1919, when his friend came to ask him to use his influence not to get him out of the army quickly but to keep him in it. It still puzzled him. Berthelin was a devout Catholic . . . that perhaps explained it? Devotion to a cause—to any cause—was itself a weakness, a moral quirk. Anyone guilty of it might equally well be guilty of any other folly, such as choosing to remain a serving officer at a lower peace-time rank.

From July 1919 to July 1929, Berthelin was in Morocco and Indo-China. That year he resigned his commission. A month after Siguenau left Belfort for good Berthelin came back to it. His brother had sent for him. The family business—a factory making bolts and screws—was almost bankrupt. Edward Berthelin took it in hand, organised it, and in a year had put it on its feet. If I had waited, Siguenau thought, I should have gone in with him and stayed humbly in Belfort. Thank God I didn't.

He saw the train approaching. A man was leaning far out of a window towards the end, his arms stretched down. It was

exactly the gesture with which, clinging to a tree on the bank, he dragged his friend out of the river when they were both eight years old. The river was in flood. For ten minutes—more than a century—one child struggled to save the life of the other. Smaller and weaker than Siguenau, who clung desperately, ready rather than let go to try to pull him into the water, he worked himself by fractions of an inch back from the edge to the point at which he could hook his knee round the tree and use both arms to drag his friend on to the bank. Then he fainted. His left arm had been pulled out of its socket.

A warmth of love and liking filled Siguenau. He ran forward, threw both arms round Berthelin as he got down from the train, and kissed him. He was laughing and half crying.

Calmer, but moved, Berthelin looked at him.

"Your clothes fit you as well as ever."

"And you're as thin," Siguenau said, laughing. "But why have you shaved? I like you with a beard. You look as young as I expected. Why haven't you come before?"

"Where are we going?"

"Home," Siguenau said. "I drove into Strasbourg to fetch you."

Excited, as off his guard as a boy leaving school, he pointed out streets, monuments, the river. When they left Strasbourg behind and were driving along roads bordered with pear-trees in bud, he began to regain possession of his cooler mind. What is there so marvellous, he thought ironically, about a meeting between two men of forty-two, without an impulse in common? He felt a prick of that jealousy the War itself started in him—the jealousy, often diluted by feelings of condescension, which an office soldier felt for the serving officer. In Siguenau it had been diluted by his love for Berthelin.

"How is Blanche?"

"Ah, I forgot—you haven't seen her since then. Do you remember our lunch at Prunier's? Blanche was wearing your flowers and carrying mine, and that fool who was First Secretary at the Embassy asked her if she knew which of us she had married. . . . She's in great form."

"And Fanny?"

"Whom you've never seen at all." Siguenau smiled. "She's a monkey, a lovely one."

"She must be a year or two younger than my boy."

Berthelin's wife had been killed in an accident after only two years. None of the easy phrases that came readily enough to Siguenau's tongue were fit to be used for this. He was annoyed by feeling himself at a loss. The other did not notice the silence. He was so used to solitude that he did not expect his thoughts to be overheard and answered, even by a friend.

"I ought to have written to you about your wife."

Berthelin was surprised.

"Why should you? There was nothing anyone could say. If you had been there I should have talked to you. . . . She didn't die at once. She lived for a week, but so smashed up—her mind was clear—she wanted me to look after her, and I did. It wasn't simple. I didn't pray for her to go on living. I suppose you've never watched anything you love suffer? . . . Forgive me for talking about it. You're the one person it's natural for me to tell."

Siguenau did not answer. His real love for Berthelin took possession of him again, bringing with it a little of the pride he had always felt in being luckier than his friend. As children they had the same presents: two identical rulers or sheets of transfers were given to them, and the one Berthelin chose always turned out to have something wrong with it—there was a flaw in the wood: the transfers, instead of coming off neatly, fell to pieces. It was to be expected that Berthelin's

wife would die young. Nothing can happen to Blanche, he thought, smiling.

"You'll find Blanche a little changed. She's thinner. To tell you the truth, I only noticed it this morning, when she spoke about you. . . . Here we are. Get out. I'll leave the car here."

"It's a charming house—the sort of house I've always wanted to live in."

"Ah," Siguenau laughed. "Trust me to find the right place."

He pushed Berthelin in front of him into Blanche's room and watched the meeting between them, eager to see in his face the look of puzzled admiration—"Why hasn't yours broken?"—and envy. He was disappointed. Blanche chuckled, as she rarely did now, and made Berthelin turn slowly round.

"Oh, Edward, you still ruin every suit you wear, putting too many things in the pockets."

"You still turn your right foot in."

"I never noticed it," Siguenau said.

"But it's quite true. I do."

"Where is Fanny?" he asked. Without knowing why, he wanted to show Berthelin someone he had not seen before and had nothing in common with.

"Caroline Burckheim rang up and asked me to send her up to the château to tea. I let her go. I thought it would be nice to have Edward by himself for a little."

"A good idea," Siguenau said calmly. He was annoyed.

Berthelin looked round the room. A smile of amused recognition came on his face. He picked up a small Chinese figure, turning it upside-down. It was hollow. He felt inside it and drew out a creased fifty-franc note. Blanche snatched it from him.

"Oh, I'd forgotten."

"What is it?" asked her husband.

He laughed heartily at the story when Berthelin told it.

The first time Blanche met Berthelin, in Paris, in 1918, she had just lost her purse. They met at a luncheon party and her hostess lent her money to get back to her boarding-house. They met again, a week later, and this time it was her handbag, which had been stolen from her, containing the cheque for her salary and some loose money. Everyone in the room laughed at her, but she was or she pretended to be afraid. "I never lose my things," she told Berthelin: "this is a punishment for something." The next day when she was lunching with him he took her to a shop in the rue de la Boétie and bought her this worthless little figure, and stuffed the note into it.

"The theory was that if she kept it in her room she would never be without money: whatever ill-luck was on her track would be discouraged and give up."

"It worked," Blanche said gaily. "I didn't lose anything afterwards."

"Give it to me," Siguenau said.

But she refused vigorously. Folding the note she pushed it inside the figure and set it on her writing-table. She was laughing and rosy, and her husband noticed on her thumb a valueless ring he remembered seeing there the first day he met her and he had not noticed since.

"I mustn't give away my reserve fortune," she said.

"It's worth less than it was," Siguenau said.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SIGUENAU had to go back into Strasbourg that evening, to see Hoffmayer. When he left his house Blanche was putting on her coat to take Berthelin into the park. "We shall meet Fanny coming home," she said.

"You're just as likely to miss her."

"No," Blanche said. "When the light is going she always comes the same way, because a large bush she has to pass turns into a dog at this time. She noticed it when she was a little girl. She used to go to look at it out of politeness—He'll be expecting me, she always said. I suppose she does it now for the same reason I keep my fifty francs—to be on the safe side."

"She never told me about it," Siguenau said.

For some time, as he was driving into Strasbourg, he thought in a confused way that it is always the same with two women in the house—even though one of them is scarcely fifteen. They keep things to themselves, he thought; they shut doors in one's face. Then the importance of what he had to say to Hoffmayer began to assert itself, and he pushed aside his self-pity. It sank leaving a tide-mark in his mind. A rising excitement filled its place.

The negotiations with C had reached a point where, if anything was to be done, it must be done very soon. During the past six years the Burckheim ironworks had had strokes of luck—an order from America, from a Los Angeles millionaire who wanted a reproduction of Lamour's gateway at Nancy for a park he was laying out in imitation of Versailles—he wanted a dozen reproductions to be sure no one missed them: a contract with the Stockholm City Council: another

to supply nuts and bolts for the gun-turrets of the Maginot Line. This wave, gentle enough, was flattening out. The Bank, which until now had been satisfied with interest, was beginning to talk about repayment. Hoffmayer was worried. He had talked to Jules Reuss and without the least success to Burckheim. The Rhine Steel Works in the meantime had renewed, through a director of the French firm it was allied with, its confidential offer to bring money into the Burckheim works. But no longer on the same easy terms. An arrangement that, six years ago, would still have favoured the French side of the firm, had taken on the nature of an invasion. C was asking now for complete control: he was not willing any longer to share it with the French management: there must be a whole-hearted reorganisation, and the French manager who would nominally be in charge would take his orders from Cologne or Düsseldorf. As year by year C became more powerful—a year ago the Rhine works had married happily into the Hermann Goering Steel Works—he was less careful to talk of an alliance and he laid more emphasis on the bad state of the Burckheim works and the money it would cost him to modernise them. Siguenau was too ignorant about the works to know whether this was all true. He knew, since Burckheim had made a fearful scene about it, that there was no money to spare the year he took into his head to make a vin de paille. He had to give the idea up. He tormented his wife by blaming “those duns in Washington” for it.

The truth, Reuss had told Siguenau, was that the Burckheim works were well run but they were out of date. They needed new plant and fewer workmen. Those workers who were purely French—and therefore the least likely to overwork and submit to discipline—must be got rid of and their places filled by German-born Alsatians. This was in C’s terms. And it was C who rubbed in the importance of keeping Hoffmayer at the head of the firm—until the change-over had

been carried out. The new methods would show up less under an old manager, he would incur all the blame—"and afterwards a younger man can take his place."

Who? Reuss waved the question away when Siguenau asked him.

"All in good time," he said blandly: "you're in too great a hurry, my boy."

All Siguenau's efforts to interest René Hoffmayer in the idea of a German alliance had ended in the same way. He was not able to be frank, since Reuss had forbidden him to give away that he was in touch with C. The effect on Hoffmayer of talking to him in general terms was to make him yawn his head off.

To-day Reuss had given him permission to say what he liked. If Hoffmayer made signs of being sympathetic he must be shown certain letters. If he were hostile—"we shall have to decide to get rid of him, and put a man in his place who won't block the way."

"Yourself?" Siguenau said calmly.

"I? No." Reuss turned on and off rapidly his charming smile. "We shall need—during the—the readjustment—someone with authority and experience."

What is he getting out of it? Siguenau wondered. Money? Promises? He did not trust Reuss. That did not worry him; he believed that men are to be used, not trusted.

Hoffmayer was delighted to see him. This younger man was now the only creature to whom he could lend the love and kindness left on his hands. On Siguenau's birthday and at New Year he sent him a cheque, with exactly the letter he would have written to his son if he had had one. . . . "My dear boy, there is nothing an old fellow can do for the young except give them money. Everything else is an impertinence. Don't measure my affection for you by this meagre sum. Yours, René H."

This evening he had laid ready a small drawing by Schongauer, of a St. Catherine with the sly face of a schoolgirl.

"Please give this to Fanny."

"But it's valuable," Siguenau protested.

"Why should I want to give it to her if it were no good? I might have left it to her—and then you wouldn't have had anything to say. If you'd like her to have it it's silly to insist on my dying first."

Siguenau thanked him and took it. He looked at Hoffmayer, at his face on which a lifetime of disillusion and disappointment had written only decent words, and wondered whether the old fellow had made his will yet. Has he left everything to some nephew I never heard of, or am I going to be lucky? he wondered.

"It was good of you to let me come this evening."

"I'm always pleased to see you. But what do you want? I hope you haven't come for nothing."

"No," Siguenau said, with an ingenuous smile. "I've come because I'm worried. He—Honoré, I mean—is talking of fetching more truck-loads of soil from Burgundy for the vines. It will cost heaven knows what. I know the works have been doing badly—and I want to know whether you have any hopes for next year."

"None at all," Hoffmayer said.

"Then what—?"

Hoffmayer began to explain patiently—avoiding technicalities, which he knew Siguenau couldn't grasp—that there was only one thing left to do.

"... we must arrange with the Bank of Strasbourg to close down and sell the site to the harbour authorities, who will use it for extending their storage of petrol. Rather than force the Burckheim, of all works, into bankruptcy, the Bank will agree to lose part of its money. They've done everything possible. They brought a man here from the Creusot works to

advise them whether we could be made into a profitable arms works. The cost was too high. And since Europe wants arms and doesn't want fine ironwork nor—from us—nuts and bolts. . . ."

Siguenau listened with an air of extreme anxiety.

"I didn't know things were serious."

"Worse for me than for you," Hoffmayer said cheerfully. "You'll keep your job as bailiff. I shall be out of work."

"Does that worry you?"

"To tell you the truth, yes. . . . This house will have to be sold. . . . These rooms are my shell. I shall die of cold and shock."

"But, why," Siguenau said quickly, "don't you make advances to the German branch of the family? You told me yourself they've become enormously wealthy. Why don't you let me go to Cologne and see them—if you don't want to go yourself?"

"You've been nursing the thought of them for years, haven't you?" Hoffmayer said. He smiled indulgently.

"Well?"

Hoffmayer did not speak for a moment. Something icy and implacable crept into his face, as though he were dying already, or as though—he had never spoken about it to anyone—he were remembering the German corporal who came into his cell and told him, with the sharpest pleasure and curiosity, that he was to be shot.

"I detest the Germans," he said quietly. "It's not—as German professors who write to me pretend—because they are energetic, dissatisfied, ambitious. What I detest about them is their servility. They make a virtue of obeying men who would punish disobedience by killing them. The very injustices that make a Frenchman or an Englishman rush into the street or into Hyde Park, or form societies, or refuse to pay income tax, send a German into an ecstasy of self-sacrifice. It's

a disgusting habit. Civilised men think, sleep, make love, die, according to private laws, each man for himself. In Germany you'll find them teaching children to think like Germans, to sleep with their arms outside the covers like German warriors, to make German love. There's even a German way of dying, which is superior to all others. They're not a people, they're a tribe, with a tribal leader and loyalties. One can't meet them on equal terms any longer. The last German who was also a human being died more than a hundred years ago, in 1832. . . . I'm reasonable. I don't want to take the Rhine from them—even if that would make it more difficult for them to invade us, with their trick of defiling and looting. I only want them to go on murdering and torturing each other, in the concentration camps. That may—it's a poor hope, but what other have we?—use up their most characteristic energies. I'm afraid it's not enough. We know they're working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in the armaments factories. What are all these shells and aeroplanes for? Not to wipe out Jews, socialists, democrats. They're doing that on the cheap in Dachau. . . . Forgive me, I didn't intend to make a confession. . . . But you can see why I'm the last person to go begging in Cologne. The Cologne family might agree to put the firm on its legs—but it would be for their own benefit, not ours. Why should I put weapons in German hands? I don't know whether Honoré's feelings are as sharp as mine. Perhaps not. Perhaps one could persuade him. I certainly shall not."

He had been speaking in his familiar gentle voice, but with the severity of a young man. It was a minute before Siguenau recovered from his discomfort. He could only do it by pretending to himself that Hoffmayer was hysterical. His vanity, his weakest point, had been pricked.

"No doubt you're right," he said, laughing, "but what a

blow for Honoré when he has to close down. Has he any idea?"

"He believes that Providence or the government will step in at the last minute," Hoffmayer said, with a shrug.

"The truth about Honoré," Siguenau said viciously, "is that he is bone-lazy, selfish, vindictive, and believes the country ought to be grateful to him."

"And he is shrewd, sensible, and a lover of our France as well."

Hoffmayer had thought it worth while to raise his voice. When he saw that the younger man was disconcerted he rested a hand on his arm and said gently,

"As much as you, as much as me. Only France matters, after all."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

WHEN he heard—by telephone from Hoffmayer—that the Germans were marching into the Rhineland, Honoré left the château at once to drive into Strasbourg. He would scarcely give Caroline time to pack a few clothes. His instinct was to run as quickly as possible towards the enemy. On the way in they passed a great many well-to-do citizens of Strasbourg whose instincts were taking them at the same speed in exactly the opposite direction. Honoré roared with laughter. He leaned out of his car to shout encouraging remarks.

"Hurry up, the Boches are after you! . . . Hullo, is that you, Wirbel? A good thing you bought that car. Run, old fellow, run!"

Embarrassed, his wife smiled and nodded to Mrs. Wirbel and to their daughter and son-in-law crouching at the back of the car among piles of luggage, only to draw looks of hatred and disdain far bitterer than any Honoré received. It was her first taste of that impulse the French feel to turn on the stranger within their gates—any stranger will serve—in the shock of danger. It is natural—and the French have a great deal of nature.

As soon as he reached the Burckheim house in Strasbourg, Honoré began ringing up his friends, delighted when he found one of them packing up to leave, more than a little disappointed when another said drily, "Leave? Why should I leave? We've at least another couple of years in hand before they march into Strasbourg!"

He was bubbling with energy drawn from the peasants and soldiers and peasant-soldiers to whom in bone he belonged.

At least thirty of his seventy-seven years had dropped off him. He went out, called at his bank—where he said he had come to see that his overdraft had been put in the safe, and heard that fifty million francs had been drawn out of the banks already and the leak was still running—and sat in a café in the Place Kléber drinking, for an hour while he was still excited, then for another hour because he felt his energy beginning to leave him. He was very tired when he reached home.

He slept, woke in the evening at six and took a bath into which he emptied a flask of his wife's eau-de-cologne, and ate with a good appetite. His mind felt very lucid.

While he was in his bank the manager, an old friend of his, had rung up the office in Paris and asked for the latest news. "What are the English doing? . . . Nothing? . . . Well, what will they do? . . ." He put the receiver down and looked sardonically at Burckheim. "He says the English will do nothing. He rang up London to ask, and what do you think the reply was? *'After all, the Germans are only marching into Germany. What do you expect us to do about that?'* My God, Burckheim, what an ally!"

Between his first and second bottle of Riesling he repeated this to his wife. Caroline had not been out of the house. The housekeeper, an elderly woman with whom she had been friendly since the day she entered the house as Honoré's wife, had said bitterly to her, "I suppose you will go back to the States now?" She would not run the risk of more snubs like this and stayed indoors.

"Well, and what did you expect them to do?" she said.

"I? I didn't expect anything from the English. They sit there in their overcrowded island, hardly room to turn round, the whole place stinking of leather and cabbage, fog everywhere, and pretend not to see what's going on. One day, when the Boche is right on them, they'll rub the fog out of their eyes and ring for the police. Pray God the police haven't

gone to sleep, too. The trouble is we're forced to stick to the English, and do what they do. They've got us. They and your countrymen, my angel, tricked us neatly in 1919. Give up the Rhine, they said, and we'll see you're all right. Like the mug he was, old Papa Clemenceau let them get away with it, handed back to the Germans the chance to invade us again—and then?—and then? The English and the psalm-smiting Americans kept their promise, of course! Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. In France we know what American promises are worth—tuppence on the can!"

"Honoré, I always said we oughtn't to have run away," Caroline said. She tried to smile.

Burckheim looked more than usually like a countryman with a bad-tempered cow to sell. He rubbed his hands and smiled, and prodded a thick bony finger into her bare arm.

"I know what I'm talking about. This is 1936. We've been pretending for nearly eighteen years that France is safe. The pretence is over. The Germans have sent their soldiers marching into the Rhineland. They're at the other side of a bridge from here. And what have we done? Have we mobilised? Not a single class. Not one. You see? The whole world, and Germany, sees. Our first line of defense, the demilitarised Rhineland, has been seized and we don't lift a finger. Because we're strong? Who believes that? We're so weak we allow the Boches to march up to our door and bang the knocker. Every government in Europe, the most wide-awake, the Serbians, I forget what ridiculous name they go under now, the most high-thinking and nervous, the Danes and the Swedes, has made a note of it and drawn the correct conclusions. Just look at the French, they say; we thought they were leading us, and now look at them—in the ditch!"

"It can't be so bad."

"If I were an Austrian who disliked the Nazis," Burckheim said solemnly, "I should begin at once taking my money

abroad. And if I were the President of Czechoslovakia I should make the best terms I could with Hitler to-morrow. There'll be no help for either of them when their turn comes. We've been shown up. Security?—tuppence on the can!"

He poured himself a full glass from the third bottle.

"Still, I think it'll last my time," he said in a bland voice.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HIS first day in Strasbourg almost did for Burckheim. The next day he had a bad attack of gout, so bad he could not be taken back to the château and had to lie up in Strasbourg. He was very angry. In Burckheim the vines were being cleared, and he was certain that something would be done badly. Every time Caroline came into his bedroom he sent her to write or telephone to Siguenau with instructions. His temper was frightful. Watching what she had to put up with, her housekeeper forgave her for being a stranger who could clear off and observe from a safe distance as soon as the trouble started, and brought her up nourishing milk soup and glasses of lime tea. "Drink these," she said warmly, "you need well-scoured kidneys and a warm stomach to face what has to be faced—war or no war, the Rhine here or the Rhine there."

A fortnight went. Honoré was beginning to be better. One day Jules Reuss came, and instead of handing the letters to Caroline as usual, he was taken into Burckheim's room. He found him sitting in his chair in the window looking out into the courtyard. A glass and a half-emptied bottle of wine were on the table beside him.

"You know, Reuss," he said at once, "my doctor, poor fool, he comes from Nantes and stinks of herrings, told me not to drink. What does he imagine I can do? The human body needs liquid. As pants the hart, you know."

Reuss smiled, with an air of simplicity and good-nature.

"And honest wine can't hurt you."

"I know that. . . . Well, what's going on? A nice mess your

friends at the Quai d'Orsay have walked into. Never get it off their shoes. What?"

Reuss had a letter in his pocket from a former colleague: ". . . at the Cabinet meeting Mandel wanted to mobilise. Scarcely anyone supported him. Even Gamelin wasn't eager. No one could be sure what England would do if we had mobilised. And think of the money! Now some generals are saying the Boches had orders to withdraw if we marched. . . . Who knows if it's true? We may have thrown away our last chance."

He did not repeat this to Burckheim. It would only irritate him, and make him more difficult to handle. No doubt he was failing mentally—but he was still shrewd: the ingrained shrewdness, hardness, and stubbornness of a peasant was doubled in him by his sense of privilege.

"The fatal mistake was signing a pact with the Soviets," he said calmly. "What use is it? You can't trust a communist."

Burckheim shrugged his shoulders. Russia was too far off, too monstrous, to interest or frighten him. And someone had told him that Riesling vines transplanted to the Crimea produce a wine tasting of dung and pitch.

"What's it matter?"

"We should have allied ourselves with Germany against Russia," his secretary said. "We should have been safe. What is the use of Sarraut broadcasting that he won't allow Strasbourg to be exposed to German guns? We are exposed! . . . What good is Russia to us? Or England? Do you know what they say in the English newspapers? That we, we French, ill-treated English soldiers during the war! It's like the English. . . . Let's help ourselves, I say. French and Germans together could cock a snook at the rest of the world."

Without troubling to hide it Burckheim yawned. He showed the sound blackened teeth at the back of his jaw. Not one was missing.

"No doubt you're right," he said, still yawning.

Disconcerted, Reuss said hurriedly,

"At any rate, we must get rid of our communists at home. They're making trouble in the works."

Burckheim had closed his eyes. He half opened them, to look at Reuss with lazy irony.

"How you keep on at me. You're worse than a blue-bottle."

"It's very serious. I have proof that a secret committee, all Reds, was formed three months ago—they're going to give trouble."

"Why don't you inform Mr. Hoffmayer?"

"I have informed him."

"Well?"

"Mr. Hoffmayer," Reuss said delicately, "is more interested in his manuscripts than in the ironworks. He leaves everything to an under-manager, and I have proof that the fellow is corrupt. He is a Jew—which is the same thing. If Mr. Hoffmayer kept his eyes open——"

He saw that he had said enough. If he went on, Burckheim would be forced to snub him. Satisfied, he held his tongue, and listened with an air of deep respect to Burckheim's story of a banquet during the French Wine Week in Paris in 1922: he had heard it forty or fifty times and knew to an eyelash the look of greed and triumph in the old man's eyes when he reached the success of the Alsatian wine offered with the Loire salmon.

Just as he was leaving Burckheim said abruptly,

"Communists in the works, eh? Well, we shall see."

"I doubt whether it will be any use speaking to Mr. Hoffmayer," Reuss said.

The same day, in the evening, Edward Berthelin had his first meeting with Burckheim. He had heard already, from people he met in Strasbourg, the stories of Burckheim's courage at the time of his cousin's disgrace, and about his generosity. He was eager to see this great soul.

His first glimpse of Burckheim astonished him. No one had thought to add that the old man had a smooth ruddy skin, and eyes as clear and without second thoughts as a child's. Berthelin realised now that he would have been distressed if Burckheim had looked more like a business man and less like a good soldier, with the innocence of a soldier.

"Glad to see you, my boy. Sit down. I've been held by the leg or I should have sent for you earlier. I know all about you. Your mother's cousin was a second cousin of my uncle, my father's side of the family. Well, cousin Edward, so you left the army. That doesn't surprise me—but why did you stay in it after the War? I can't understand that."

"It suited me," Berthelin answered. "I was fighting fit. The thought of an office disgusted me."

He did not care to say that what held him to the army was his reluctance to lose the only decent belief of all those he had taken with him in 1914, when he was called up, his belief not in man but in men, in the men he had seen killed, and in those who remained to the end, to the day, foggy and windless, smelling of murdered trees, when the order to cease fire was given and the men who were with him looked at him and each other and said nothing. This intimacy, the sense of bone touching bone as if in the earth, was not lightly to be thrown away. Although he was married, and loved his wife, he knew he would try to stay in the army. The least bearable day of his life was not when his wife died but the day, in 1929, when he left it for good. With everything about it that is vexing, stupid, narrow, it is a better life than the life of banks,

business houses, factories. At least in an army you needn't suspect the man nearest you of picking your pocket.

"I agree with you," exclaimed Burckheim.

He had taken to the younger man—by the same instinct that made him a good buyer of horses. He had known at sight that Berthelin was disinterested. A little rigid, perhaps—too many scruples or too good a Catholic. But—what a relief!—he didn't want anything. And there was not the least danger of his jerking a balance-sheet out of his pocket. He was a gentleman, thank God, not a secretary.

"Are you married?" he asked brusquely. Perhaps this too hastily adopted cousin wanted a job for his brother-in-law.

"Yes. My wife died—fifteen years ago."

"Ah," Burckheim said.

He showed no interest. The polite remark he had been going to make was laughed out of hearing by Geneviève. She jumped down from the window-seat where she used to watch for him; her black hair fell over her eyes, and she lifted her hand meaning to push it back, then shook it across her face. . . . "How late you are, Honoré. No, I don't want you". . . . She jumped into his arms.

"You can't know how a woman is going to turn out," he said. "She might have been tiresome when she was older."

Berthelin looked at him in surprise. Rubbing his hand over his face, the old man brought himself with an effort to remember what they had been talking about.

"Have you any children?"

"One son—Robert."

"How old?"

"Seventeen."

"Almost war age," Burckheim said. His expression changed suddenly, becoming livelier and angry. "The damned fools! Why didn't they mobilise? The Germans would have tumbled over backwards to get out and the English would have

hurried after us for their share of the credit. The English will always be high-minded in their own interest. Do you know why we lost our chance? Because we thought Paris might be bombed. As if it mattered! We could have destroyed the German planes, wiped out Essen, Düsseldorf, Cologne, brought down Hitler and marched into Berlin only eighteen years late. What a chance! Now we've got nothing—not even a military alliance with the English, blast them.”

His energy died as suddenly as it had sprung up. Leaning back in his chair he looked at Berthelin with sly interest. He was delighted by his air of respect.

Actually Berthelin was passionately pro-English, excusing all their backslidings on the ground of their ignorance. No great nation has ever been so immune to intelligence and sound in instinct. He would not contradict Burckheim. He was too deeply moved by his sincerity and moral force.

He got up to go.

“Are you leaving me?” Burckheim said in a weak voice. “Come again, won’t you? I’m lonely.”

The door opened and Caroline came in.

“Who is that woman?” Burckheim said. He looked at her, frowning. “Oh, it’s you, is it? I suppose you’ve been resting or gossiping. This is Edward Berthelin. He’s been telling me about his son. Why haven’t we had sons?”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

As soon as he could Burckheim went back to the château. He was bored in Strasbourg. Every friend who called on him ended by discussing the intentions of Germany.

"Why give yourself the trouble?" he grumbled. "Of course they'll come again. What did you expect? But we've got a few more years, and my vines are in fine shape."

He got up at six, before light, and was in the field with the earliest of his workers. In the clear air he felt his mind rubbing off the skin of the past. As he looked at the new leaves their pattern coloured off on his eyes; he saw a world of delicate ribs, covered with down like a wolf-cub, and toothed. A tough rind round his heart—he heard it creak when he stooped—split across, and he discovered below it a gentleness, a warmth, that belonged to his childhood. The finger he laid on the reddish stem of the leaf was a child's finger. There was no sentiment in his happiness: he did not identify himself with the earth pierced on all sides by strong roots. Vines, earth, hills, were sharply separate from him: he delighted in them because for generations a Burckheim had used them.

A thought darkened the new clearness of his brain. I only needed a son.

Towards ten o'clock he was hungry, starving. He was two hours' walk from the château and an hour from the village. He turned down towards the village, meaning to go into the Dauphin, but changed his mind and went to his daughter's house instead. She was at the well in the courtyard when he came in. He saw her for a moment before she turned round. Stooping over the well she seemed a young woman, because in stories and in the Bible it is always the young women who

go for water. Burckheim spoke to her. She straightened herself slowly, turning to him a face much older than his own. She was embarrassed. She knew his voice had reached every corner of the courtyard and that by now every half-open shutter and blind had its ear and eye. She never knew what he would say.

"I'm hungry," Burckheim said.

"I can give you some soup," she said hesitantly. "It's thin, though."

"Give me some. It'll do."

He followed her, her feet shuffling in bast slippers, up the dark narrow staircase to her rooms. It smelled of linseed and old powdery wood, and the sunlight stripped off every pretence of self-assurance. Burckheim had been here before, but it had never struck him until to-day that this was a poor place for a woman who was half a Burckheim. He looked at her. No, she's a peasant, he thought; I couldn't have done with her.

He took the basin of soup and broke his bread into it, and began to eat greedily. It tasted mostly of leek but it was warm, and he had got it for nothing.

"It's not bad," he said in a mild voice.

When he got up to go he said curtly, "You come up to the house this evening and bring a basket. I'll give you half a dozen bottles to take home. You look as though you could do with it. You're yellow."

He went home and forgot her until she came into the library after dinner, holding her basket in front of her for protection. He was dozing, and started awake.

"God bless my soul. What do you want?"

"You told me to come," Anne-Marie said drily. "I don't want any of your wine."

"Nonsense." He rang, and told the servant to fetch up the bottles. "You see, I was reading."

He groped behind him for his book, and held it out to her open at a page covered across the margins with notes in his

handwriting. But they had nothing to do with Aeneas, they were notes about last year's vintage. Anne-Marie looked at the page without seeing it. Her mind was busy with the sentence she had rehearsed during most of the day.

"Why don't you take Henry into the business?" She was trembling and sat down. "I'm getting old. Yesterday I was fifty-seven. I want him nearer to me than Metz."

"Why ever should I?" Burckheim said, scandalised.

"He's clever," Anne-Marie said. She did not dare to say, "He's your grandson."

Burckheim shook his head. He felt a sober repugnance to bringing Henry Eschelmer into the ironworks. If there's anything of our family in him, he thought, it's been overlain by Germany—that ugly German father of his. Another feeling pushed past this—his grief that he had no children he could be proud of even if they quarrelled with him as he used to quarrel with his father.

"Why, if you had to marry a customs official, did you pick a German one?" he growled.

"What has that to do with it?"

"More than enough."

Anne-Marie went out, slowly, her body dragged at by the weight of the wine she had not asked for. She met Caroline on the staircase. Before the younger woman could open her mouth, Anne-Marie said jauntily,

"Henry sends his respects. He's coming to stay with me shortly, he's a good son, he writes once a week and tells me his news, the celebrated people he meets and all that. No, you couldn't say he neglects me."

"I'm very glad," Caroline said gently.

She watched the older woman go down the stairs. It was as though a pebble made up of courage, patience, spite, were falling from step to step. She is more at home here than I am, Caroline thought.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SIGUENAU always took care to find out as much as possible about the family and upbringing of a colleague. It is useful. He knew, as soon as he learned that Reuss was the son of a postman in Ammerschwih, that there were days when he was proud of coming from the people and days when he would like to marry into an aristocratic family. He knew that the anxiety with which Reuss added franc to franc and put the whole lot for safety in Sweden and America was partly the memory of hard cheap boots and only partly ambition. He had his boots made for him in Strasbourg now and they did not give away that his feet had been squeezed out of shape when he was a child. He dressed carefully; and sitting behind a desk he was impressive, with his large head. The minute he stood up you saw that below the waist he was stunted. His engaging smile and voice were meant to keep your attention on his face.

It was easy for Siguenau to touch his vanity, so easy that he made the mistake of thinking that vanity was the strongest of Reuss's instincts. It was only an irritant. He was far too shrewd and supple to let his vanity drive him. He had determined to become a power in the Burckheim works because he wanted, above all, to be safe. Siguenau could not grasp that—his own passion for conspiracy gave him the excitement he needed, and he cared very little about the future of the iron-works. He was only vexed that Hoffmayer, as he thought, had made a fool of him. Who would have expected him to care whether French or German money took possession of the firm? Siguenau had never guessed that a man can cling sin-

cerely to a belief, to something he cannot make love to or show off. It was this blinded him to the sincerity of Reuss's passion for Alsace.

He spoke about Hoffmayer to Reuss with the most brutal dislike.

"The man's senile. We ought to get rid of him."

"You don't mind doing that?"

"Why on earth should I?"

Reuss lifted his hands a little—a gesture dismissing everything he knew about Hoffmayer's kindness to Siguenau. He himself would have felt a certain obligation—but he was not surprised or shocked by Siguenau's callousness. He really is incredibly vain, he thought; Hoffmayer has trodden on his heel.

"I agree with you," he said smoothly. "We must get rid of Hoffmayer—and replace him by someone more alert and—and receptive. We must do it at once."

"What is the position of the firm?" asked Siguenau. He sat bolt upright, to give himself the air of a sound man of business.

"As a matter of fact—it's temporarily not so bad. Mr. Burckheim has been remarkably clever. In the last two days he has persuaded a personal friend—a Strasbourg man who has been living in Chicago—to lend him a large sum. I say large, but all it will do—when you remember that the equipment of the works is out of date and worn—is to fill a few holes. It puts off the evil day. That's all."

"For how long?"

"A year. Three years. It depends entirely on the state of trade. We're doing a little work now for the Moselle Steel Company of Metz."

"How did Burckheim persuade his friend to give him the money?" Siguenau asked.

Reuss smiled.

"I think—by a subtle mingling of pathos and patriotism. He's really remarkable at it. He has a natural genius. . . . Did you ever hear that in 1919 he gave away the entire war profits of the firm? Of course you did. Everyone has heard about it."

"Yes. The day I came to Strasbourg, in 1929, the story had just leaked out."

"Do you know who prepared the leak?" Reuss said. He narrowed his eyes. "Mr. Burckheim himself."

"Really!" Siguenau laughed. "Are you certain?"

"Absolutely certain. He was just going to make wage-cuts, and he thought he would be able to put them across quietly, under cover of the cheers."

"Marvellous," Siguenau said. His eyes sparkled. "Still, you know—he did give a sum of money to the Government in 1919. That was a real sacrifice. Why did he do it?"

"He may have had reasons. Or it may have been genuine—a genuine impulse. It doesn't surprise me that when he had done a noble deed he wanted to be repaid for it. It's perfectly natural."

"Everything one didn't expect from another human being is thoroughly natural," Siguenau exclaimed.

His sudden passion surprised Reuss. He waited to see whether the other man would give away what was in his mind. But Siguenau had become calm, almost bored. Very likely he did not know himself why he had been excited.

"You said on the telephone you had someone up your sleeve who could take Hoffmayer's place," Reuss said. "Who is it?"

Siguenau appeared to hesitate. A strange look of indecision and annoyance crossed his face, as though he had put his hand in his pocket to pay for a purchase and found nothing there but a hole. He stood up, walked over to a certain picture where he could catch a reflection of himself, and stared

intently. He must have been reassured: he turned round and said in a placid voice,

"Edward Berthelin."

"But—does he want a job?"

"No, he has his own firm, in Belfort. But it's a small affair beside the Burckheim ironworks. I think he could be persuaded."

Reuss considered the idea. He had seen Berthelin half a dozen times, when he came to the château, and he was amused by his admiration for Honoré Burckheim. It was clear he had formed an idea of the old man which was precisely the one Burckheim had of himself. The warmth a subaltern can feel for an elderly colonel whom he trusts came into Berthelin's voice when he spoke about Burckheim. He is a romantic, thought Reuss.

"I should have said he was obstinate."

"Obstinate? Edward?" Siguenau smiled widely. "What nonsense. Don't forget I was brought up with him. I know him thoroughly. He used to run errands for me when we were at school. I can do anything with him."

Blanche Siguenau at thirty-nine had the beauty of two ages, of a girl and of an old woman. Her skin was not lined, but every place where age would set a hollow, temples, cheeks, the sides of her throat, was marked by a light shadow, as though the sculptor's thumb had passed across it. Her hair, which she had never cut, and wore plaited round the crown of her head, was beginning to lose its colour, like corn faded by the sun. She had once merely been beautiful; she was now charming.

She enjoyed living in Burckheim. She could fill her day with innumerable small activities, so that each day was as

timeless as it is to a child and she was never bored. She rode, gardened, dried herbs for the different teas, made jellies of wild fruit, redecorated rooms. When Siguenau talked of taking her for a change to Strasbourg she made excuses. She let him go alone, and to Paris. She knew he had brief love-affairs in both cities, and she chose not to be brushed by them. They were unimportant.

This morning when he came back from the château she saw he was restless. She expected he would make an excuse to stay away for a few days, and began turning over in her mind the number of shirts he would want for a week in Strasbourg.

"Where is Edward?" he asked when he had been in a few minutes.

"In Strasbourg. He told you this morning he was going in."

"I'd forgotten. . . . Is he enjoying his holiday, do you think?"

"I'm sure he is," Blanche said, smiling.

"What does he do all day, after you come in from your ride? You're not riding too far, I hope. You overdo it."

"It's so nice to have someone to ride with. And Fanny likes him."

"Oh, you take Fanny with you, do you?"

"Why, Ernest, you know she always rides for an hour before her tutor comes out here. Usually Edward and I go again during the day. And he reads in his room. Or I drag him out for a walk. I'm sure he's not bored."

"I hope not. . . . Never mind about him. I've been talking to Jules Reuss, and I'm not altogether satisfied. I have a feeling that he interferes far too much. For instance, I've given permission for another boy to be taken on in the stables, and Reuss spoke to me about it this morning—asked me if I thought we could afford it. Damned impudence. I'm allowed so much, and so long as I don't run into debt what business is it of his what I spend the money on? He needs my help to

handle Honoré—and in all sorts of ways—but I manage the estate, and I must have a free hand. How long have we been here—nearly seven years?—time enough for me to know what I can do. If I had a freer hand I could do more.”

He was walking up and down the room, frowning with impatience. His wife disapproved of these moods; they always ended in trouble when he began actively getting rid of a man who bored him or stood in his way. She had no real knowledge of the relations between him and Reuss: he had always talked as though Reuss depended on him. It might in reality be the other way round. And if it were—how dangerous for him to begin intriguing against the personal secretary, who must surely be able to influence old Burckheim. Looking at him, she thought, He’s unmanageable, or at least I can’t manage him: why can’t we lead simpler lives? Suddenly her face cleared.

“Why don’t you talk to Edward about it?” she cried. “He’s always so sensible and cool. Do talk to him. He can advise you far better than I can.”

Siguenau stood still. He put his arm round her shoulder and stared at her as though he hoped to see the inside of her skull through her eyes.

“You have a very high opinion of Edward, haven’t you?” he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"MY DEAR René," Caroline Burckheim said, "I can't think of anything this evening except that I'm old. I'm forty-nine. At home, I should get myself made president of a club or learn tap-dancing, but here I am in a country where women don't run together in clubs and only dance for pleasure, and I have no special talents, no children—there's nothing I can do. I looked at my foot when I was stepping into the bath and noticed that the skin underneath is glazed and the veins at the side swollen, it's an old woman's foot. My body feels heavy when I lie down. And yet I'm not any more resigned or honest than I was. I still expect something to happen every day, I tell lies because I'm afraid, and to save people's feelings. How much older do you suppose I shall have to be before I give up expecting to be made happy and don't care what people think?" She laughed gently. "I'm disappointed in my life."

"Wait until you are really old," Hoffmayer said. "When you're seventy you'll be taking a long view of the world and you won't notice your own mistakes. In three years I shall be seventy. Already I find I don't care very much about the failure of my books and the collapse of Europe, and the other tragedies I used to think mattered. It's always the same with people like me. We begin by wanting to be famous, then infallible, and end by being thankful not to have been bored the whole time."

"Would you have been happier if I had married you when you were in love with me?"

"I should for a time."

"But not now?"

"There's a great deal to be said for being alone," Hoffmayer answered. "If I want to scratch myself I do."

"How disgusting you are."

"Heavens, I thought I was being delicate enough even for an American woman."

Caroline struck the arm of her chair, with the quick anger of her Boston grandfather.

"Don't laugh at me, René. . . . Would you have been happier if you had had time to become a great scholar, if you hadn't to earn your living by looking after Honoré's iron-works?"

"No," Hoffmayer said at once. "I've always wanted a little power. The control of the works gives me just enough of that."

"You don't want to resign?"

"Certainly not. Why do you ask?"

Caroline did not answer. She had a suspicion that Honoré would jump at an excuse to get rid of his step-brother. But René gave him no excuse; he was experienced, competent, and the bankers who were the chief creditors of the firm trusted him. She had never discovered why Honoré disliked him. To penetrate Honoré's frankness and simplicity to the motives beyond them was beyond her courage. She would rather admire him than pull him to pieces. But she would like to warn René that he might be in trouble. She did not know how to do it.

"I've often wondered about that man Reuss," she said hesitantly. "He's ambitious. And I should think unscrupulous."

"You think he'd like to push me out and take over my job? My dear Caroline, your husband isn't a fool. He knows that Reuss couldn't run an ironworks. He hasn't any experience."

"I don't think Reuss likes you."

"I know quite well he doesn't. But what does it matter?"

"He has a great deal of influence over Honoré."

Hoffmayer laughed at her kindly.

"Don't get ideas into your head. Honoré and I have known each other too long. I know his faults . . . but I can count on him not to listen to lies about me. After all, when we were boys, he would thrash me himself but he didn't allow anyone else to thrash me. Even though he wouldn't admit I was one of the family. . . . And you're forgetting something. I should hear at once if Honoré began complaining about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I should hear about it from Ernest Siguenau. I know Honoré talks freely to him. He'd warn me instantly."

Caroline looked at him with shrewd pity. She did not suspect Siguenau of anything worse than egotism and a desire to show off—faults so common they can be taken for granted. She was sorry for her friend only because he couldn't get along without believing he was needed by someone. He was giving Siguenau all his most valuable possessions one after another.

"You're fond of him, aren't you?"

"Yes, he's like a son," Hoffmayer said simply.

"I don't admire him so much as that."

"Oh, I haven't any illusions about him," Hoffmayer laughed. "He's neither very brilliant nor very steady. He does silly things. For one thing, I know he's been corresponding with our Cologne relatives. Probably he imagined he would bring off a success of some sort—an offer of money—goodness knows. He's too inexperienced to know what use they could make of him. He isn't far-seeing. But he's generous, affectionate, honest."

"Honoré would be furious if he knew he'd been writing to the German Burckheims."

"But I could count on your not telling him," Hoffmayer said curtly. "You'll hold your tongue, won't you?"

She was vexed.

"Of course I shall. I don't want to harm your—your son."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

BURCKHEIM had spent the morning with his personal secretary. For once he had listened to every word Reuss said. As soon as he began yawning Reuss jumped to another part of his report, so that the old man was interested again and attended. Reuss had made this same report, the figures only changed, scores of times during the past seven or eight years. He had never, before to-day, managed to get to the end of it. Usually Burckheim told him to leave it on the table and go away—and that ended it.

Two things had happened the day before, about which Reuss knew nothing. Burckheim had visited the ironworks—his first visit for a year—and a new foreman had asked him what business he had there. And, in his club, he had to listen to a long account of René Hoffmayer's cleverness in settling a dispute that threatened to spread to other works. He drove back to the château turning over in his mind ways in which he could punish his step-brother for being competent and loyal.

From Reuss's report he gathered that the works would show a small profit on the year.

"Considering the difficulties in which the firm was twelve months ago—" Reuss was saying.

"If Mr. Hoffmayer expects me to go on borrowing money for him he must be told his mistake," Burckheim said.

He ignored as if he had never made them his step-brother's passionate arguments against propping the firm up with loans. The cold hatred in his voice astonished Reuss. This was the first moment when he realized that there was something per-

sonal in Burckheim's coolness to his step-brother. He was not simply bored by Hoffmayer's long painstaking reports: he hated Hoffmayer. Why the devil haven't I noticed it before? Reuss thought. His obtuseness vexed him. For years he had taken for granted the strength of the ties between Burckheim and his step-brother—and now he found them eaten through. It made everything easier.

He was still swallowing this when Burckheim got up and moved to the door.

"Time for lunch," he said pleasantly. "My wife has gone into Strasbourg, and I sent them to fetch Siguenau. We'll lunch together. . . . Ah, there you are, my boy," he shouted, at the sight of Siguenau on the staircase. "Come along, come along, I want a change. Reuss here has been driving me the whole morning—without telling me the one thing I want to know—Am I or am I not going to add to the stables? If you can get that out of him I'll thank you."

Reuss smiled coldly.

When they were at the table Siguenau told a story he had heard in the village the day before, and sent the old man into fits of silent laughter. That's something I can't do, Reuss thought drily. He depends on me, though he doesn't know it, but he likes Siguenau. Which of us is going to do better out of it?

Burckheim expected his guests to eat as though they were famished—of foie gras, trout from the Bruche, chicken cooked with wine and bay leaves—and drink glass for glass with him. He sent for bottles of the wine kept for formal dinners and celebrations.

"What d'you think of it, eh?" he asked Siguenau.

"Admirable—perfect."

"And that dry stick, that fool, would rather drink claret."

"Who, sir?" Reuss asked.

"Why, my step-brother—works manager—ape." Burckheim

refilled his own glass. "Y'know, he thinks he knows everything. He thinks he's a man of destiny. Wha-at? You don't know as much about him as I do. I've seen him when no one else was there, when it was a matter of life and death, and he—well, never mind about him, but the truth is he's a stick."

He's not really drunk, Reuss thought; there's something more here than jealousy. Watching Burckheim's eyes, he saw a shadow like a fox slipping between the nerves: it came out of the past and went back into it; the old man's stealthy vindictive glance followed it.

"I'm told," Reuss said, "that the workmen respect Mr. Hoffmayer. They say he knows what he's doing."

"He sucks up to them," Burckheim said.

"The real point is," Siguenau said gaily, "does he deliver the goods? Can we afford to build new stables this year or not? After all, why hasn't the firm got armaments orders? Surely you ought to get something better than the crumbs dropped by the Moselle Steel people?"

"I've said so all along." Burckheim looked up in anger. "I'm not to blame for anything that goes wrong in the firm. It's been in my step-brother's hands. I don't interfere with my—my subordinates in their work. I do my own duty and expect them to do theirs."

Siguenau watched him with a look of affectionate pity. He began an impulsive speech, checked himself, and seemed horribly embarrassed.

"Excuse me," he stammered, "I—I ought not to repeat things said to me in confidence."

Burckheim narrowed his eyes. He had drunk more than the younger men between them, but he was sober. He drank to clear his brain.

"What are you talking about, my dear boy?" he said quietly. "If it has any bearing on what we've discussed, you must show it up. Come. What is it?"

Siguenau leaned forward. He rested his elbow on the table and covered his eyes. He looked as though he were going through an agony of indecision.

Reuss watched him with curiosity. His own skull felt as though it had been stretched; the words spoken by the other two knocked on it like the blows of a woodpecker: he had the greatest difficulty in attending. He was a moderate drinker, and the wine sent up with his meals—taken in his own room—was not of this vigour.

"Come, out with it," Burckheim repeated, with a touch of impatience.

"It's not very pleasant," Siguenau said in a low voice. "I was recalling something Cousin René said to me two or three weeks ago."

"Well?"

"We were talking about the ironworks, and the—the state of trade—and all that. René said he really thought you believed the Government ought to step in and save you from going bankrupt—you were too lazy to save yourself—I—well, that was all. I got the impression he didn't intend to exert himself."

Reuss was suddenly sober. A jet of water turned on him would not have brought him to his senses so sharply as this unexpected treachery. Was there a better word for it? Determined as he now was to get rid of Hoffmayer, he would never have asked Siguenau to help him in this way. Such lack of scruple, such indecency, shocked him. He sat and watched without trying to take a hand in it.

Burckheim's expression was one of deep sadness.

"I never did trust the fellow," he said simply.

"I ought not to have spoken."

"On the contrary, my dear boy—it was your obvious duty." Burckheim had lowered his head. He was looking down at his fist on the table, as though expecting it to act for him.

"The real trouble," he said calmly, "is that one can't easily replace him. Can you think of anyone we could get hold of quickly?"

Watching Siguenau furtively, Reuss saw a shadow cross his face. It was brief, and it had gone before he began to speak.

"I know the very man."

"Really," Burckheim said heavily. "Who?"

"Edward Berthelin."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

RATHER than invite his step-brother to the château, Burckheim drove into Strasbourg to see him; and, to put Hoffmayer more than ever in the wrong, he left them to finish racking off the new wine without his help. If something went wrong it would be Hoffmayer's fault. His wife went with him. If she had known why he was going she would have stayed at home, but he had pretended he wanted to discuss policy.

She was not surprised when he told her that on no account was she to ask René to dine with them. She shrugged her shoulders. Every meal René had shared with them since the War had been spoiled by a quarrel—started deliberately by Honoré—about the wine they were drinking. They're both childish about it, she thought: it couldn't do René any harm to pretend that Alsatian wines are as good as Bordeaux. She had once said so to him, and been snubbed.

"Very well, Honoré," she said calmly. "I won't ask him to dine with us. But do you want to talk to him after dinner?"

"I suppose you meant to sit gabbling with yourself?"

"I usually do go and see him, while you—read."

Burckheim was annoyed. "I want to get back in the morning," he said, frowning. "I have no time to waste on the fellow. I shall talk to him to-night."

He went to the library after dinner. His step-brother was there waiting, and Burckheim noticed with satisfaction that Hoffmayer, ten years his junior, looked old and delicate. Time the fellow went, he thought. Nothing could give him a keener happiness than to wake up one morning to the thought that the only other man who knew the whole story

of his cousin's suicide in December 1918, was dead. He would have rubbed René out long ago if he could.

Hoffmayer came forward with a smile. He held his hand out and Burckheim took no notice of it.

"Sit down," he said.

Hoffmayer sat down. He was not surprised by his step-brother's rudeness, but it depressed him. He sighed.

"What did you want?" he asked gently.

"I want to know what you meant by abusing me to my bailiff."

"Your bailiff?" Hoffmayer repeated. "Oh, you mean Ernest Siguenau. I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't abused you to him—why don't you ask him? Or to anyone else. What do you mean?"

"I don't propose to argue with you," Burckheim said brusquely. "The fact is, Siguenau has repeated to me the conversation he had with you less than a month ago, when you told him I was expecting the Government to come forward with money to help the Burckheim works. Are you going to deny you said it?"

"No," Hoffmayer said.

He was busy learning a lesson he had not needed to learn before. The most savage of our enemies cannot do us as much harm as a friend; it is only a friend who knows where to strike. He was ashamed to have taken so long to make this simple discovery. If Siguenau had really been his son, he would not have suffered more during these moments.

"You told a number of other lies about me," Burckheim said. "Fortunately Siguenau was not taken in by them."

"Yes, it was fortunate," Hoffmayer said, smiling.

He did not notice the change that came over Burckheim's face. Burckheim was preparing one of those emotional climaxes which were very moving when he unveiled a War

memorial or gave away the prizes at his old school. His face became that of a stern simple-minded old man.

"I couldn't have believed you would behave like this, René. I've always tried to help you."

Hoffmayer did not speak. He had just remembered a day when Honoré took a thrashing for him at school, and another when he gave up to him a shot-gun they had both waited a year to possess.

"You can hardly expect me to overlook this"—Burckheim hesitated for a word—"your extraordinary ingratitude."

"What are you going to do?" Hoffmayer said.

"Dismiss you. You don't think you deserve anything else, do you?"

Hoffmayer smiled. "Very well," he said.

There were now tears in Burckheim's clear pale eyes. He allowed himself to sink forward in his chair.

"This is extremely painful for me, my dear René."

"When do you expect me to leave my rooms in this house?" Hoffmayer asked politely.

"As soon as possible. This week."

"Have you chosen my successor?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Edward Berthelin," Burckheim said. He looked up sharply. "I believe he intends to come and see you. I hope you have enough sense of decency to keep this—this unfortunate business to yourself. I shall tell people you have resigned."

"That's quite unnecessary," said Hoffmayer gently.

"I would rather we kept this family disgrace to ourselves."

Hoffmayer stood up quickly and went out. He went directly to the orangery, shivering a little as he crossed the lawn. Siguenau's treachery had made him notice the cold. He turned up the lamp on his desk and it showed him that he

was alone, that books cannot be trusted to tell the truth about anything, they are more likely to deceive and betray, that a manuscript which represents the patient work of a lifetime is only ridiculous. Despair seized him at the sight of these thousands of unfriendly treacherous books he would have to go on living with. "And where can I go?" he said aloud. He forced himself to smile. "It was bad enough to lose a son, without losing at the same time shelves where I can pick out any book in the dark, and rooms I've taken the trouble to learn by heart. I'm too old to begin all that again." Why begin it again? He began to think of killing himself.

Opening a drawer of the desk he saw the envelope containing the draft of his will sent to him this evening by his solicitor. He had left everything to Siguenau.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

CAROLINE expected René to come and see her after his talk with her husband. She waited, surprised and a little indignant, until midnight. By that time it was too late for her to ask Honoré what had happened. In the morning before breakfast she sent her maid with a note to René, asking him to drink his coffee with her. The woman came back and said he had gone out. From the window of her bedroom Caroline saw him crossing the courtyard. He stopped to look at the charming small fountain with its huntress and dolphins; he had all the air of a tourist seeing it for the first time. Caroline opened the window and called. Either he did not hear her or he pretended not to hear. He turned his head away and hurried off.

Immediately after breakfast Burckheim insisted on going back to the château and taking her with him. With some hesitation she told him she wanted to see René. Burckheim looked annoyed.

"I must talk to you about him," he said coldly.

"Now?"

"When we get home."

During the drive she became more and more uneasy. Clearly he had quarrelled with his step-brother, and since he could do anything he liked, René would suffer. I must see what I can do, she thought. When they reached the château she went with him to his room and said firmly,

"I want to know what you said to René yesterday evening."

She expected to be snubbed. Instead Honoré sat heavily on the side of his bed and groaned. It was an alarming noise.

"What has happened?"

"I've had to dismiss René," he stammered. "I couldn't keep him any longer. The works were going to the devil. He's too old, too prejudiced. There's been trouble with the men. . . . He can't adapt himself to new ideas, he refuses to realise we're living in a new age, an age when justice has to be done to all classes. It's no good behaving as though some men were born to be the slaves of a few others. We have to admit the rights of the individual. Even though we can't all at once transform the world into a Christian State we must take what steps we can to that end. Men are brothers."

Caroline was thrown completely off her balance. Everything she had learned as an American—the Americans have more ideals than any nation in the world and know better how to keep them in their place—came to the top in sympathy with Honoré's little speech. Everything he had said she believed. What shocked her was to be told that René denied it.

"Well, but has he been doing things without orders?" she said weakly.

"I've always given him a free hand," Honoré said. "I believe in trusting my servants . . . I find the workmen are dissatisfied, grumbling. They asked for a conference and were refused"—he had a petition in his pocket, and took it out and showed it to her—"the whole position is impossible."

"Did he refuse to do what you wanted?"

"He has a way of talking that makes it difficult to know what he means," Honoré said drily.

"Yes—that's true. He's terribly cynical." René's unkind remarks about her more sacred beliefs—that women are nobler and less selfish than men, that American society is democratic—sprang in her mind. Poor René, she thought.

"I shall have to put in a much younger man," Honoré

said. He straightened his shoulders. "I have had my hour. It's time I looked about for someone to carry on."

His wife looked at him with a quick warmth.

"Your hour isn't over yet," she said, smiling.

"I must go and see what they're doing with the wine," he said restlessly. He got up.

Caroline walked with him to the top of the staircase. A sense that she had in some way deserted René was growing in her. She felt bewildered.

"There's just one thing," she said diffidently. "You'll allow René to keep his rooms in the Strasbourg house, won't you? He'll be lost if he has to move."

Burckheim looked at her with patronising sadness.

"That wing of the house has always been lived in by the manager of the ironworks, whether he was a member of the family or brought in from outside. René is far too unyielding to want to stay on there, and I shan't humiliate him by offering it to him. After all, you don't know him very well. I advise you not to mention it to him."

Burckheim went first to the press-house. There was no one there but one of his oldest workers, who took no notice when he spoke about the racking that had been finished the day before. This was satisfactory, since the only times this particular man spoke were when he had a misfortune to announce. He must have had a grudge against the world. Yet he had been known in the village for his dancing when he was a young man, and he still joined in lustily when there was singing. Burckheim patted his shoulder and went off to look round the farm. He talked to his cowman about the animals he kept only to supply manure for the vines, then walked to the stables. He found Siguenau there, looking at one of the draught horses which had injured itself slightly. Siguenau was excellent with horses; a mare which had been condemned as vicious and incorrigible settled down to a

virtuous life when he had handled her for less than a week; he never made a mistake in buying, and Burckheim left it more and more to him. Watching Siguenau as he handled the nervous animal, he thought, That fellow René never was and couldn't have been mistaken for one of our family.

"Tell Edward Berthelin to see me to-morrow," he said brusquely.

Siguenau had the tact not to ask questions.

The old man went off to the vineyard. Instead of crossing the park he sauntered along the drive to the village. He would drink a glass or two at the Dauphin, then walk through the village as far as Dietrich's farm, and starting at that end of his vineyard reach the château in time for lunch. This was the route he preferred. Since his childhood he had disliked returning by the way he went out, as though he wanted to avoid meeting himself. And it gave him a chance to see that Dietrich was not shifting a stone from one side of the yard to the other.

Dietrich was leaving the yard as he came up. He stood still. His looks said for him that he knew why Burckheim came round this way three or four times a week, and he had no intention this morning of standing out of the way for Burckheim to look round.

"Well?" Burckheim said.

"Well?"

The day was mild with low clouds and now and then a handful of warm rain. It was exactly what Burckheim wanted while the vines were being cleared. If it continued like this until the middle of May he would be satisfied.

"You know, old fellow," he said amiably, "you oughtn't to go to your last home without decently thanking me for letting you live in this spot. My uncle believed the pears on your dozen trees were better than any at the château. What's your view?"

"They're good trees," Dietrich said calmly. He stumped across and opened the door in the wall sheltering the orchard from the lane. "Look for yourself."

The blossom was just coming, a delicate wash of colour along the branches. The hill, planted with vines, rose at the far side, beyond a low rough wall. Now the sun came out: a hardly perceptible movement of the leaves of the vines altered the colour and shape of the hill, flattening it and turning what had seemed a valley into a ridge.

"What I like about this part of the country is that you can use all of it," said Burckheim.

"It has its merits." Dietrich laid his hand on the wall, passing his thumb over it in a friendly gesture.

"My bailiff says you spoke to him again about buying."

"And if I did?"

"You know I shan't sell. Why d'you keep on about it?"

"You won't live for ever," Dietrich said slyly.

"How do you know that? I might."

"If you could you would," Dietrich grumbled. "But when it comes to bodies you're like the rest of us—you have to make room, see? And after all, I've had four sons, and only two killed in the War. Two with their women and children is as many as I need here."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SIGUENAU had been certain he had only to say a few words to Edward Berthelin to persuade him. He began by talking to him about the ironworks, their importance, the chance they offered to a man who was alert enough to seize it. All they needed was money, and money—when the right person was in charge—would be forthcoming. Berthelin listened with cool interest. He asked questions that Siguenau, through ignorance, was unable to answer, but it was clear he was only asking out of politeness, and Siguenau's first clumsy hint ("What the firm needs is a man of your energy and experience.") slipped off him. Siguenau's next step—after he had talked to Burckheim—was direct. He was still blandly confident; and he expected Edward to be grateful . . . Edward laughed. . . . "My dear chap, I have my own firm on my hands. I can't run the two." He was amused and polite, exactly as he had been when Siguenau offered to get him a Staff job in 1916. ("My dear chap, I know you can do it, I know you have all the influence in the world, but I don't *want* a Staff job.") Siguenau daren't allow himself to be annoyed. His vanity was touched. He had failed to manage Hoffmayer: if he now failed with Berthelin his reputation was finished.

He was thoroughly disturbed. He came into Blanche's room one night, and woke her to tell her he would lose his job unless he could persuade Edward to take over the ironworks.

"But it's most unfair," she protested. "Why should your job depend on a change at the works? It has nothing to do

with you. And how can you tell Edward that he must alter his life completely to oblige you. It's ridiculous."

"You're very anxious about Edward."

"Don't be absurd," she cried. "It's a question of decency. You can't ask even your closest friend to save your job for you at a cost to himself."

"There's no cost. He has a firm making bolts and screws. It's small and insignificant. He has the offer—he can if he likes have the offer—to manage one of the oldest and most famous ironworks in Alsace. You don't think I'd ask him to make any sacrifices?"

Blanche tried to reach his thoughts. She felt as though she were walking on a glacier in the dark. Her glance slid from under her.

"I don't see what more you can do than tell him that the post of manager is going to be vacant," she said.

"Very well," Siguenau said.

He stood up—he had been sitting on the edge of her bed—and looked at her with unashamed despair for a moment. Before she could speak he smiled gaily and went away.

When he spoke to Berthelin again he approached him carefully, without the self-assurance of the time before. Berthelin ought to have remembered that he had always looked as anxious and modest as this when what he wanted was necessary to him and hard on his friends. The very frankness with which he talked should have been a warning.

". . . the old man has asked to see you. It means he's going to offer you a post as manager of the Burckheim works. I'm not going to pretend to be indifferent. I'm madly keen for you to take it. Think what it would mean to me to have you in Strasbourg instead of hours away in Belfort. And then—frankly, Edward—I believe my own future and Blanche's depends on your taking over the works. Old Hoffmayer has let them get into such a state that only the most drastic reor-

ganisation can put them right—it's exactly the job you had to do on your brother's firm when you came home—with the difference that his was a small affair and this is a large complicated one. Better suited to you. . . . I know you'll inherit the Belfort firm if you stay there. But why shouldn't you inherit the Burckheim works? The old man has no closer relative. You could make that a condition—"

It crossed his mind as he spoke that Reuss did not expect the new manager to stay for ever. He shrugged his shoulders. What was Reuss's position? Do I want Reuss to become too powerful? he thought excitedly. The future—he had no interest in a future he could not feel twisting in his hands like an eel. When the time came to deal with Reuss he could deal with him.

"What do you mean?" Edward said quickly. "How can your future be affected—whether I take over the ironworks or not? I don't understand you."

"I ought not to have said that," Siguenau exclaimed.

"Nonsense. What did you mean?"

"Please let me off," Siguenau said, confused and laughing.

"Certainly not—why should I? Tell me what difference it will make to you—and Blanche?"

"My tongue will be the death of me," Siguenau laughed. "The fact is, if you must know, I had a talk with Hoffmayer a month ago—it was a few days before the Germans turned up at the other end of the Kehl Bridge. He told me that if the works has to close down, Honoré would have to economise strictly, and he would certainly get rid of his bailiff. I shouldn't care for myself—but Blanche loves this house, she's happy here. It will hit her if we're thrown out and I'm without a job. . . . I hope you won't say anything about this to her."

He watched Berthelin closely, with an anxious air.

"No——" Edward broke off. In a sharper voice he said,

"This is a bad business for Hoffmayer, isn't it? He can't have wanted to lose his job. How do you know he's willing to hand over?"

"He's too old to do the work and he knows it. He told me he wanted to resign. He's a scholar of some sort."

Siguenau had not felt any compunction in removing Hoffmayer. His extraordinary vanity allowed him to hope that his part in it would never come to Hoffmayer's ears. Now he was seized with fury at the thought that even at this stage René was in his way. He said recklessly,

"Why don't you question him?"

He had taken risks of this sort all his life. At the moment he took them, they ceased to be risks, because he could persuade himself he was telling the truth. At this moment he believed that Hoffmayer would be lying if he said he had not wanted to resign.

Berthelin had jumped up and was walking about the room. He stopped beside Siguenau and smiled at him with a severe love.

"You've really shaken me, damn you. I don't like Belfort particularly—and the three or four men I used to know well were all killed. To be living near you would make all the difference to me. . . . It's true the Burckheim works are worth saving. I daresay they might mean something to my son, to Robert. . . ."

Siguenau looked him in the eyes.

"You'd be able to see Blanche, too. She'll enjoy that."

"Yes, of course," Berthelin said.

Siguenau waited. At last he said in a calm voice,

"Well, you'll go and see Burckheim to-morrow?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

STILL in doubt after his interview with Burckheim, Berthelin made up his mind to see Hoffmayer—without knowing what he wanted to find out. He went straight away into Strasbourg and telephoned. Hoffmayer invited him to dinner.

They had not met. As soon as Berthelin came into his room the older man recognised an equal: he greeted him without any impulsive liking but with respect. I am like Isaac, he thought; I gave my blessing too quickly and it is the only one I had.

"Why haven't you been to see me before?" he said politely.

"That's very kind of you," Berthelin said, smiling.

He felt at home in these rooms. This wing had been added late in the eighteenth century; the panels of the room they were dining in were moulded in shallow arches with a bench running the length of one wall and a shelf under the low ceiling. The wide floor boards, waxed as smooth as an egg, had no rugs. No bookcases, but books lying about everywhere, and German and English reviews.

"You read English?" he asked.

"I see no tolerable future for France unless we form one country with England. I mean actually one country, with tunnels under the Channel, two languages like Switzerland, a common system of education, one Parliament, one civil service. The English will teach us to add correctly, and from watching us they will probably remember—they once knew—how to live decently without having twinges of boredom and rheumatism at twenty. It's the only chance either of us has of surviving."

"Do you like the English."

"I prefer them—merely because they are civilised—to Germans."

"Did you notice what happened at the League meeting in London? At one moment Flandin burst into tears. We got nothing, not even promises. With the blessing of the English newspapers, Hitler marched his troops to the Rhine, that is to London, Paris, Prague, Vienna, Warsaw—but not in that order. Can you understand it?"

"Of course," Hoffmayer said, laughing. "The same English papers that are applauding Hitler now used to speak of the Germans as Huns. It doesn't mean anything except that they've reached the bottom of the giant slide. And there is a sort of Englishman who admires Hitler for killing socialists as much as some Frenchmen do. I understand these people. They may ruin us—out of stupidity, fear of the future, ignorance—but so long as one Wiltshire farmer, one cockney and one Paris street-seller, one peasant from the Dordogne and another from Alsace are left alive, England and France will be resurrected. When? Who knows? In a hundred, five hundred years? No doubt at the very moment when America is getting ready to fight Asiatic Russia. They'll be in time to give birth to a new world. You see I am optimistic!"

"I have always liked the English," Berthelin said. "They are good soldiers."

"It is certainly something."

The longer he sat here with Hoffmayer, listening to his voice which was as dry and uncompromising as the atmosphere of the room, the less he felt like questioning him about his resignation. At last Hoffmayer gave him an opening.

"You've seen the château, of course?"

"Yes, several times." He decided to speak with brutal frankness. "Mr. Burckheim sent for me this afternoon and

asked me to take your place at the works. He said you had just resigned."

Hoffmayer did not answer for a moment. In this moment he took his leave finally of these rooms, of the orangery crammed with his books and manuscripts and the days of his years, of the table he wrote at, and of trivial memories of his boyhood, moments in which the Bruche ran between his fingers to the other boy's. This civility done with, he could attend to Berthelin.

"That's quite true. I resigned the day before yesterday."

"Definitely?"

Hoffmayer smiled. "Of course."

"Forgive me," Berthelin said. "I wondered why you had decided."

"I am an old man," Hoffmayer said mockingly.

Berthelin knew he had been snubbed. He was in the habit of deferring to older men, and he liked Hoffmayer. He did not resent the snub. But it made it impossible for him to ask, as he had meant asking, what degree of reorganisation would be needed to put the firm on its legs. It was the difficulties themselves that attracted him. He had revived one bankrupt firm, but that was a very small affair. The Burckheim iron-works were known in Europe: he was being invited to serve Alsace. He felt a sober excitement.

"It was good of you to see me," he said.

Hoffmayer made a gesture of fatigue and boredom. Throwing away his second nature, an unwearying politeness, he seemed to turn his back. He was quitting without apologies a room where he no longer had any business, even to see to his guest. When Berthelin stood up he roused himself to say curtly,

"I hope you will succeed me. I am sure you're the right person."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

BERTHELIN decided to accept. When he went to see Burckheim he was shown into the drawing-room, an immensely long room, the length of the south wing. Six of its eight windows looked over the lawn of rough grass bordered with crocuses: it had a painted ceiling, the figures of the zodiac watched over by young immodest angels, and white and green panels: between each pair of windows a cabinet from which the Hannong peonies and tulips burst into the room. The April sunlight split into fragments where it ran on the lustres of the lamps. Burckheim was at the far end of the room, sitting at a table, his arms stretched across it, hands clenched, as though they were keeping him upright. He pulled himself up, and looked anxiously into Berthelin's face.

"Well, my boy?"

Berthelin felt a sudden affection for him. He needs my help, he thought. He was delighted and humble. But he did not forget to make conditions.

"I should like to accept," he said slowly. "But you know it means my giving up the firm in Belfort. My brother promised to leave it to me on condition I stayed there—otherwise it will go to his son-in-law. Now, I have no other means, and I have a son. I should like some assurance from you that he can come into the firm when he finishes his service with as good a chance of getting on as he would have in the Belfort firm——"

Burckheim interrupted him. There were tears in his eyes.

"Yes, yes," he said eagerly, "of course he must come in, but don't think you're only the manager, my boy, I shan't

treat you so casually as that. I'm going to leave the works to you and your son. I've no one else. There's no other member of the family capable of handling them, but you must keep those damned socialists in order. Promise me you'll do it. None of this nonsense about contracts, and conferences with workers' delegates. I trust you, my boy. And you can trust me. Send for your son. I want to see him."

He stretched his hands out and took one of Berthelin's in both his.

"I shall do my best, sir," Berthelin said, moved.

"I count on you, my dear boy."

Edward Berthelin was a living proof—the armies of every country can provide hundreds of them—that a first-class soldier is always something more, a scholar, a poet, a botanist. His coolness in danger sprang from the same source as his admiration for Mallarmé, whose poems he carried with him in the War: he ended by believing that this writer's skull gave him better protection than the walls of his dug-out. He had learned, and after his wife's death very quickly, to think about himself with as much and no more interest than he would give to any problem he had to deal with. This disinterestedness broke down at two points, on the side of France and of his son. He could not think about these two as objects. He was attached to them by too many nerves, and an effort to tear himself free only doubled his sense of responsibility. They were his mortal heel. He would be finished if either of them were to go rotten.

Of his son he felt fairly sure. Robert was healthy, intelligent, sound. As for France—if the only danger came from the other side of the Rhine it, too, was manageable: Berthelin

had been in Germany on business several times since 1933 and he never felt when he was there any flicker of the tremulous admiration that seized other visitors at the spectacle of a million arms and throats mobilised for the same ridiculous gesture. But he detested romanticism, and he felt the air lighter on his skin as soon as he left the plain on the other side of the Rhine and came in sight of the sunlit Vosges. Nothing in Germany, neither the old-new barbarism nor the hectic energy of the young Nazis, alarmed him. He was alarmed by the invalidism of France—by the clinging to office of old men, by their obscene energy when they had to defend themselves and the past, their malevolent blindness before the future, in a word, their morbidity. He did not believe them when they talked piously about their horror of war and the sacrifice of young lives. What they dread, he thought, is the loss of their power: they cling to that although it bars the way to the future: to defend it they will in the end sacrifice the millions of young lives, making the usual speeches and calling up the usual words, honour, liberty, courage, and the rest.

He stood still when he was crossing the park to look at a handsome beech-tree. France, he thought, ought to be like that, not one limb fed at the expense of the others, not poverty eating one root while the others suck the good out of the earth. It seemed to him that there was as much wrong in a country which allowed Burckheim's ironworks to go to the devil as in a family where one child is let starve.

He promised himself to save the works, for France, for Robert, and—to please himself—for that magnificent old man, Honoré Burckheim.

He found Blanche Siguenau in the garden at the back of the dower-house. He told her he had agreed to take the job.

She gave a cry of pleasure and patted him on the arm as though he were a good child.

"I'm so glad, Edward. That's really exciting. We shall see you often now, shan't we? You must spend weekends out here."

She hurried him into the house and into the room where Siguenau was sitting writing.

"He's taken the job," she said gaily, "he'll be living in Strasbourg and we shall see him at weekends. We shall expect you when you feel like coming, Edward. You needn't ring up, you know. You'll have your room here and it will always be ready for you."

"This is grand," Siguenau said. He got up, smiling. "We must have a drink on it, my dear Edward."

He filled the glasses and touched Berthelin's with his.

"Good luck to you—may you become disgracefully rich. Perhaps the old man will leave you the works and we shall be able to live on you for the rest of our lives."

Blanche chuckled. She made a few deliberately noisy steps, like a tomboy. It was when she was happy that she behaved as her husband imagined Englishwomen behave without that slight excuse, clattering her heels on the wooden floor and laughing childishly. He was not to know it was the way she had amused herself behind the back of a rather cracked and severe governess.

"Do you know," he said drily, "we were calling on an important and very stiff official in Strasbourg. I looked round when he was showing us his collection of pictures and saw Blanche making faces at his back. He could certainly see her in the glass. Sometimes she behaves abominably."

"Do you remember the Italian First Secretary in Paris?" Berthelin asked her.

She nodded, laughing. "Yes."

"He was sitting beside her at a luncheon," Berthelin said, "it must have been in 1918—and he complained bitterly to her about the way the English officials treated him. 'Anyone

would think your country has bought us,' he said. Blanche laughed at him. 'Well, haven't we?' she said. I believe he tried to get you sacked, didn't he?"

"Yes," Blanche said, "but no one minded what he said."

Siguenau had listened with a lively expression. He looked smilingly into their faces.

"You must have known each other well during the War," he said lightly.

1939

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DURING the three years she was at school in England, from fifteen to eighteen, Fanny Siguenau cast three skins: from a child she became an unmanageable tomboy; the tomboy turned into a serious awkward girl, shocking her father when he visited her at Cambridge by talking to him about economics—if her mother had not argued him out of it he would have taken her away at once. On their next visit things were better; Fanny had seen the ballet and decisively rejected J. M. Keynes for his wife, little Lopokova. She now danced whenever she could, and her only use for economists was to pile their heavier works on her head when she was practising balance.

She came home in April 1939. She was of middle height, slender, brown-haired, her face delicate and narrow-chinned, her eyes wide and very bright. Her mother had redecorated her room; she turned round three times and settled in as though she had never been away. The same evening she burned her school-books in the courtyard and tied up her English clothes to give away. Blanche altered one of her own dresses for her so that she could go into Strasbourg to shop.

Until she was eight years old she had adored her father: her face fell when a door opened and it was only Blanche who came in. She became independent slowly. Now, though she loved and teased her father, she relied on Blanche very much as a pupil on a friendly master. If there were a warmer feeling under this liking it showed itself when she scolded her mother for wearing old slippers and ignored or criticised her in front of strangers.

She was crossing the park one morning, and a young man stepped out of the trees on to the path, with his back to her. He turned round. They looked at each other with curiosity.

"I think you must be Miss Siguenau. I'm Robert Berthelin."

He's good-looking, he has a pleasant voice, he's probably conceited, Fanny thought.

"Yes," she said curtly. "I'm Fanny Siguenau."

"I've just come from the château."

"I'm going there."

It seemed that the same path led in two directions at once: he fell in beside her and they sauntered together between a hedge of laurestinas and the beeches. At the end of this tunnel the path crossed a field of rough grass, scattered with pear trees in blossom. The sky sprang back suddenly to an immense height, blue, and padded with white clouds.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to dance," Fanny said.

"Why not?"

Robert put his arm round her and they pranced about in the grass for a few minutes, until the rough ground and laughing forced them to stop. As soon as she was out of his arms Fanny was reserved and distant again, and the young man made no progress until he told her he was on leave from his regiment; he had gone down with pneumonia the day before the German troops went into Prague.

"I thought the war would start without me. You can imagine what I felt like."

"Is there going to be war?"

"Of course. I don't know when. In a year or two."

"My father says it's not necessary," Fanny said lightly.

"He's wrong. If we let the Germans conquer the rest of Europe do you suppose they'll spare us?"

It was at this moment that Fanny lost sight of the crack that opened in her when she went to England. Her friends

there used to say to her, "But of course you're half English," as though it put her on the right side of a line drawn across Europe. She began to discover in herself English habits, like walking about in the sun and laughing all the way through meals in a restaurant. Now, suddenly, she became French to the roots of her nerves; it was France that was threatened in her by war and France she must defend. She glanced at Robert Berthelin and felt herself becoming insignificant, a nobody, a girl who can perhaps fold bandages or scrub floors or give lessons to refugee children, but will never know what it is like to live for years with men in the same danger of dying suddenly. She felt relief, anger, humility.

"How old are you?" she asked without thinking.

"Twenty."

"I'm eighteen. We must take care to live through the war, then we can compare notes afterwards. But perhaps it won't happen."

Her eyes narrowed when she smiled and became very bright. Robert felt that he was falling in love and drew back. But what a slender chin! It would fit between his thumb and first finger like an egg into an egg-cup.

"There was an American girl at my school," Fanny said. "Last September she said the English and the French were cowards. We asked her what she would do if there was war, and she said her father would fetch her home. She didn't understand why we laughed at her."

"They don't know they're born, in America," Robert said.

In a few minutes they would be within sight of the château. The same impulse halted them both; and they stood side by side, looking at the hills in April sunlight. An air of friendliness and well-being came from them, from the green summits, from the vines, from the crystal fragments of streams. It seemed incredible that it was turned back at the Rhine, a discredited traveller, not wanted in a country of

woods, hills, vines, rivers—and concentration camps. Put a vine-dresser from Riquewihr—which the Germans disguise as Reichenweier—down beside another from the Rheingau and in ten minutes they will be cronies. You need only separate them by a river and different school-books and this year or the next they will be packing their sons off to kill each other. And the same for all the other honest fools, dupes of their masters.

The young man looked at Fanny. She was smiling, her eyelashes touching her cheek. Her hands, thin and brown, were half in the pockets of her jacket, and she stood like a boy. He was deeply moved.

"In the last three years I've been here, staying at the château, a dozen times—and you weren't at home."

"I was in England," Fanny said.

"Your mother showed me a photograph of you, in shorts and a jersey. Your face was a blur, you had moved, but your knees were very distinct—and small and bony."

Fanny smiled at him. "I must go now."

"I shall be here in the morning."

Without answering she turned and walked quickly through the trees dividing the park from the lower of the two rough lawns.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

DURING the three years Berthelin had managed the ironworks he had seen Burckheim for an hour every week. Very often he stayed longer than this at the château but not to talk about the firm. If he persisted, the old man went calmly to sleep, sitting in his chair. Berthelin learned to squeeze what he had to say into little pellets and roll them across the table.

Soon after Berthelin took over the works new rules were forced on employers by the stay-in strikes, and the first trouble he had with Burckheim was over the collective contract demanded by the men. The old man was furious. He came into Strasbourg and insulted separately and as a body the employers who had signed agreements. He spent a fortnight at the ironworks, coaxing the men not to make use of their new rights. "You know you can trust me," he repeated. Calling a meeting one morning in the dinner-hour, he reminded them of the days when he knew every worker by his Christian name.

"I looked on you as my family, and I did my duty by you as a father ought. Now you have a duty to me and France, and to your own children. The gentlemen in Paris can fix higher wages if they like, it costs them nothing, but the works can't afford it, I can't afford it. Do you want the firm to close down? Are you prepared to do France that injury? Go home and think about it, children. Talk to your wives. Say to them, 'The old man opened his heart to us this morning: what do you think we ought to do?' The women always know best."

He managed to delay the question of a contract, and when at last he was faced with it he dragged the negotiations on for

nine months. Berthelin went back and forth between him and the workers' delegates, clearing up one misunderstanding after another. He learned to detect the approach of a misunderstanding by the sly shadow it threw on the surface of the old man's face while it was still swimming upwards. The men finally agreed that they would sacrifice the higher wages in return for a pension scheme. This was being slowly got ready.

Berthelin found Caroline Burckheim waiting for him in a room opening off the first landing. She beckoned him in.

"Are you going to tell him we must cut down expenses?" she demanded.

"Whether we do it or not, we're in a bad seam," he said smiling. "The best thing that could happen to us would be to be taken over by the Government and given a loan on condition we reorganised. I could take steps—but your husband won't hear anything I have to say."

"He's been in a bad temper for days."

"Poor Caroline. What can I do?"

"Nothing. Your son is a comfort to me. I suppose you want him home. . . . Am I lucky not to have had children? I was in town yesterday, and a woman whose three sons were killed in the War said to me, 'I shall start their next war exactly as I finished the last, bankrupt: I have nothing to pay and nothing to pay with.' "

"Next time we'll make a better job of it," Berthelin said.

When he went into the library Burckheim said in a dry voice, "What is it this time?"

He listened with his eyes closed. His two fists resting on the table, like the buttresses of his heavy body, tightened when Berthelin suggested going to Paris to talk to friends he had in the Government. His eyes opened narrowly, in a flurry of suspicion.

"No, no. I'll have no interference, none of your Ministers and their lawyers. Why, they would strip the place in a week. I know them—they fill their own pockets first. Then if there's anything left, they tax it. No."

Berthelin did not press the idea. He was not in the least sure that it would have come to anything.

"Did you look at the papers I left with you last week, sir?"

Out of the corner of his eye he could see them, stained and crumpled, under a pair of boots in the corner.

"You mean your scheme—what d'you call it?—your suggestions for reorganisation. Why can't you let things alone, my boy? Far and away the best advice I can give you is to do nothing. Things solve themselves if you leave them alone." His expression changed quickly. "Wait until I'm dead," he said affectionately. "When the firm belongs to you, you can do what you like with it. I'm leaving the Strasbourg house to you, too. This place will go to Siguenau and the ironworks to you and your son. Both of you are getting what you can manage. Don't bother me any more about changes. They bore me."

Burckheim was eighty—but there seemed no reason to suppose he would die in time to save the ironworks. No new idea ever penetrated his defences; no civil war was going on between his appetites. He ate and drank enormously and thought as seldom as possible. He would sit for hours in a black stupor, holding on to his Vergil for good faith. Then a message would be brought to him about the vines; instantly he got to his feet, the gleam of lust in his eyes restoring life to his face, and went out.

Berthelin made another attempt, without hope, to bring home to him the seriousness of the position. The old man got up. His body, like the trunk of a great tree, seemed incapable of being moved. You expected him to shake earth off his feet.

"Go away, my boy. You'll find you can get rid of some men

—sack radicals and socialists first—and cut the wages of the others. When it's a choice between short wages and none they'll give in. And drop the pensions. Do you understand? I know what I'm about. Go away, my dear boy. Do as I tell you."

He walked over to the window and opened it.

"It's going to rain," he said, smiling. "When you can see the spire of the Cathedral from this window it's a sure sign. Now turn your head and look through the other windows, you'll see every leaf of the vines. Did you ever see such light? And all that is mine, my dear boy. By God, I shan't die. Why should I?" He gripped Berthelin's arm between his hard fingers. "Don't tell me it was an accident I was born here. Ah, but you won't, you're a good Catholic. Well, my boy, you may tell me that we Alsations, we Burckheims, need God, but my opinion is that God needed the Burckheims. Or else why did he put us here when he could just as easily have made Americans of us? No, no, dear boy, he'd be badly off without us—especially since half Europe has gone off its head."

He cuffed Berthelin gently on the side of the head, making his ears ring.

"Run away and leave well alone. Trust me."

CHAPTER THIRTY

ROBERT BERTHELIN admired the old man without any of the reservations his father had been three years teaching himself. The elder Berthelin had learned that there were no limits to Honoré Burckheim's egotism; he was inconceivably lazy with a genius for slyness. But he believed him to be morally honest, and loyal to his friends. He believed that Burckheim had as strong a sense of his duty as selfishness—and that was saying something. He didn't try to cloud his son's hero-worship with these moles. The young have no sense of justice: in their eyes a man is either great or petty; it is only when they have had time to examine themselves that they are willing to forgive the under side of their great men.

Robert's open admiration delighted the old gentleman. He took it without a qualm. When they were out of doors together he called Robert "my son," and leaned his terrible weight on the young man's thin muscular arm.

The morning after he had seen Fanny, Robert waited for her in the park for an hour, in vain. He went back to the château and found the servants looking everywhere for him. Burckheim was waiting to go round the vineyard. They set off. The old man wanted to talk. He wanted the pleasure of seeing Robert moved by the emotion he could put into his voice. He needed the young man, too, to stand between him and the despair he felt when he thought he was losing his strength.

"Y'know, boy, it's a pity your father knows nothing about vines. I'd rather have left you and him the land, and the other one the works. I've a good mind to leave you a share in the

vineyard. We'll see about it. Remember everything I tell you. Wine isn't only a question of soil, it needs devotion and intelligence. I give both to it. Look at this press-house; the walls are four hundred years old, but I had them faced over inside, as you see them. You could lick into any corner with your tongue and not feel a speck of dust. Those vats are polished with a wax we make ourselves; it was my great-great-uncle's recipe: I shall leave it to my heir. We don't mature in new casks. Don't let anyone kid you about that. I know what I'm doing. When we have to buy new casks, from Stettin, we rinse them with wine and then with a good brandy, the one we use to sponge the vats. And don't press with the bare foot. Take a look at those boots, my son. If one of them accidentally touched the ground we should chuck it away. Don't spare money. I'd make my wife wear a dress twenty years sooner than not spend what's needed on my vines."

The sun, as they walked up to the vineyard, struck Burckheim with blinding strength. This was one of the moments when he knew he was old. It was only the gentle April sun, crystal-clear, as if preceding rain. Burckheim gripped Robert's shoulder.

"See that wall, running half way up the slope? I had that put up because the shape of the hill there brought the winds across that stretch like water through a funnel. You want air and light even more than sun, but you don't by God want them more than smoothed on."

All Burckheim's vines were kept low, unlike his neighbours', who fastened the ends of the shoots to a long prop, so that the vine bellied out below and bore far too many grapes.

"The smaller you keep the clusters," Burckheim said greedily, "the longer they'll hang in a good year, until they're rotten-sweet."

His expression was childishly eager. He seemed to want to roll all the goodness of the vineyard on his tongue. Out here,

with the clouds lifting the sky to a greater height every minute, he became almost frail. His broad shoulders sank a little: he let his lids fall to bandage his eyes against the sun, and when he opened them for a few minutes they were as empty and unfocused as the eyes of an infant. But he walked tirelessly, and it was not until they reached the track leading to the village that he said he was out of breath. All the same he went on talking. It never entered his head that, under cover of an admiring silence, Robert was thinking of a young woman.

"I have had my hour, my son. I'm eighty."

"Why shouldn't you live to be a hundred and eighty?" Robert said warmly.

A sly look crossed Burckheim's face, at the thought of playing such a trick on his heirs. But he smiled sadly.

"No, no, it's time I went under. You'll be walking down this street in sunlight—my God, what sunlight—when my eyes are turned in for ever. You'll look at my vines, you'll fish the Bruche. Every time you cross the park and the courtyard it will be over my footsteps. Do your best by Burckheim and Alsace, my son. They matter more than your rights—whatever those may be. . . . Don't forget to change the linen round the bungs every month for the first year. When you begin racking in February it's got to be a north-west wind—and watch out for sudden changes of temperature from the end of February. A tricky month. They're all tricky, by God. Watch the new wine in April. And in May and June. I've written all this down. You'll find a couple of notebooks in my desk."

They were late for lunch, but he insisted on going into the Dauphin. He became gay all at once, and forgot he had been prophesying his death. (In Europe to-day a man of eighty has as much chance as a young man of living another ten years—more, in fact.) He was singing in a monotonous undertone when they left. Crossing the square he stopped to admire a young woman rinsing clothes in the basin of the fountain.

"What thighs! You could run against her with a battery," he said warmly. "D'you know what you ought to do? Marry the little Siguenau girl, then you'll get both the land and the ironworks. Think it over, my child."

During the last few weeks—to be exact, since the day when Prague was taken over by the Germans—Burckheim had been expecting to get something from his first wife, a sign that wherever she was and whatever she was saying now (and contradicting it in the same breath) she had not forgotten the promise she made, and forgot to cancel at once, a day or two after their marriage. They were staying in the château and he was with her in the room at the end of the south corridor—she had filled it with rubbish, school-books, a pair of dancing slippers worn through at the edge, a pencil-box, the notes she used to exchange with other girls in class. He had just asked her if she were happy. "Certainly not. Yes," she said, laughing: "I am so happy that I shall come to this room when you are old, and remind you of it." He made fun of her because she had not said, "when I am old."

He had been able to get along without her. He had other women, and his second wife: there was his ceaseless interest in the vines. So long as he was healthy and felt safe, his memories of Geneviève could be brushed off like flies. Now, between his momentary weaknesses—moments when he was too tired to finish a sentence, when his mind suddenly left him—and the German swarm, getting ready to move, he knew that either she had been tricking him or she must speak up at once: there was no time to lose. He had taken to going into this room—it was used now for filing papers—and standing there, head bent, his eyes so fixed on the past they appeared

lifeless, waiting. He would wait for an hour like this. When there was no sound, except the noise made by a bluebottle in a corner of a pane, he shook himself and came out, slamming the door in rage.

This evening he began pacing from side to side of the room. He was unusually alert. His ears caught sounds inaudible on ordinary days, the stealthy movement of air through the hinges of the door, a branch scratching the outside wall, the tapping of a beetle, like a knuckle cracking, behind the panels. The instinct by which he knew hours in advance that the wind would change warned him now of changes taking place in Europe and in his own body. He listened. For a minute, only for a minute, he knew that France was in the greatest danger since the Marne, and that he himself would not live for ever. A second later his eye caught sight of a nearly invisible thread of grey between two floor boards. He lowered himself to his knees and bent his face to the ground. It was the edge of a piece of paper.

He was wearing the jacket, of wool and leather, he wore all the year round when he went to look at his vines, in winter with waistcoats and a shawl under it, in summer over his vest. He carried a long needle threaded in the lining, to pick up early-fallen grapes. He never used it for anything else—it would have been sacrilege. Without thinking he drew it out now and began poking it between the boards. A very little dust came up, then a corner of paper. He worked it out slowly. It was only a scrap, the edge of a sheet torn from an exercise book, creased and discoloured. Three or four words in Geneviève's neat writing. Getting up with an effort he took it over to the window.

"... you are very silly, I wo . . ."

Now what? he thought. He looked up suspiciously. She must be laughing. There was nothing, no one. His heart, which had been grumbling at the efforts he was making,

quietened suddenly, and a sensation of confidence and warmth spread through him as if a quilt had been drawn up over his cradle. He began walking slowly to the door. His heel caught the needle he had dropped, crushing it into the floor.

In the corridor when he was going to his room he heard the wireless talking. It was in Caroline's sitting-room. He opened her door. She switched it off and turned to him the face of a woman frightened at a death-bed. It infuriated him.

"What's the matter?" he growled.

"Nothing new," Caroline said. "But really one can hardly bear to listen. It's said now that Jugoslavia is making secret terms with Italy and Germany; Roumania is turning against us; the Dutch and the Swiss have called up men to work on their defences. The whole of Europe is hanging feebly on Hitler's next move——"

Burckheim cut her short.

"Rot, my good woman. Sheer rot. France won't be defeated even if the whole of the rest of Europe caves in. You poor American, you. You only see the look of things—you don't see our roots. They meet somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean, by God. You can't pull up France in a year, in ten years, in fifty. D'you know what my mother used to sing to me?

In Strasbourg on a fine day
Little Alsatians laugh and play,
Little Germans run away
From Strasbourg on a rainy day.

To be sure, it was the French who ran away soon afterwards, but you see we're back again. Don't be an ass."

He turned and began to march out. From the doorway he said casually,

"I found something of Geneviève's just now. She would never have been such an ass, y'know."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE one person to whom Edward Berthelin talked freely about the state of the firm was Siguenau. If he did not come down to the dower-house on Saturday for the night it was usually because the Siguenaus were staying with him in Strasbourg. "You've done something I never could—persuaded Blanche to like Strasbourg," Siguenau told him, with a smile. Blanche liked music—her husband detested it—and when Berthelin took her to a concert he went off to his club or accepted an invitation from a hostess who was delighted to get hold of him.

For two or three hours every weekend Berthelin discussed with his friend the difficulties facing him. He told him about each new failure to convince Burckheim that the position was serious now, and showed him letters and reports—as though Siguenau were as deeply involved as he was. In this way Siguenau learned that the bank had promised Berthelin to make him a loan the day he got full control of the works—that is, when Burckheim died. The old man had informed the bank that Berthelin was his heir, but until Berthelin was the owner the bank would not risk any more money. Their respect for Burckheim was deeper than their pockets.

"The old man can't live for ever," Siguenau said lightly.

"I should like him to, I'm fond of him," Berthelin said, "if he would only give me a free hand with the business."

"But what could you do?"

Berthelin hesitated. He had been in Paris, and had talked to his friends in the Government, men who respected his genius for organisation and knew he wanted nothing for

himself. After only informal talks he had satisfied them that it would pay them to turn the Burckheim works over to making aeroplane parts, and that under State control he himself would keep all the freedom he wanted. But this was all in the air, he had no authority to talk about it. An instinct he rarely disregarded warned him against speaking.

Siguenau was watching his face. No one except the friend who had known Berthelin during the whole of his life could read there that he was keeping something back. Siguenau knew it from a single nervous movement of his eyelids. That was how he had guessed all Berthelin's secrets when they were children, forcing him to give them up by repeating, "I know you're hiding something, you might as well tell me, because I shall find out." The other child would sigh and begin to talk.

"Edward, what were you doing in Paris? Whom did you see?"

"I went to the theatre," Berthelin said blandly.

"Oh, yes?"

"I saw the new Cocteau play."

"And did you call at the Air Ministry and see Jeannot?"

Berthelin laughed. "Well, in fact I did."

"I thought as much," Siguenau said, with innocent triumph. "Well?"

"Nothing definite," his friend sighed. "We discussed the new armaments plan, trying to see where the Burckheim works might fit in. However, nothing can be done while the old man is alive."

Siguenau got up to close a window—he wanted to turn his back to Berthelin; he was afraid of showing his excitement. He had learned something Reuss would be glad to know. Better than that—he was certain the right moment had come to suggest to Edward, discouraged as he was, that there were other ways of reviving the firm than letting it be expropri-

ated by the State. His excitement almost throttled him. He realised that he was smiling, and turned it into a look of anxiety before he sat down again.

"But, dear old boy, you'll be ruined in another year. What an ass I was to persuade you to take over the job. I can't forgive myself."

"Don't talk nonsense," Berthelin said warmly. "I took it to please myself."

Siguenau leaned forward.

"One other idea occurs to me. Have you ever talked it over with Jules Reuss? The old man's very frank with him, you know. He shows him your reports—it's all right, Reuss is the soul of discretion—and in fact Reuss knows a great deal about the firm, though of course he's not an expert on iron and doesn't pretend to be. It was he who told me years ago, before you came, that our German cousins, the family living in Cologne and Düsseldorf, were willing to put up any amount of money for the firm. The old man used to give him their letters to read through and answer. Now, I don't know much about business, but I should have thought it was infinitely preferable to do a deal with members of the family, German or French, than hand over to the State. Once a Burckheim always a Burckheim, as Honoré says!"

"Do you know anything about the Cologne family?"

"They're enormously rich. I know that."

"And enormously German," Berthelin said. "Their ideas of a bargain are one-sided. What did they expect to get out of it for themselves?"

"You'll have to ask Reuss that. They wanted a share in the management co-operation. . . ."

"German co-operation," Berthelin said, smiling. "You'll find that, like a great many words, it has a quite different meaning in German dictionaries. Like protective arrest, which means shutting an innocent man in prison for life.

Justice, which means concentration camps. A threat to German honour, which means that some small country is in danger of being invaded and crushed out. Pacification, which means forced labour, the murder of unarmed opponents, torturing of prisoners, loot, daily suicides, cruelty. Before long, to know the exact meaning an official German attaches to such words as peace, decency, kindness, truth, it will be enough to reverse their meaning in other countries—and speak of war, indecency, bestiality, lies. No body of men has ever put abroad so many lies as, since 1933, responsible German statesmen. Except”—a look of bitter grief altered his face—“except those Frenchmen who pretend that what happened at Munich in September was not a fearful defeat for France.”

Siguenau was silent. He was feeling intensely humiliated. Ever since he had been the first to learn to stand up, and the quickest in learning to talk, he had managed his friend. He took his influence over him for granted. Although Berthelin had changed profoundly during the War, and even although he no longer understood him, he had believed that in the last resort Berthelin would listen to him and not to anyone else. He had said so to Reuss several times, and boasted about it. Now he realised that Berthelin had got away from him completely. I don't know the first thing about him, he thought. He felt as much bitterness as if his friend had betrayed him.

He has really betrayed me, he thought. For a moment he hated Berthelin, warmly, because he had loved him.

He pulled himself together.

“So you think Munich was a defeat?” he said, in a doubtful voice.

“Worse than a tactical defeat,” Berthelin said. “Worse than the loss of a strong, loyal ally, far far worse than Sedan. Before we lied to the Czechs we were still the spiritual fountain-head of Europe. We watered it with generous ideas. At Munich these dried up. Nothing has flowed since, except

complacency, cynical callousness, lies. I have a friend in Prague, a soldier. I haven't dared write to him. I shouldn't want to open his letter if he wrote to me. He doesn't any longer."

"But you knew it would mean war. Do you want that to begin again?"

"I hate war. Anyone who was in the last hates it unless he is insane. I have more dead friends than living ones. I made too many promises to them. They make a coward of me. . . . I have Robert, too. . . . But—better a war than another Munich. Better all that fear, boredom, better dead children than Frenchmen in concentration camps."

He broke off suddenly. "I'm talking too much."

"I'd no idea you could be so eloquent," Siguenau said.

Berthelin did not hear him. "Yes, better all that," he said in a low voice. "And a man who was not there wouldn't know what I'm saying."

As he said it he remembered that Siguenau himself was not "there," having spent most of his war at G.H.Q.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

BLANCHE was anxious—though she had not yet admitted it to herself. She had noticed one after another the signs that her husband was busy with some scheme which was not going well. He was rarely at home, and when he did spend an evening with them he was sarcastic and impatient even with Fanny. This was normal—but she had a new anxiety. When things were going badly with him he always talked to her, asked her advice—it was always the same advice: Don't interfere with other people—or warned her not to call on some woman friend because he had just succeeded in upsetting her husband's chances of being elected to the General Council.

For several weeks he had scarcely talked to her at all. If he came to her bedroom it was very late at night, when she had given up expecting him and was asleep. He had his coffee brought to his room in the morning and went off without coming in to speak to her, and almost every evening he went into Strasbourg. She made excuses to ring up Edward Berthelin, always hoping to be told he was in the room and dismayed by hearing Edward say, "You might give your husband a message. . . ."

He was deeply involved now in local politics. She knew that. His friends had labelled themselves autonomists, and he was much too comfortable with them to ask himself why, when that dear boy Count Ciano stayed with Mme de Tel, he approved so warmly of her innocent wish to protect the special rights of Alsace from any cunning assault by the French Government. His two closest friends were ex-officers of the old German Air Force—they had been given French

nationality because they had married into a wealthy Alsatian family. He had ties with the fashionable Croix de Feu, now masquerading as the French Social Party: it held its war councils in the most aristocratic drawing-room in Strasbourg.

Blanche believed that here, as when they were living in Belfort, his only genuine reasons for playing at politics were social. Trying all the time not to, she despised him a little for wanting to be run after by the right people. He was ridiculously anxious to find out the personal scandals of the minute; and he got as much pleasure and excitement out of patching up an old quarrel and starting fresh ones as from hearing exactly how an election to the Senate had been worked. The rather more frivolous hostesses wanted him to get up their amateur theatricals: he made even these satisfy his passion for watching how a man or a woman would behave in a difficult situation. The time when he cast a husband and his mistress for parts that gave them away to the audience he did it so naturally that all the blame fell on an innocent person.

His wife had very little idea of the lengths he would go to in his pleasure at being able to pull strings. She disliked formal dinner-parties extremely, and never accepted an invitation unless he had told her she must. She was not in society in Strasbourg at all, and some of Siguenau's women friends believed he had married his cook. She only knew about his social and political intrigues when he told her himself.

For some months he had told her nothing. She took to going to see Caroline Burckheim, because she too was a foreigner. It was the only thing they had in common.

One evening she was in her own room when her husband came in. She was not expecting him. Edward Berthelin had been staying with them: he had just gone back to Strasbourg, and she had watched her husband cross the courtyard to the door leading to the park.

He sat down and watched her. She was mending a pair of his riding-gloves.

"Whose are those?" he asked.

"Yours, of course."

"I thought they were Edward's, he keeps his here."

"His are lying in the hall."

"He drops things about everywhere," Siguenau grumbled. "Have you ever known him to put anything away?"

"You've known him longer than I have," Blanche said, smiling.

"When you first met him—when was that, by the way?" Siguenau asked. He put his hand up to smother a yawn.

"I think it must have been in February of that year——"

"Which year?"

"Ernest, what are you thinking about? You know I met Edward in the last year of the War. It was at someone's house—the day I lost my purse. I remember he was in the room when I came in and I didn't see him at first, I was too busy telling the others what had happened. Then I saw this stranger smiling, and I thought he was laughing at me."

"Did you dislike him at first?"

"No. I was only a little afraid of him. He talked about French writers I had tried to read and couldn't, because they go too far with that awful French habit of repeating the same thing three times in slightly different words——"

"But you became friendly with him very quickly. Did you think he was in love with you—or might be?"

"No," Blanche said drily. "Why should I?"

Siguenau leaned forward and touched her cheek lightly. He was smiling at her with a gentle irony.

"Why not? You've forgotten how young you were."

Blanche did not speak.

"Have you been happy with me?" Siguenau asked suddenly.

"Yes. You know I have."

"Wouldn't you rather I'd been—steadier—cooler? Or had taken an interest in music and the other things you were brought up to like. We don't share many interests."

"But why are you saying all this now?" Blanche exclaimed. She was disturbed. "None of this matters."

He had begun his energetic pacing up and down her room. Stopping abruptly in front of her he said in a curt voice,

"You know I haven't always—" he frowned.

His wife interrupted him calmly. "You've had other women, you mean."

"Tell me—haven't you sometimes wanted to punish me?"

"How could I punish you?"

"You might have paid me back in my own coin."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders. "My dear boy, I'm not an idiot—I shouldn't purposely try to spoil our lives. I—don't imagine I've enjoyed it when some woman I knew has taken to avoiding me. I was surprised the first time it happened, and didn't know what it meant—and I cried when I knew. But you must admit I haven't worried you about it."

Siguenau did not notice that she was trembling.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

JULES REUSS listened in silence to Siguenau's report of his conversation with Berthelin. It didn't surprise him to discover that Berthelin, like Hoffmayer, was a scoundrel. Alsace itself—and Berthelin was not even an Alsatian—was full of scoundrels prepared to sacrifice it to their so-called patriotism. He kept a list of their names, with the dates when they had written or said something which showed they did not admit the need to make friends with Germany at any cost—no matter what it cost—for Alsace's sake. A day would come when he would be able to punish them. He carried the list about with him and used to look at it when he went into the Café de la Paix in Strasbourg and saw Jews seated at a dozen tables. On it were names of wealthy Jews because they were Jews, or because he suspected them of encouraging Jewish refugees to inflame Frenchmen against Hitler. He despised Jews, but he hated a man like Berthelin—he was either a fool if he didn't know that France was too weak now to fight another war, or he was a devil, a million and a half dead young Frenchmen didn't satisfy him, he wanted to throw in another generation, he wanted Alsace to be overrun, drenched in blood, ruined.

While Siguenau was talking, Reuss let Alsace unroll in his mind like one of those Chinese paintings which have to be read yard by yard. The vast fragments of prehistoric wall sunk in the forest on the top of Mont Sainte-Odile, refuge of some sort against invasion; yellow-haired rank-smelling savages ferrying themselves across the Rhine to descend on the smiling fields and vineyards of the Romans; through four

centuries they kept emerging from the black pine-forests at the other side of the Rhine and were driven back; then the legionaries withdrew from this country they had civilised, and the invasions began; not until the seventeenth century was Alsace really at peace—for how few years—1814—1870—1914.

Reuss felt his breast-bone aching, as though he had tried to shield with it the keels of the Vosges cutting through this rich plain, roads bordered by pear-trees, crazy quilt of fields gleaming and changing every minute, tapestry of vines, villages laughing across their old walls, the arrow of Strasbourg, the fountains, the streets built up in solid cubes of sunlight. To throw all this into the line again—? His body set itself like a stone against such a horror. So Berthelin thought Munich a defeat, did he? It was a defeat for the murderers of Alsace. A defeat for war-mongers, for unbalanced men who didn't know that Alsace must have peace, must make friends with an all-powerful Germany, must believe that the bones of one Alsatian recruit were worth more than all the Czechs in the world.

"He's a friend of Beneš, is he? He goes in for patriotic blackmail? Do you know what, my friend, the mistake we made was in not giving the Czechs openly to Germany. And to please whom? To please our own Reds? To please the English? Do you know that two years ago in August our English friends told Blum not to send arms to Spain because if he did it and got into war England wouldn't fight for us. So much for the English."

Siguenau looked at him with intense curiosity. He guessed at a personal bitterness, but he had not fathomed it yet. If he had known there was a black mark against Reuss's name in the official records, because of that generous mistake of his during the War, he would have suspected Reuss of being upset worst of all by Berthelin's plan for State support of the

ironworks. There would be nothing for Reuss in a business controlled from Paris. But he didn't know about this black mark. Neither did he know that Reuss had begun praying for a German Alsace—naturally, since France was going down hill fast! Reuss was too shrewd to come out openly as a supporter of any political group. He was an anti-Semite who kept on polite terms with rich Jews, a pro-German who had refused German money. He despised Siguenau for getting himself labelled. Just as he despised him for looking forward to the day when the Croix de Feu, after changing its name as often as necessary, would triumph all over the country and send him to cut a dash in Paris. Paris of all vulgar holes! If he were invited to be a Secretary of State Reuss would refuse unless he could move his department to Alsace.

"Tell me why you are against a Government loan," Siguenau said inquisitively.

Reuss looked at him with dislike.

"What do you imagine a socialist government will do with firms under government control?" he said curtly.

"Ah, yes!"

"You hadn't thought of it in that light?" Reuss said, with contempt.

Siguenau shrugged his shoulders. His opinion of socialists was lower. He believed that any one of them could be bought. You had only to offer a modest bribe and the most savage would eat out of your hand.

"If it's a choice between bankruptcy and socialism, I'd prefer the Burckheim works to close down," Reuss said coldly. "Fortunately it's not. We shall find some way round."

He meant, I shall find a way round. He no longer expected anything from Siguenau. But Burckheim was fond of him and trusted him—and for what that was worth, little enough, no doubt, Siguenau could still be useful.

"You approved of Berthelin when he took the job," Siguenau said. He had been stung by Reuss's manner.

"I was under the impression you were able to influence him," Reuss answered drily.

Siguenau turned pale. He detested Reuss at this moment, but he had a confused feeling that it was Edward Berthelin who had struck him and let him down.

"He's changed a good deal," he said, with difficulty. "He's capable of anything . . . I doubt if he was ever what I thought he was."

Leaving the château after his talk with Reuss, Siguenau caught up, almost at the end of the drive, with Anne-Marie Eschelmer. She was bent double over a basket crammed with jars of fruit Caroline had given her. Siguenau took it from her and insisted on walking with her through the village. She was flattered by his kindness and tried anxiously to find something to say to him. Not a word came into her head. She had been thinking about her rheumatism, but she couldn't tell Siguenau that when she got out of bed in the mornings her ankles gave way and she had to sit down and rub them. The two lumps of flesh, like dark tallow, were not fit to be discussed with him. Then what could she talk about? The rug in her sitting-room was in holes. Henry had sent her money to buy anything she needed, and she had hidden it in a safe place—why waste it? Ah—yes—Henry. She looked at Siguenau with a smile distorted by pride.

"I think you know my son? Yes, he enjoys calling on you. He formed a high opinion of you, let me tell you. I am glad to be able to tell you so. In his profession—you know, he's

not only in business now, he has to do with a newspaper as well—he's brilliant, my Henry—he has to learn how to judge people. You don't object to my saying this, do you? He doesn't trust many people. Poor boy, he had such a difficult life when he was young. He's forty now. Strange, isn't it? It's strange, I mean, to have a man for a son, not a little boy. You know, when I'm praying for him, sometimes I have to say, 'You know, precious St. Joseph, it's that boy you used to give the prizes to at school, the little boy with the sad eyes.' His eyes are often sad now, when he's such a great man in Metz."

"In Metz, is he?" Siguenau said, smiling. "Of course—I remember."

"Yes, I sent him some quince cordial last week by a neighbour. He always liked it. . . ."

Siguenau was half listening to the old woman, and half remembering the last time he had seen Henry Eschelmer: the fellow had treated him to an hysterical tirade against Russia. An idea seized him. Perhaps one could make use of Eschelmer. How? Never mind how—it would be amusing to get the fellow here and probe him, see whether there were any use to be made of half-a-Burckheim. It was just possible. The spider in the centre of Siguenau's brain sent a thread out without knowing where it would catch . . . it stretched forward like a drifting cable.

"A pity he's in Metz," he said casually.

Anne-Marie pressed her hand over her heart.

"Why?"

"Don't you think he ought to be here? After all—his grandfather is getting old. If only he saw your son oftener there's no saying—"

"I've always said so," Anne-Marie said, agitated. "It's true. But what can I do?"

"Why not get him to come here and stay two or three months?"

"He wouldn't listen to me."

They had reached the arch leading to her courtyard. Anne-Marie looked up at Siguenau again with anguish.

"Can I tell him you advise it?"

Siguenau hesitated.

"Why not? Yes—do."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

CAROLINE came downstairs dressed to go out. The door of her husband's library was open: her husband, not yet properly absorbed in his book, opened an eye and spoke to her.

"Where are you off?"

She hesitated. "To see René . . . you know, he's really ill now. His housekeeper cooks meals he won't eat, and he's not comfortable in those rooms——"

"What's he living in the village for?" Burckheim growled. "Spying on me. Let him go to Bordeaux."

"Why to Bordeaux?" Caroline asked, stupefied.

"It's where he belongs."

His wife turned to go. He called her back and said drily,

"I've seen him hanging about the park. I won't have it. Tell him so. He has no right there, he isn't one of the family, he must clear out."

"No," Caroline said. "You must tell him yourself."

She shut the door, as much afraid of his rages as she had always been. When she was away from him she felt indifferent, certain that nothing he could say to her now would touch her, since why fear where you have ceased to love? But the same tones, harsh, a little dulled, started in her the same quiver of shame, as if she were still a young woman and she would be disgraced if he were bored by her.

The window of René's sitting-room was open. She could see him at the back of the dark room as she stood waiting for the house door to be opened. It was a room in which there was nothing of his except some of his books crammed untidily into the shelves. He had refused to let her put them

right, making her feel she had been tactless, as though she had wanted to read his letters. She realised that he was purposely leaving his things in disorder, so that he shouldn't pay these rooms the compliment of seeming to live in them. He was waiting to be moved on.

He was writing when she came in. He saw the inquisitive look she was not quick enough in brushing off. It vexed him. Then, since it is only ridiculous to expect privacy in a waiting room, he smiled.

"Yes, it's still my history of the Burckheim," he said. "I shall probably get it finished in time. But it won't be published—unless I remember to leave the money to pay for it—and I'm not sure I have enough vanity. What I ought to have done—I see it now—was to write about Dietrich, Honoré's tenant. There's no chance of him dying out. He may have been here before the Burckheims—he'll certainly be here five hundred years from now, turning over the same ground, and when he finds a bone or two not knowing which war it belongs to—and not caring."

"Is there going to be war now?" Caroline asked.

"Really I don't know. It depends on our being able to make another effort—the third in seventy years. To defend —? To defend what can't be destroyed, the courage, tenacity, meanness of Jacob Dietrich and his sons? Or what? No doubt it's because I'm going to die soon that I wonder whether it's worth doing anything except blot out the Germans altogether—men, women, children. And to do it would be our moral death. Perhaps the young don't feel this. How should I know?"

There was very little air in the room. The window, set in a thick wall, looked on to the street above a cellar. The other side of the street was blinded by the sun, shutters drawn to. A smell of lilac came into the room, with the smell of rotting wood, and licked at the walls.

"This place isn't doing you any good," Caroline said. "Why don't you let me find you something better? You could take a house with a garden."

Hoffmayer shook his head. "I wouldn't waste the money," he said simply.

There is a peasant in every Frenchman, thought his friend. Even in a man as civilised and sophisticated as this. It's what the rest of us don't understand about them—and makes them hard to get on with, and will always save them.

"Your history of the Burckheims," she said diffidently. "If you'll let me pay for it to be published"—she saw his face contract—"I haven't done much for the Burckheims, I didn't manage a son."

"We'll see."

His ungracious answer did not offend her; she had never wanted to please him, or suffered from him.

"I wish you'd tell me something. Why have you quarrelled with Honoré? It's ridiculous for you to be living in Burckheim and never come to the château."

"I haven't quarrelled with him," Hoffmayer said gently.

"You used to be friends."

"He put up with me."

"No—there was more than that. After all, you were brought up together. You caught trout in the Bruche with your two pairs of hands. I should always love anyone I'd done that with. Don't look forbearing, René, it doesn't snub me. Something went wrong—I want to know about it."

"I daresay he always resented me—from the afternoon my mother brought me into the house—and the older he got the less reason he saw for putting up with me."

Half satisfied, knowing she would never get the truth out of him, since he had begun by lying, she gave in. The silence outside, held down to the edges of the street by sunlight, was

broken up suddenly by an unlikely noise, a rider in this narrow hot side-street. Caroline went to the window.

"Who is it?"

She hesitated. "Ernest Siguenau."

She did not know what had happened, but she had noticed that Siguenau never went to see the man who used to speak of him as a son. No doubt, like many sons, he had turned out a disappointment. She kept her back turned to Hoffmayer.

After a minute he said drily,

"He's mixing himself up with very dubious circles in Strasbourg."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE number of hours Jacob Dietrich had wasted in idleness since he became a man, that is, since he was nine or ten years old, scarcely added up to a week. It was with a strong sense of guilt this evening that instead of going indoors when he came out of the barn he left the courtyard and sauntered towards the village. He turned aside on a path between walls and reached the ramparts without crossing the main street of the village. He used to come this way when he was going to see his wife before he married her, and he thought of her as little then as now; he thought about the price of his barley, about his vines, and turned his nose from side to side like a dog. Turf smoke—that was the Hübbers: mixed smells of musk and dung—the courtyard shared by Mourer's widow and her sons-in-law: a faintly acrid tang worked its way like a knife under the closed doors of the smithy.

As he stepped across the stream he saw something glittering on the ground at the far side. He stooped. It was a coin, a franc, caught by the moon. At once his feeling of guilt left him.

Between the crumbling walls of the rampart and a second lower wall a stretch of the ditch formed a grass walk: there was a tree here and there, a single row of vines under the ramparts, and a fine view over the valley of the Bruche. A milky sea of mist covered the fields and the river, eddying about single trees. The night sky was covered with white clouds.

Dietrich walked a short way. He heard a noise, and stood still between the outer wall and a beech. It was close here

that a few yards of the ramparts had been built into the wall of Burckheim's park. A wooden door, never used, opened from the park, through five feet of masonry, on to the grass walk.

This door opened with the noise of something being dragged over rubble. Two figures came through.

They walked away from Dietrich hiding behind his tree, and leaned on the low wall. He had seen them clearly when they crossed the moonlit grass—the Berthelin youth and Miss Françoise Siguenau. Their arms touched. The young man, head and shoulders above the girl, was bare-headed: the girl had tied a handkerchief over her brown hair. They spoke in low voices, in the stillness, but Dietrich could hear almost all they said.

Up to their tricks, he thought drily. It's the ones have had money spent on them who run out at night; the others are glad to sleep.

"I must go back to Strasbourg, to my father, to-morrow. I can't spend the whole of my leave here."

"How much longer have you?"

"Until the end of the month—the end of May."

"And then?"

"The battery I'm training with is near Wissembourg. I'm told we're up to strength. I missed the mobilisation, you know. There'll be another."

Always thinking of a war, Dietrich thought: but when it comes he won't be worrying about the harvest, he'll be full of fine phrases before he's killed. . . . Come on, forward! Fire! . . . and our young Daniel, poor sinner, will be wondering with his face on the ground what it's all about.

"I shall see you again before I go back," Robert said.

"And then?"

"When my service is finished—and if there isn't a war—I'll be in the works, my father has arranged it; I shall have a

small salary, and after a year or two a larger one. How much do we need, Fanny?"

Not how much she needs, but how much she'll spend, Dietrich thought, grinning behind his tree. He watched the young man move his arm, to put it round the girl's waist, then draw it back as though he were afraid. Careful, careful, Dietrich thought ironically.

"You'll remember this night, won't you?"

"I shall remember more than this," young Berthelin said. "I shall remember going into Molsheim with you, and the fortified gate, the Virgin standing there like a sentry, and the market place with a sample of everything Alsatian except a vineyard. You bought three handkerchiefs you didn't need, to see inside three small shops, one new, less than eighty years old, one unbelievably old, and one marked 'Ave Maria Gratia Plena. 1655' with an angel on either side of the door. I shall remember that the corners of your mouth turn up before you begin to smile. And you're long-sighted, you can read the mayor's clock from the end of the street."

"Only when the sun is level with it. I cheated."

"Well, I shall remember you sometimes tell lies."

"It's time we were going."

They stood a minute longer, and looked up at the rampart and across the valley of the Bruche. Everything was frighteningly beautiful, glittering, and asleep.

When the door had shut groaningly behind them, Dietrich came out from his tree and went home. He turned over in his mind what he would tell his wife and decided not to tell her anything at all. If there were a scandal later, and he was mixed up in it, as a witness, it might do him harm. He touched the franc in his pocket. At any rate I've done well out of the evening, he thought slyly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE suite of rooms Henry Eschelmer occupied in the largest hotel in Metz was as unlike any of the places he lived in before as he had been able to find. The bedroom was enormous; it was carpeted, there were double curtains at the windows, and cupboards and chests of drawers he could fill with clothes, shoes, medicine bottles, and the chocolate he ate in quantities at all hours. He had partly refurnished the sitting-room, and without knowing it he bought chairs and pictures in the atrocious style his mother admired when she was a young woman. All these things were a reminder that he had succeeded. There was always a moment in the early morning, between dozing and waking fully, when some other room took possession of his memory and forced him to struggle to escape from it. It was either his room in Burckheim, so narrow that he could not stretch both arms out, and still darkened for him by memories of the tears he had given way to there, kneeling helplessly on the boards or stretched face downwards on the bed, or it was one of his other rooms in Metz, when he was poor and had to put up with the squalor of poverty. He felt all the anguish of coming to life in a shabby icy room, to the clothes he had reluctantly taken off and left lying on the floor, to coffee drunk, shivering, in the bistrot at the end of the street. Even when he opened his eyes it was a second or two before the window of that other room vanished.

He woke late this morning. The sun on the closed shutters filled the room with air like tepid water. He turned himself

in the bed and began to knead his stomach with both hands to start it up for the day.

He had eaten too well at dinner. He dined at a restaurant where a table was always kept for him until nine o'clock, and the German who was his guest had noticed the attention paid to him. Did I impress him when I talked? he wondered restlessly. He went over all he had said. He refused to send written reports to his superiors in Berlin. They had to send an agent to see him once a month, and he told this man what he had done, how he had spent the money sent him, the names of people he had approached, his successes or failures with them. When the agent gave him new orders, he gave them in a respectful voice. . . . "We ask you to consider this, Herr Eschelmer. . . . You are the authority here; naturally we accept your judgement. . . ." Ah, they know who I am, he thought. Involuntarily his face assumed a look of insane arrogance. He stiffened his body, flinging his head back on the pillow. His hands gave up massaging his stomach: he clenched them.

"People of Metz," he said, frowning, "you are once again free, free German citizens. Your leader, Adolf Hitler, is speaking to you through me. My glorious work for you is only beginning. No one can reproach me for the past, and those of you who helped me in my long struggle shall march forward with me into our glorious free proud German future. . . ."

The feeling of discomfort in his stomach cut him short. He turned over on his face and pressed himself against the mattress. He remembered the silverweed and ginger tea his mother gave him when he was a child to cure stomach cramp. I would send for her to live with me if I didn't know she would annoy me by fussing, he thought. The truth was she reminded him of his past. He would never marry: he was afraid of being deceived or laughed at. The nerves attaching

him to his mother were too much alive; he would never put another woman in her place and he did not want her near him all the time.

And yet how he longed to be loved. He would follow aristocratic-looking foreigners in the street, hoping for an accident that would allow him to rush forward and help them. His eyes filled with tears when he thought of the gratitude they would pour out on him.

I must get up, he thought, lying still. Phrases of the leading article he had to write—he edited as well as owned the newspaper his German backers had bought and handed over to him—sprouted easily in his mind. It was to be an article proving that Poland must submit to Germany. The price of peace. These obscure scoundrels who want war, he thought bitterly. What on earth could I do in a war? A frightful spasm shook him. The solid base of his good fortune cracked across. He groaned.

Lying on it had quietened his stomach. He felt a gentle relaxation, and turning back the sheet from his body, flaccid, yellow, the colour of a plucked fowl, he staggered up.

The waiter brought him his letters with his breakfast. There was one from his mother.

“Darling boy

don't think I discuss your affairs with anyone, I let them judge for themselves, by what they hear. No one knows you are a wealthy business man and an editor now, except the wife of Stürmel at the saw-mill, her niece married the cousin of that Daul who is a postman in Metz, so naturally she knows all about you. I don't know what Mr. Siguenau has heard. He must know something, or else why should he carry my basket for me, not that I asked Mrs. Caroline Burckheim to give me anything, before all eyes?

I mustn't make you read a long letter. Cutting it short at once—he advises you to come. Remind your son, he said to me, his

grandfather is an old man, and when it's a question of making a will absent connections are forgotten.

I asked him if I ought to write to you. He said, write.

My dear Boy, your room has been ready since Tuesday, I cleaned it with my heart's blood. My joy in seeing you will be such—and if justice is going to be done to the rejected, the Lord and holy St. Joseph, friend of women in my mother's situation, will let me depart in peace.

Your loving Mother
A-M Eschelmer."

The extraordinary thing was that Eschelmer understood this letter at first reading. He was close enough to his mother for his thoughts to fit easily into the tracks worn in her mind, however crazy these were. He saw the glance she turned on Siguenau when he was advising her to send for her son. He saw her hand, with its flattened finger-tips, pressed over her heart in the gesture she made when she was happy and when she was frightened—she had had so little happiness in her life that she made the one gesture do for both. And he saw her go into her room, and trembling a little begin to set the bowl and plate for her supper, and then, since after all what had happened was comforting and pleasant, decide to treat herself to a slice of cake after her soup and hurry smiling to get it.

He glanced over his shoulder. The waiter had gone out of the room. He was alone. He began to walk up and down the room, laughing and waving his arms.

"Friends—fellow-citizens of Burckheim—I come back to you as a conqueror, as the heir, as—I am deeply moved—your spontaneous welcome—my long struggle, my courage, my patience——"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

EDWARD BERTHELIN'S indifference to women sprang from two roots; one, the shock of his wife's painful death; the other, his restless intellect, which drew wastefully on his nervous strength. He used this up not only in his management of the ironworks but in writing those excellent monographs on the metal resources of the country which were making him known in authoritative circles. He slept badly. His servant, an elderly reservist who had been his servant in the army, was used to finding him still writing at five in the morning. He would then drink his first pot of coffee, unless he were going to early mass, bathe, walk out past the university to the river, and come back to drink more coffee before going to the works.

His face, strong and delicate, was filed down to the bone. This bony thinness gave him a look of fanaticism which women instinctively disliked: they felt it as an insult. Actually, because he was indifferent to them, he liked women. He talked to a woman very much as if she were his son, expecting her to be ignorant and to have ideas. If she showed him that she expected to be made love to he avoided her from that moment.

He felt respect as well as warm liking for Blanche Siguenau. She amused him. He felt at ease with her; he supposed at first it was because she was English and had been brought up with three brothers who were naturally given all the advantages and had taught her to fag for them. Later, when he had known her a few weeks, he liked her because she was lazy, intelligent, modest. If he had not already been deeply in

love with the young woman he was going to marry he might have fallen in love with her. He was delighted when she married Siguenau—from now on he could think of her in the same breath with the man he was closer to than to any other human being, and make one emotion do for both.

She advised him on his household troubles in Strasbourg, and when anything went wrong in the house his servant telephoned to her as the mistress.

He came down to Burckheim on Saturdays. Usually Siguenau was busy in the afternoon, and then he sat talking to her. To-day he wanted to talk to her about his son.

"He spent an hour yesterday writing a letter. He never writes anything but postcards to his friends, so I suppose——"

Blanche interrupted him. "The letter came to this house," she said drily. "He was writing to Fanny. When I was sorting the letters I recognised his writing—he used to send her postcards when he was at the château, with messages from Caroline Burckheim—as if Caroline had forgotten how to use the telephone."

"Well?"

"Fanny is too young. She's eighteen."

"But except for that, you don't object to it?"

"I don't know," Blanche said. "Sometimes I object to marriage altogether. Yes, yes, I know there must be children, and I know that the family is our only way of living according to nature—but they're both terribly heavy burdens and I wanted Fanny to be happier than other people."

"She wouldn't be happy alone. Even if she would—you can't arrange her life for her."

"Robert is good-looking."

"He's kind, intelligent, sensitive."

"Very like you."

"A pity we haven't managed a simpler world for them. I feel like apologising to every young man and young woman

I know. What on earth were we doing, we soldiers, to let the old hands carry on after the war and make another one certain? I blame ourselves, not the politicians. One doesn't expect them to learn anything."

"I think we were luckier than Robert and Fanny," Blanche said. "The War dropped on us suddenly, we hadn't been expecting it for years, since we were children."

"Well, we can't dictate to our children—we can't even advise them. We must let them strictly alone."

Blanche got up with sudden energy. She hurried across the room to a window.

"I thought I heard Ernest," she said, disappointed. She came back and stood in front of Berthelin, her hands clasped awkwardly behind her like a schoolgirl. "You know, he's very moody now. I'm afraid he's getting bored with his work, and I don't want him to leave here. The old fellow talks of leaving him the estate. Even if that's all nonsense, we ought to stay. Where else would he get a salary, a house, and work he likes? Do you know whether he's bored?"

"I'm sure he's not," Berthelin said quickly. "He knows everyone in Strasbourg, baronesses and fashionable politicians ask him to advise them—he's a terrific success." He laughed gently. "Think of the pleasure he gets out of knowing everything about everybody."

"He's ridiculous, bless him."

"You're very good with him," Berthelin said.

"It's easy for me," Blanche said simply. "I'm one of those women whose feelings grow narrower and deeper as they grow older—like some rivers. I really love him, and my daughter less, and you and one of my brothers a little. And that's all."

The door opened and Siguenau came in. He began talking at once about Burckheim's extravagance and bad temper. Berthelin listened. He imagined for some reason that

Siguenau wanted to be left alone with Blanche, and he made an excuse to leave them.

As soon as the door shut Siguenau said coldly,
"We see too much of him."

His wife was startled. She waited a moment, expecting him to give away the real cause of his bad temper. He sat down, took a letter out of his pocket and began reading.

"What is the matter?" Blanche said. "He's never here during the week, and you like seeing him."

"I know Edward better than you do," he said, without looking up. "He makes use of people. He pretends to be helpless. Has he ever done anything in return for his free weekends? Not a thing."

"I never heard such nonsense——"

"Then don't let's discuss it."

Siguenau folded the letter into his pocket and jumped up. He looked at his wife with an air of dislike and irony.

"I may have to go into Strasbourg this evening. Colonel Wirbel has written asking me to see him. He's going to divorce his wife. She's been making a fool of him for months and he's just tumbled to it. With the man who was his closest friend. She was his mistress before marriage, then it was broken off, and it began again when they met last year after he had been abroad for years. It will ruin Wirbel—but he's going to make them pay for it all the same."

"Poor woman."

"Why? Why pity her? Is that the way an English woman thinks about adultery? A deceitful bitch of a woman, who has ruined her husband's life—and you're sorry for her. You surprise me."

"Don't be absurd," Blanche said gently. "I was thinking that she's lost everything."

"No doubt she'll come out of it on the right side," Siguenau said airily.

On his way downstairs Siguenau caught sight of his daughter crossing the hall towards the door into the walled garden. He ran after her. She had a notebook and pen, and tried to push them into the pocket of her jacket when she saw him. Siguenau took no notice.

"What have you been doing, my darling?"

"Walking across the park," Fanny said, with her charming smile.

"Alone?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well—" Siguenau hesitated. He had never scolded her since she was a child, he was too vain, he wanted her to think well of him. "You saw a great deal of young Berthelin when he was at the château. I know that Mrs. Burckheim and your mother knew about it—but you know they're neither of them French, they weren't brought up as French girls of their class would be, and they—you don't want to be thought wild, do you?"

Fanny looked at him with a pretence at seriousness.

"Who would think I'm wild?"

"The kind of people you'll have to meet very soon."

"Why should I meet them? And you know—the times have changed. Girls do a great many things now they didn't when you were my age—"

"Not French girls of your class."

"But you forget," Fanny said, smiling. "I'm half English."

Siguenau turned his head. Blanche had come into the garden. He looked from his wife to Fanny and said drily, "You've infected your daughter."

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SIGUENAU had sources of information he never spoke about to his friends. Through the chief of the police in Strasbourg he could make use, without seeing them himself, of a shady crew of blackmailers, drug-pedlars, and worse, who worked for the police and bought themselves at least a temporary immunity. When he had astonished someone by his intimate knowledge of a reputable man's backstairs life, he would say jokingly, "Ah, I have my spies." No one took him at his word. He might have been suspected if he had pretended to be innocent.

As soon as Mrs. Eschelmer told him that her son had taken his advice and was coming to stay in Burckheim for a few months, he had enquiries made in Metz. In a few days he knew that Eschelmer was supposed to be the agent in Metz of certain French firms, respectable and powerful, who were anxious, as a pure question of business confidence, to see France and Germany embrace. Siguenau's "spy" added that Eschelmer's newspaper had unlimited funds it could draw on, and that these came from the other side of the Rhine. There was nothing shocking or surprising about it. If Eschelmer were spending German money freely, wasn't it going into French pockets? And what harm did he do? No one knew which side the cat would jump. It might after all jump to Berlin—and one would be off on the right foot. If not—what was easier than silencing Mr. Eschelmer? Silencing Mr. Hitler, of course—ha, ha!

Siguenau chewed this report over for a few days before sharing it with Jules Reuss.

"Why did you advise the fellow to come home?" Reuss asked.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know," Siguenau said, with an ingenuous smile. "It struck me when his mother was talking that he might come in useful. I'm not sure for what."

Reuss held his tongue. Either the man facing him was a complete fool, or he was playing a deep game for his own benefit. It was easier for Reuss to credit the second version than the first—but he was puzzled.

"I'm not anxious to go to Cologne again," Siguenau went on. "If we needed to send anyone there, this chap with his German connections might be the very man."

"It's possible," Reuss said, without warmth.

Siguenau had asked Eschelmer to dine with him in Strasbourg. He had chosen a restaurant on the Kellermann Quay. He saw at once, by the look on Eschelmer's face when he came in, that he was disappointed because he had not been invited to a larger place. He's as ready as ever to take offence, Siguenau thought.

"My dear boy," he said with a smile, "I've risked ordering the dinner. One gets the best food in Strasbourg here. It's worth every penny it costs. Do you know the joke going round about the Baronne de Kopp and her 'avec supplément'? Of course you do—ha, ha! And now you must tell me frankly whether you like this trout flavoured with almonds. I haven't dared to choose your wine, but if I might warn you—the chicken will have been cooked with burgundy. You'll know what to avoid."

"I leave it to you," Eschelmer said.

His sullenness had gone. He looked round him with an air of insolent good-humour. He was still nervous, but when he had eaten and drunk he relaxed and became sentimental.

"I've always wanted to have enough money to enjoy a modest luxury," he said. "I'm not luxurious by nature—in

fact, I'm an ascetic—but I have an extraordinarily sensitive skin, inside and out. I can't stand rough sheets, or coarse food. If ever I have a great deal of money I shall run a chef and a private orchestra—soul and body, in fact."

"May you be as rich as you hope," Siguenau said, laughing.

Eschelmer pushed his jaw forward.

"I shall be very rich one of these days. I know it. My planet—I believe in the stars—is in the best possible house now. This year. Something unusual is going to happen. I'm absolutely confident."

Siguenau encouraged him to talk. He was surprised by Eschelmer's shrewdness when he was talking about money and politics. He only became hysterical when he talked about himself and his feelings: the rest of the time he was sensible, tough-skinned, cynical. No wonder he had been able to get hold of money. He was deranged enough to suit politicians, and he had the abracadabra of finance and business at the end of his tongue.

Towards the end of the meal, when he was over-excited, he began talking about his grandfather.

"I don't want anything from him for myself, thank you. I've made my own way. But he ought to have looked after his child—my poor mother. No one will ever know what she had to put up with, from her foster-mother first, and then from her husband. And Honoré Burckheim never raised a finger to help her. Selfish lazy brute."

"Forgive me," Siguenau said, leaning forward. "I ought not to contradict you. But I believe the truth is, your grandfather"—he noticed it gave Eschelmer acute pleasure to hear him say "your grandfather"—"would have welcomed a son. He wasn't interested in a girl. That's why, if you will allow me to say so, you ought to be in his good graces. The old man needs managing—but I mustn't talk about it if it offends you."

"Please go on," Eschelmer said. Tears stood in his eyes.

"Well—there are certain things he feels strongly about. He never forgives a criticism. If you don't agree with him and admire him, you're damned. He's a patriot. He adores Alsace—and his own bit of it more than the rest. He detests change. He's sly. One day he's a peasant, the next a politician, on another a rather maudlin poet—and with everything else a shrewd sensible squire. If you take the trouble to flatter him in the right way he may do something for you—I mean, of course, for your mother. An admirable woman, your mother."

Eschelmer was weeping openly now. He took one of Siguenau's hands in both his.

"I shall never forget this," he stammered. "Never. One of these days I'll repay you. Remember. I'll do anything I can for you. I'm your friend for life."

Who the devil is it takes hold of one of your hands as if he were drowning? thought Siguenau. He remembered suddenly. It was Honoré Burckheim himself, of course.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

BERTHELIN was leaving the château after he had made his weekly report. The message from Caroline Burckheim caught him just when he was going out, and he turned back reluctantly. She noticed as he came into her room that he was tired, and began to apologise for asking him to see her—she had lost all that hard confidence the Boston City Godmothers gave her when she was born. Berthelin smiled.

"I was hoping to see you," he said untruthfully, "but I had no excuse for coming."

"Are you sure?"

"What's the matter, Caroline?"

"I don't know," she confessed. "The last few months—ever since last September—I've felt uncertain. I never felt less like an American, but people here and in Strasbourg talk to me now as if I couldn't understand what they were saying and they explain things—or don't trouble to talk at all. What have I done? We're not even at war. Besides, I was in Strasbourg all through the last war and no one looked at me as if I were a stupid foreigner."

"But the Germans were in Strasbourg then," Berthelin said. "You and the native-born Alsatian women were on the same raft. To-day you're alone with us. You're learning something—when we French are threatened we don't want advice or sympathy, and we know your countrymen will work overtime on both. We're beginning to close the doors that we open a very little in peace time."

"Leaving me outside."

"Have a minute or two's patience. First of all every field,

every vine-pole, every magpie, becomes French and nothing but French—as though even the ground, the air, the water in the rivers, were different with us from all the rest of the universe. But then we remember what we were taught at home, that each of us is a person, even an American is a person—and so we begin breaking our bread with you again. You must try to forgive us.”

“I’ve nothing to forgive you at least.”

Berthelin put his hand over his eyes. He was more exhausted than he had known. A moment later the room darkened. Opening his eyes, he saw Caroline noiselessly drawing the shutters.

“Keep your eyes closed,” she said, smiling.

“Thanks. But I don’t mind the sun. I’ve been working too late at night.”

Caroline hesitated. She had not dared to question him as she would have questioned René about the firm. His reputation as an economist frightened her. She had never respected René’s scholarship . . . what is a scholar?—a man who isn’t able to do anything else.

“You’re having trouble, aren’t you?”

“How much do you know?”

“That Honoré won’t allow you to do anything drastic—he tells you to go slow, to wait, to retrench——”

Berthelin smiled.

“His most overworked word is ‘retrench.’ I’ve cut wages to the bone, I’ve dropped the pensions scheme the men were promised. I’m loathed in the works. So loathed that when I cut my own salary in half, I overheard a foreman asking one of the men what he imagined I was getting out of it.”

“What’s going to happen?”

“The works will either be closed down, or taken over if we go to war in time,” Berthelin said. He shrugged his shoulders.

“If we go to war——?”

"I mean when."

Caroline made the gesture of a childless woman who hears talk of war. She dropped her arms by her side.

"It won't happen, it's too terrible, it will be stopped," she said vehemently.

"Now you're talking like an American," Berthelin said kindly.

"We must be the only sane nation."

"No," Berthelin said, "you ruin your country in other ways—it's the only difference."

Caroline did not answer. For a moment she had felt she could not go on breathing this sharp stinging air of Europe: her lungs hurt her; she felt homesick for steam-heated ideals and kindness. She wanted ideas to be respectable, loyalties to belong in pigeon-holes, friendships to be detachable at will. Memories were too long and friendships too costly for her in Europe. She closed her eyes and saw very clearly an aunt she had always disliked, and felt comforted.

Berthelin stood up.

"I must go," he said gently.

"How do you think Honoré is?"

She would have been shocked if she had known that what she meant was: How soon do you think he will die and let me go back to America?

"Not in a very good temper. I'm sorry. Someone has written him a letter about Ernest Siguenau, and it annoyed him. He asked me whether it's true that Ernest runs about with the Alsace-for-the-Alsatians idiots."

"Well—it is, isn't it?"

"Ernest is absolutely to be trusted," Berthelin said warmly. "I told your husband so. He believed me—but his temper is at least as bad as it was. I'm sorry for you, my poor dear."

Caroline left the house by the servants' staircase and a side door into the courtyard, to avoid passing her husband's room. She was unlucky. Before she could hurry away into the park she saw coming towards her Henry Eschelmer and his mother. There was nothing for it but to turn back. She took Anne-Marie up to her room and left Eschelmer to wait on the landing, between the smiling ironical angels in needlework and the Callot prints, while a servant found out whether Honoré wanted to see him.

"My husband may," Caroline said delicately, "be asleep. He sleeps a great deal, you know. You must join us if he doesn't want to be disturbed."

Eschelmer looked at her haughtily. She saw his hands behind his back close on the ledge of a cupboard.

Anne-Marie refused the chair Caroline drew forward for her. She drifted about the room with the dry sound of a leaf blowing across the floor. She fingered things. She knew more by touching it about a curtain woven a hundred years ago in Mulhouse than Caroline knew who had looked everywhere until she found, in a shop given over to antiques, the colours she wanted. Caroline knew what it was worth, and the design enchanted her: neither its beauty nor its cost meant anything to Anne-Marie, but her fingers carried by the shortest route to her mind the sweat, eye-strain, and profound wordless happiness of the dead weaver. Her body, like her tongue, spoke the same uncouth dialect. She had to forget it to speak to Caroline in the stiff French she used for strangers.

"How d'you think my son is looking?"

"I thought he looked very well."

"Ah, he's not. You haven't an eye that sees these things. If you had ever had any children——"

"I'm glad I haven't," Caroline interrupted. She had had enough of listening in silence to the older woman's instinctive malice. She now knew it was malice, her eyes had been

opened by the weight behind them of uncertainty and fear. "I'm glad. This country has no use for children except to get them killed."

"I don't know what you mean. I was talking to you about Henry."

"I mean this everlasting talk of war."

"A war has to be fought," Anne-Marie said calmly. "No one likes it, but if it comes it comes. It's no use making a fuss."

"The French are impossible."

Anne-Marie had often thought this. She was an Alsatian, and it annoyed her to have to speak French. It annoyed her infinitely more to hear Caroline criticise France, a country where stalls set down next door to each other in the market sell butter at different prices, and you have the pleasure of saving five centimes, and where you can insult your neighbour grossly without being denounced as an enemy of the State. If it were a question of choosing between France and Germany, between her father and her husband, Anne-Marie knew her road. She began a sharp reply. Remembering at the same moment that she wanted Caroline to do something for her, she stopped. A look of mild cunning crossed her eyes.

"Yes, aren't they?" she said innocently. "But I was talking about Henry. . . . Did you notice his shirt? Pure silk. And his shoes! He's done well for himself in Metz. But it hasn't changed him, he still asks me to send him herbs—for his dyspepsia, poor child—and he is always giving me presents. Me—an old woman." She rolled her eyes, with the childish coquetry of ageing women. "Dear boy!"

"I'm glad he's doing well."

"But he's not happy," Anne-Marie said, watching the other woman. "He's very ambitious. His father used to punish him, you know, because—well, in fact, because he expected Mr. Burckheim to do something for us and he never did."

Unjust? Yes, I agree with you. But one doesn't expect justice."

"It must have been difficult for you," Caroline said. She could not pretend to like the other woman.

Anne-Marie came closer, laying on Caroline's arm a hand shadowed with thick veins. A smell of rice powder and acid came from her.

"What Henry wants is recognition," she said slyly. "Mr. Burckheim ought to take him into the ironworks. Or give him some share in the estate—even a modest one. Enough to admit what everyone, the whole of Burckheim, knows about us I'm his daughter, he treats me like a poor relation, but at least a relation. He hasn't done anything for Henry except get him out of Germany after the War I want you to use your influence. You must."

Caroline did not answer. It was less than a week since Honoré had told her he was leaving the château to Ernest Siguenau and the ironworks and the house in Strasbourg to Berthelin. Their connection with the Burckheim family might be distant but it ran on legitimate lines. Since she had her own money, and because he was glad of the excuse, he had not left her anything but her portion. The two men were friends, their children might intermarry, the land and ironworks grow together again. She, the foreign graft, had been cut out.

"I have no influence."

"On your husband?" Anne-Marie said sceptically. "You must. But, of course, if you don't want to say anything. . . ."

"I assure you I'm telling the truth."

"Oh, quite."

"You don't believe me?"

I'm out of my mind, Caroline thought. Why should I want to make excuses to this woman for disliking her?

"I must believe you if you say it," Mrs. Eschelmer said.

She spoke with that mortal rudeness only a Frenchwoman is capable of, without raising her voice. If any further proof had been needed that neither of her parents had a touch of German in them. . . . She smiled politely.

"You must go," Caroline said. "My head aches."

Anne-Marie gave her a polite glance, which saw everything, her carefully-dressed hair, her hands, so well massaged that at fifty-two they were unwrinkled, her eyelids, oiled to seem young.

"Forgive me, I should have noticed it."

"So you've come back?"

Burckheim had been awake when the servant came into the library and said that Mr. Eschelmer was in the house and would like to see him. He was awake, but a minute earlier he had been sleeping. Some light noise in the room had disturbed him. He had been dreaming about Geneviève, but without happiness: she laughed at him as they followed a path between vineyards and not only he but the vines themselves shrivelled; he knew he was dying. He woke, with relief. He heard a light footstep outside his door and turned his head, expecting to see her. The servant came in.

The feeling of weakness and terror persisted. It made him speak to Eschelmer in a soft wavering voice.

Eschelmer had nerved himself to march into the room, his face stern, shoulders squared. This unexpected gentleness flurried him. He was confused, then suspicious. The hand Burckheim held out to him was feeble and very cold, and when he touched it Eschelmer thought, God bless me, he's going to die. He felt himself joyously strong and cunning.

"I came home for a short holiday," he said, in the pleasant

ingratiating voice he used when he was off duty. "Y'know, I've been hard at it for the last few years."

"Yes, yes."

Burckheim made an impatient gesture. He had no wish to hear about the younger man's triumphs—whatever they were. He wanted to talk about himself, while he had time. This was not the first time he had thought about death, but it was the first time he realised—it shocked him—that the words "I did," "I saw," "I like," would drop out of the language the instant he died. People might say for a few years, "Honoré Burckheim liked good food," or "A splendid year for the Traminer grapes—old Burckheim would have been pleased"—but that was not the same thing. He felt energy returning to him with the need to talk of himself. What a tragedy if he died with a lifetime of acts and gestures not used up.

"You should see how I worked at your age," he said loudly. "Up at four, in the fields an hour later, I could tell you whether one particular branch had grown during the night, I've eaten dinner in the field with the men and walked home to lunch, then out again the minute the sun touched three o'clock, and home at dusk. And the miles I've walked to shoot hares—y'know, dressing with candles lit in the room, and when you step outside you can feel it's the last few minutes of darkness but you're walking by touch: it's cold still, with a mild breeze; you know you're off the track by the difference between frost under your boot on mud and on grass—the grass that time of the morning is as hard as the ground. The first light—my God, how often I've tried to pin it down, keeping my eyes skinned, fixed on the right spot on the horizon. I must have blinked—I never once saw it come—the sky vanished faster than I can watch—a mist level with the hedges. . . ."

He stretched his arm out.

"How d'you suppose this arm is going to forget the weight of a gun? Y'know, if you break a twig off and bring it to me in the dark I can tell you which slope it was growing on. You wouldn't think fingers could lose that, would you? But I can't——"

He stopped. He did not care to remember which of his senses was failing him.

"What a magnificent life you lead," Eschelmer said gently.

Burckheim was delighted. If Eschelmer had used the past tense he would have been irritated and not, as he was, flattered and soothed.

"I use the senses I was born with," he said.

"You were born with more than other people."

"Yes, that's quite true. But the fact is, my dear boy"—it was the first time he had spoken to Eschelmer with a touch of liking—"I haven't been afraid of them. Most people are. They don't drink or work or enjoy women half enough. Not because they think it's wrong—no Frenchman is quite such a fool as that—but they're afraid of running down. But what the devil—the body has its rights, hasn't it? Look at me! I have eighty years of life behind me. I never denied myself anything. If everyone could say that at my age, there'd be peace."

"You are unique," Eschelmer said simply.

Burckheim smiled. Pulling himself out of his chair, he insisted on going out. He was afraid for his vines. The weather, instead of the mild warmth they needed this month, was hot and dry. If it went on like this the young shoots would suffer. As he crossed the park he stopped every few yards to stare at the sky. His eyes were the same blank colour between earth-coloured lids.

"My grandfather used to make me say,

Burckheim, Burckheim,
A little town, a great wine.

I've just remembered it. . . . The wind by God is going
round. You've brought me luck, my dear boy."

He leaned heavily on Eschelmer's arm.

CHAPTER FORTY

REUSS was sleeping badly. He had formed the habit of waking before dawn, to lie waiting for the first sound of life in the château, it might be a shutter creaking open in a servant's room or a magpie darting past his own open window in the first streak of light still invisible at the back of the room. He would get up, and stumble over to the window, to watch the shapes of trees and bushes separate themselves slowly from this darkness that was Alsace. On such a night he heard what he thought must be a child's first cry coming from the direction of the ramparts outside the park. The houses there were among the oldest in Burckheim. With the scarcely audible sound of the stream running towards the Bruche, and the fresh smell of earth with its burden of new vines and grass, this seemed to him the voice itself of his province. It was an interval between the two notes of France and Germany. That severity, as of a stone column, which underlies every other quality of France, was here the half-smiling robustness of a young boy; that sullen unsubdued vigour of the German tribes at the other side of the Rhine was here only a root too deeply sunk in the earth to bruise the foot.

The trees now stood clearly, like masts, in the light currents of mist. Alsace was in mid-stream.

Reuss went back to bed, and slept. When he woke, everything, and especially his thoughts, had become clear and smaller in the bright sun. There was nothing poetical in so many hectares of parkland and vines, nor in the headlines of his newspapers. A copy of *The Times* posted from London told him, what he knew already, that the English, the only

remaining ally of his country in a war against Germany, were well-meaning, complacent, and fifteen years behind their potential enemy in every field.

Among his letters was one from an under-manager in the ironworks. Three of Berthelin's subordinates reported to Reuss every week, and without reading Berthelin's own reports to Burckheim he had full accurate information about the works.

Later in the day he saw Siguenau, and told him that meetings were being held in the works to protest against the wage-cuts and demand a new pensions scheme.

"But I thought they were settling down," Siguenau exclaimed. "The speech Berthelin made this week when he warned them——"

Reuss interrupted him.

"Your friend doesn't know what he's up against. He may have convinced them while they were listening, but a few men talking about it afterwards among the rest can make things look ugly. It's easily done. No explanation in the world is good enough for a man whose wages have been cut."

"What are you going to do? When you've made Berthelin's position impossible. . . ."

Reuss did not answer. He was trying to guess why Siguenau had turned against his friend. He knew now that Siguenau was capable of a treachery so sudden and instinctive that it seemed part of his nature—like a tendency to colds—rather than a sin. The almost casual way in which he dropped René Hoffmayer had been a reflex, not a deliberate action. But Edward Berthelin had been a friend of his since they were born. You don't get rid of a friendship of that sort without pulling to pieces your own childhood down to its first notions of pleasure and loss. What impulse in the man sitting opposite him made him anxious to destroy himself? Reuss's curiosity was unsatisfied. He could find no reason for it—since

Siguenau was not a monster, but a normally selfish, intelligent man, quick-witted and charming enough. Does he, Reuss wondered, imagine he could run the ironworks himself?

"I've had a talk with Eschelmer," he said at last. "I was surprised to find him very well-informed, very shrewd, a good business man. I've noticed, too, since he began coming to the château every day, that Mr. Burckheim is quite fond of him. The other day when I went into the library Eschelmer was reading aloud while the old gentleman dozed comfortably. Very touching."

He smiled.

"I taught him how to behave," Siguenau said.

"I don't think there's any danger of his worming his way in here. He doesn't know anything about vines."

"It hadn't entered my head."

"Of course not."

"Then why speak about it?"

"The thing that occurred to me," Reuss said blandly, "was that he might take Berthelin's place."

"What?"

"My dear fellow. Think. He understands business. He gets on with the old gentleman. And—this is very important—he's inferior, and knows he is. The son of a customs clerk and a peasant. All that hysterical bragging when he's excited . . . he'll obey you, or even me"—Reuss's cold smile did not reach his eyes—"simply because he can't help it: he was born to obey orders. We should have to respect his vanity—not so ridiculous, after all, if you reflect that he hasn't been helped in any way to get where he is."

"You're quite right," Siguenau said. "He's the obvious man for the place—and he'd always be under our thumb. Why didn't I think of it?"

"In effect you did," Reuss said quickly, "you brought him here."

"Obviously he would approve of bringing German money into the firm."

"That's what I mean! I had a long talk with him. He made no bones about wanting to see a German Alsace—"

Reuss checked himself sharply. He realised instantly that he had gone too far. Before Siguenau could speak, he went on in a smooth voice,

"We needn't let that alarm us. We all have our particular insanities. Let him go on talking—at least he has the sense to admit that we shall have to do a deal with Hitler, for the sake of peace. When it comes to that, I'm as much and as little of a pro-German as you are."

Siguenau nodded. His sudden feeling of danger had vanished, leaving only the cold overmastering excitement he needed as other men need women or business. If Eschelmer was pro-German in the wrong, the worst sense, he would have to be watched. In the meantime, why not use him? Simple enough to get rid of him again when he had served his turn, and the Burckheim works was an ally of the rich powerful Rhine Steel. Siguenau's eyelids twitched, as they did when he was excited. He hadn't the slightest doubt of being able to manage both Reuss and Eschelmer—and the gentlemen in Cologne. When the time came he would put a nominee of his own into the ironworks. You—you *clerk*, he thought drily, looking at Reuss.

"Splendid," he said.

"I'm glad you agree with me," Reuss said, smiling.

Siguenau told himself he had reached the age—he was forty-five—when he would make a success of his life or begin the swift decline into nonentity. He felt intolerably kept back

by living in the provinces. If only I'd chosen the army as a profession, he thought, I should have been at the War Office by now. Or if I'd gone in for politics as a career I should have been a Minister. The truth is I've been too interested in living.

He overlooked, in examining himself, a more obvious truth. His instinctive dread of responsibility. It sprang from his overweening vanity, almost the vanity of an artist. Suppose he accepted a position of responsibility, and failed, and was disgraced . . . he never allowed this thought to form in his mind: it remained an instinct; he couldn't escape—he was unconscious of it, and it ruled his life from some nervous centre always carefully ignored by his intellect. He had every quality of an astute politician—he was incapable of sustaining a principle, it was in supreme good faith that he put his interests before everything, since he couldn't imagine any others being more important—except the sort of actor's confidence that such a man must have.

He really and sharply enjoyed the backstairs because they suited his talents.

When he thought, I might have been a Minister, he overlooked the profound reason for his neglect of public politics—his moral vanity. The discontent he was feeling nowadays sprang from boredom—he was bored with provincial hostesses and provincial retired generals and provincial ex-Ministers—and from another deeper feeling that had to do with his friend, with Berthelin.

He struggled desperately not to think directly about Berthelin.

What I need is money, he thought. A grandiose idea of living in Paris—becoming the friend of Ministers, making and unmaking Cabinets, his influence completely unnoticed outside a small inner circle of the real rulers of the country—filled his mind. He would be consulted, he would advise,

he would act. The effects of his acts would be seen—a Minister ruined, another taking his place—but not the powerful supple hand, the hand of Ernest Siguenau, jerking the strings. That would be happiness.

He had invited Eschelmer to dinner. During the meal he tried to find out whether the other was intriguing against him with Reuss. Eschelmer seemed very frank. He asked about Reuss's job.

"Is he anything special?"

"He's the old boy's personal secretary. Before that he was Richard Burckheim's secretary—he's a, so to speak, permanent post office clerk."

Eschelmer sniggered.

"Reads all the telegrams, eh?"

"Exactly," Siguenau said coolly. "You shouldn't tell him anything you don't want known."

"Oh, I never do that," Eschelmer said, with a look of simplicity. "I only give away what I want to give away. If other people are misled it's their fault."

He was in a relaxed friendly mood. At these times he was attractive: he had an appealing insinuating voice, and he seemed ingenuous.

"Have you ever thought of going into Parliament?" asked Siguenau.

"I was just going to ask you that."

"Oh, that's not my line," Siguenau said carelessly: "I'm not a public speaker."

"But don't you enjoy playing on a crowd?"

Siguenau shook his head. He was leading to a question about Eschelmer's pro-German sympathies. He began talking about music; from music he reached art and an exhibition of painting by artists whose works had been first condemned in Germany, then sold abroad to bring in foreign money.

"Dégenerate muck," Eschelmer said. "Personally, I should have kept the artists in Germany and employed them as scavengers. One of the things I admire about Hitler is that he refuses to be hoodwinked by these scoundrels. They live squalidly with mistresses, they corrupt young men and women. Think how many of them are Jews! They're rats. They gnaw the roots of a decent healthy France. Hitler is absolutely justified."

"You'd like us to do the same here?" Siguenau said. "Well, you know, if Alsace were free and independent—"

"If it were German—" Eschelmer interrupted.

He saw he was making a mistake. He scarcely paused. Doubling on his tracks he repeated,

"Yes, if it were German we should throw out Jews, communists, all the rest of the international tripe. Since—thank God—we're French, we have to deal with them in other ways. I'm not a politician, I'm a journalist and a business man. In my humble way I try to save France. . . ."

Siguenau nodded encouragingly. He was more or less satisfied. His opinion of Eschelmer—formed the first time he saw him—was undoubtedly correct. He was hysterical, a nervous case. Outside business and journalism—both very well suited to a lower middle-class intellectual, which the fellow clearly was—he had only the most confused and idiotic notions, not in the least sinister, simply the kind of thing that would appeal to a man whose mind had been warped by a hard childhood. A feeling that was almost pity awoke in Siguenau. It was so unusual that he enjoyed it. He was also contemptuous.

"Let me give you a little more claret," he said kindly. "I remembered that you liked this one. If you'll let me say it, you have the finest natural palate of any man I know. When I'm doubtful about a wine I shall always try it on you."

Eschelmer simpered.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

"I've come to say goodbye, sir."

Warned by Caroline that her husband did not like to be disturbed in his reading, the young man spoke in a low voice. It reached Burckheim as an audible movement of the light in a long room, so bright with sun and warmed by a murmuring of bees in the bush of peonies growing through the floor that he felt himself laughing in every bone: he walked lightly and easily, breast high in the light, in happiness, in security.

He opened his eyes and saw Robert Berthelin in the doorway. For an instant he confused the young man with himself, and felt with a pang of joy and relief that he was young, supple, alert. He forgot it instantly. Nothing easier than to be an old man, comfortable and well-wined, in a familiar room, with heavy flesh taking on itself the duties of brain and heart. Glancing first at the nearest window he saw the park, shaggy with still young grass. He was satisfied.

"Well, my son? Did you speak?"

"I'm leaving first thing in the morning."

"Stay and dine."

"I should like to—but I must get back to Strasbourg, my father is expecting me."

"Ah—well." Burckheim got up very slowly. "My hat and stick," he said in a curt voice.

Both were lying on a chair. Robert handed him the stick, and cautiously and respectfully placed the hat on his large head. As though this were the weight that set him going, Burckheim moved away, his enormous square body erect. He

walked stiffly down the stairs, followed like a shadow by the slender body of the young man.

Burckheim was in a good mood. He gripped Robert's arm as they crossed the courtyard, and sang. A heavy luncheon followed by a bowl of strawberries had settled down in him, and he was full of energy. A few yards before reaching the cellar he was silent and began to walk softly. Huge list slippers were waiting for him just inside; he pulled them on over his boots and beckoned to one of the men to find another pair for Robert.

Casks were being prepared for the second racking of the new wine. Burckheim inspected everything pitilessly. He made every man show his hands, turning each over with the knob of his stick while he peered at it.

When they came up again into the sunlight, he stood blinking like an owl, and drops of sweat formed on his face and ran off.

"To think there are people who have never had to do with a vineyard," he said slyly. "Y'know, if there were no more than just enough people in the world to grow wheat and vines and look after them, you'd have no trouble. It's when you get people who haven't anything to do but own banks or factories, or write books."

Robert Berthelin smiled, with affection. They went back, through a side door and a stone-flagged dark kitchen passage, to come out at the other side of the château on a terrace shaded by walnuts.

"I'm glad you don't shave the grass as they do in England," Robert said. "All this would be as smooth as an egg, without any flowers. Yet they're always gassing about nature."

"Who told you the English shave the grass in their parks?"

Robert turned red.

"Fanny Siguenau."

The old man had not listened. Narrowing his eyes like an

animal, he stared hard at the Vosges. He was trying to detect, among the scents brought to him from hill, vines, forest, young wheat, the only one that would tell him what sort of a year it was going to be. Standing bolt upright, as he would if he were going to be shot, he looked more robust and better-rooted than the trees behind his back.

"It's my opinion this is going to be a poor year," he said. "I believe it'll be wet. We shall have a wet June and July, and all the courage will be washed out of the grapes. I won't stand it. I'll—here, I'll make a promise. If I'm wrong, if we get the right sort of summer, I'll do what I've been planning to do for years, I'll make a vin de paille. I'll turn some of the downstairs rooms into drying rooms—when I was a brat my Colmar grandfather took me into a sort of warm barn and showed me the bunches of grapes hanging up: I have the notes he left, he let them hang until March, until they were almost dry, then squeezed them in small hand-presses as if he was drinking at the breast. You wait, son. One of these years—when your eldest boy is as old as you are now—you'll open a bottle of it and you'll say, 'My word, I remember the autumn, 1939, when old Burckheim was choosing the grapes to make this. He knew what he was about, the old sinner.' One thing you won't forget—standing here on this terrace, on a hot afternoon at the end of May, with the smell of France coming at you on all sides. D'you believe in immortality? I shall have a word to say if I find things up there very different from this. Don't tell me!"

Robert glanced stealthily at his watch.

"I must go now, sir."

"Go? Go where?"

"I have to get back to Strasbourg. My train leaves at five in the morning."

"I remember now," Burckheim said heavily. "Back to your infantry regiment."

"I'm a gunner, sir."

"Well, well, don't get into danger—and arrange your next leave for September. There's nothing in the world or in heaven like the vintage. But you know that. Good-bye, my son."

"Good-bye, sir. Thank you for all your kindness."

The old man made a casual friendly gesture: he was too busy pointing into the wind, trying to verify his instinct, to notice that Robert took the long way across the park instead of going straight to the drive.

Fanny was waiting at the side of a track leading to the stream. She wouldn't point out to him that he was almost an hour late, but she said hurriedly,

"I am early."

"Old Burckheim made me go with him to his cellar."

"How long have we?"

Robert looked at his watch again. "Only a few minutes."

"It doesn't matter in the least."

Fanny wore grey shorts and a yellow linen blouse. Her legs, thin, smooth, brown as if waxed, were noticeably straight. She was walking in front of Robert on the narrow path, and he was tortured by the three or four fine lines at the back of her knees. When he put his arms round her she was as tense as a young tree, and as unsatisfying.

"Shall we ever spend years together?" Fanny said. "I look at every woman I meet who is as old as my mother, and try to imagine what it must be like to have lived for nearly twenty years with someone you love, expecting all the time to live another twenty at least. Do you think we shall get tired of each other?"

"We shan't have time."

"All the better. But I hope we shall have ten years."

The bough of a wild-cherry swung down suddenly, when a bird made a clumsy forced landing—there was no one to

tell him off—and struck her lightly on the head. If it was an omen, she couldn't read it. At the end of May that year, omens were at a discount. She laughed.

There was a scent of late violets. They grew on this bank of the stream, small flowers covered by coarse glossy leaves. The ripples made by pebbles lying on the bed of the stream were reflected back over them in flickering irregular lines—no doubt another code. Neither of them could read it. But they were moved by an anguish and a happiness neither had known except with each other. It seemed that it had never happened to anyone else: each single ray of light on the leaves and in the stream was answered in some way by their bodies.

“Love.”

“When are you coming back?”

“In the autumn—I'll be back here in the autumn.”

“We can be sure of something, then,” Fanny said, smiling.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

BURCKHEIM's instinct had been right. There was too much rain and too little sun in June. In the last week there were some hot cloudless days, during which the vine plants hurried to catch up, and one morning Burckheim saw a stranger, probably a tourist, climb on to the wall of the vineyard. The fellow almost paid with his life for his curiosity. Burckheim rushed at him, flung him off, and chased him bruised and bleeding to his car.

He was in excellent health these days. He slept like an infant and ate like a famished schoolboy. His brain, too, which had been showing signs of age, had become clearer and more alert.

Siguenau watched him eating lunch. He began with dozens of small shell-fish and a slice of pâté, and went on to devour the whole of a chicken cooked in wine and oil and covered with a sauce made of five yolks of eggs and a pint of double fresh cream. He ate a little cheese—not a great deal, because he said it spoiled the after-taste of the wine he had been drinking—and a soup-plateful of cherries. It seemed the right moment to talk to him about Berthelin.

"When I was in Strasbourg this week I heard a rumour about disturbances in the works. It surprised me. I didn't know there was any fresh trouble."

"Neither did I," Burckheim said curtly.

"You'll be getting a report, of course."

"What did you hear?"

"Well, frankly—a great deal of criticism of yourself. They

say you're leaving everything in Edward Berthelin's hands, and that he's disloyal and very rash."

"Anyone who talks like that is so obviously a fool," Burckheim said drily, "that his opinion isn't worth having. I know all about Berthelin. Perhaps you don't know that before I made him manager I got a report on him from his Corps Commander. Among other things he wrote, 'This officer was a good serving soldier, intelligent, cool in an emergency'. . . . You don't write in that way about a man who is rash and disloyal."

Siguenau was smiling, without looking up.

"Evidently not."

Burckheim looked at him for a minute, as expertly as he would look over an animal he was considering buying.

"You haven't changed your opinion of him, have you?"

Siguenau hesitated. He was trying to see the trap Burckheim must be setting for him. He is a real devil, a peasant, he thought. At last he said,

"Not exactly."

"What do you mean by that? I'm asking you simply to say yes or no."

"Well, no."

Burckheim leaned forward. "I didn't hear you. There are too many thrushes in this garden—I'll wring their necks."

"No."

Burckheim was silent. He liked Siguenau as much as he could like anyone now: he liked the younger man's admiration, and his habit of talking when they were alone as if he were Burckheim's subaltern in the regiment. "He knows how to make me feel young," he told his wife. But he was too old to take any interest in any appetites but his own. He dropped the subject. He had no interest in knowing why Siguenau had turned against his closest friend. An idea sprang into his mind suddenly, making him smile by its grossness.

Berthelin must be having an affair with his friend's wife, and Siguenau suspected it and naturally didn't enjoy it. He poked Siguenau's arm.

"How's that handsome wife of yours?"

Siguenau made a gesture of surprise and disquiet.

"She's well, thank you."

"Look after her, my boy. You never know with women. Always up to some trick. If you're not careful, one of these days she'll run off with your best friend. And now take yourself off, I'm going to read for an hour."

Towards evening Burckheim went round the edge of his vineyard, at a funeral pace, scarcely daring to breathe. He allowed no one to go into the vines during the flowering. He manœuvred his enormous body past the ends of the rows as though it would crack if he made a false step. A happiness he scarcely felt, it was too common, filled him, and he drew in deep breaths of the scent. It was a little like mignonette and reminded him of his Colmar grandmother: he saw, not himself as a child, but an image, vague and seductive, of her garden with the lawn, herb bed, and arbour. He sighed with pleasure. Overhead the sky was as clear as glass and incomparably softer. A hawk rose above the nearest slope of the Vosges and hung there as though it had come to a cross-roads. His instinct warned Burckheim that this was too good to last, but—a sign of age—he clung to it, noting every movement of a leaf that could promise him a month without heavy rain, with no cold dry winds, without too great heat. He knew he was deceiving himself about the future, and he persisted.

He came out in Dietrich's lane, and at first could not see him anywhere. A disappointment—he looked forward to noticing again that Dietrich, who was only seventy, looked a dozen years older at least. That made him in effect two years older than Burckheim. It was a pleasure to watch him come, bent double, out of the barn, and try to straighten himself

by gripping the edge of the well. Dietrich caught sight of Burckheim in the open arch of the yard and managed, out of pride, to stand up.

"Well?" he said drily. "I suppose you've had a poor time, like the rest of us. There's one thing you rich men can't buy yet, and that's different weather from the rest of us. You would if you could."

"So far I've nothing to complain about."

"What sort of a summer is it going to be?"

Burckheim hesitated. He disliked admitting that anything could go wrong for his vines: but he was too jealous for his reputation to tell lies.

"Too cold."

"I thought so."

"It's easier to get a woman through her belly-swelling. Y'know, a vine feels as much, and from tip to roots."

"Tell my wife that," Dietrich said, grinning.

He took three steps, groaned, pressing his hand to his back.

"What's the matter?" Burckheim asked, delighted. "Dear, dear, is it your kidneys? You should drink a great deal more. There's nothing like Alsatian wine for the kidneys, it's been recommended since the sixteenth century. Look at me. I flush a gallon or more through every day, and I'm as clean inside as a whistle."

Looking at the pair of them from the window of her bedroom, Mrs. Dietrich thought there was not a pin to choose between them for greed and cunning, and—it was the first time in her life such a thing had happened to her and she was alarmed, thinking she must be out of order—her mind flung up an image of them as two old infants, dropping greedily off, still sucking. She thought a moment of her foster-sister, Honoré Burckheim's first wife, and smiled—Geneviève had always said, "I shall never die," and since she used to say the opposite of what she was thinking she must have

meant, "I shall always be young." And so she was. Burckheim stretched his arm out and took Dietrich by one ear, and gave it a sharp pull. Fancy, I saw him do that to her, thought Mrs. Dietrich. Fifty-nine years since, at the least.

Dietrich had asked slyly whether it was true that Burckheim intended to sell some of his wine.

"Certainly not," Burckheim said. "Who told you?"

"Someone must have thought you wanted money."

"Still hoping I'll sell you the farm?"

"If you don't sell it when I want it, you'll have to take less for it when you come round asking me to buy."

"I might sell it to another man."

"You might, but you won't."

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

HOFFMAYER's doctor had telephoned to Caroline, and told her he thought Hoffmayer would scarcely last more than another two or three days.

"Can I go and see him?"

"Certainly. He is alone, except for the nurse, he needs his friends." The doctor's voice hesitated, and went on with less assurance. "He has been talking a great deal about your husband. I think you ought to make it clear to Mr. Burckheim that he won't have another chance of seeing him alive."

"Yes," Caroline said.

She waited until the late afternoon, then—feeling certain he would forget his grudge against René, whatever it was, when he knew he was dying—she told him what the doctor said. Burckheim had been writing, and he listened without lifting his pen off the paper. He said coldly,

"Oh, the Bordeaux fellow is dying, is he? Well, the sooner he hops it the better—so far as I'm concerned. And why you should imagine I want to see him. . . ."

"The idea of your talking like that about him—"

"Rubbish," Burckheim said placidly. "He's not even a relation. I never liked him, and at my age I needn't go through the farce of being sorry I shan't set eyes on him again. Thank God."

Caroline left him. There were tears in her eyes when she got into the car and told the man to drive her to Hoffmayer's lodging, but her sadness was less for the sick man than for herself—she felt at this moment that she had lived the best years of her life with a stranger, and a brutally cynical stran-

ger at that. I shall never know why they quarrelled, she thought. The tiresomeness of this dried her tears.

Hoffmayer had had himself carried to a sofa, with his back to the window. The room, in fact, only looked into the street, paved, with two gutters, and faced a house of which the shutters, faded to the colour of old wood, were kept closed. This house was two hundred years old, a newcomer to the street, very plain, with high narrow windows, a doorway in the form of a round arch, with no pretensions, but very beautiful. Hoffmayer used to say that if once a shutter were left open, letting in the light and dust of the street, he would go across and give the owner one of his more valuable engravings. Was he afraid, now it was too late, that his word would be taken? More probably he wanted to die with the least regret, watching a featureless wall. But what had he to regret—since he had lost the one place he had been sure of enjoying to the very last?

He greeted Caroline with a glance that moved past her in search of her husband. Yet she had been his close friend for years. It is when we are dying that our friends learn how little they mean to us. The only person he wanted to see now was the man he had known long enough for it not to matter whether he liked him or not.

"Honoré will come at the end of the week," Caroline said.

Her friend smiled. He did not believe her.

"Why won't you let us move your sofa to the window?"

"I prefer it like this."

"But what do you do all day? It's too dark at this side of the room to read."

"Oh, I don't read any more," René said simply. "I can remember all I want to remember."

She asked him foolishly what that was, expecting phrases from some of the obscure authors he had edited and restored to their place. Far from it. He who had never cared for any

but German poets now found nothing in his memory but French ones, and when he was lying awake at night the nurse, listening in the next room, overheard such fragments, reminding her of nothing, as "Sois sage, ô ma Douleur . . . le Regret souriant. . . . Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche. . . . L'aube exaltée ainsi qu'un peuple de colombes. . . ."

He did not trouble Caroline with any of these, which came to him only in the semi-darkness of a room lit by a night-light, when, to give himself courage, he put his mind and body under the protection of the great men of France, the men whose thoughts shaped France as she is. Instead he quoted to her a living author he admired because he is simple and artificial, cruel and gentle, sophisticated and a peasant, in a word, French.

". . . My uncles were all eagerness to help him. For his sake they had abandoned Robinson Crusoe, Montaigne, the Gospels. Each of them looked in his special subject for a ladder by which he could draw this gentle, ignorant, good creature into the conversation. . . . Fontranges had to leave Paris some days later without coming to dinner again, but during the September nights Parisians might have seen rising from Marly lights of every colour, intensity, and duration; they were the lights warning ships off Cape Ras, the Sanguinaires, the Mediterranean blockade, plague in Saigon. They were, in fact, my uncles signalling to the last man."

Caroline had listened with an air of baffled respect.

"It's not poetry, is it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Who wrote it?"

"Giraudoux. I want you to do me a favour. I've left you, in a codicil to my will, the manuscript of my history——"

"The history of the Burckheims."

"Yes, the history of the Burckheims. I want you, when war

breaks out, to take it to some safe place. Perhaps to Norway or America, if you are able to leave France. After the war, if you have enough money left, if there are any countries left untouched, get it printed in one of them and send a copy to as many public libraries as you will. I haven't left you anything more. Do you mind?"

He couldn't bring himself to tell her that, out of contempt, and because he was weakly afraid to look where he felt pain, he had let his will stand. It left everything to Ernest Siguenau.

"No. Why should I? But is the war really going to come now?"

"Of course."

Hoffmayer closed his eyes. He had heard so much about the dangers threatening France with defeat that he ended by laughing at them. France, the one country where men are more human than any other, cannot possibly be defeated. How can a country which sets the standard of freedom and equality be defeated by a nation to whom these dreams are unknown? He could no more imagine a world without France than a schoolmaster imagines a world in which all the models he must give his pupils to copy have been lost, or a young man can imagine a world without bodies. He was, too, leaving France. He could not leave her on the eve of a defeat.

"I wish you would tell me something," Caroline said. She tapped nervously on the arm of her chair. "What is the secret you and Honoré have? Why did he begin disliking you?"

Hoffmayer did not answer. Without knowing it, he felt the impulse to try out, it was his last chance, faculties he had not used during his life. He had been reserved and generous. Why not discover now what it felt like to be weak, to give yourself away, to punish? He was on the edge of giving way to this longing. Another took hold of him. To be free, to die without secrets, to hand to this stranger—this was now what he thought of the woman beside him, with her bad

accent, and her mind trained in all the subterfuges of an Anglo-Saxon education—the most irksome thing he was still carrying. Afterwards, let her do what she liked with it.

He turned his face away.

Shall I, he was thinking, tell her that Honoré's courage failed him when he had to tell his cousin he must kill himself to save Burckheim? He is usually calm in danger because he's stupid. But once that stupidity is shaken, once an idea penetrates as far as his heart, his nerves give way and he's useless. Shall I tell her how I left Honoré in another room and went into the bedroom myself? That it was I, while Honoré was sleeping off his weakness, who planned what he must say to the *Commission de triage*, and rehearsed him in it, every word and every gesture, until he was perfect? All those sincere moving words—they moved the Commission—were mine. Honoré—but what a marvellous actor!

"René, why don't you speak? Have I tired you?"

"No," he said.

"Forgive me if I ought not to have asked you anything."

Hoffmayer looked at her and smiled in a friendly way.

"I don't know what I could say to you," he said. "Suppose Honoré cheated once during his life. We all do. Even Racine, even Stendhal, even Molière, cheated. But the part of him which is shrewd, reasonable, wilful, obedient and sceptical at the same time, the part of him which is France, doesn't cheat. Perhaps if he knew that, he would—forgive me."

"I don't understand," Caroline murmured.

"There is no reason why you should."

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

FROM the middle of August Caroline had no need to question anyone about the approach of war. Since René had been dead for more than two months, she was in effect cut off. No one, if she had put her question, would have patience to reply to her.

It was only now, twenty-one years after the end of the last War, that she recognised its marks on other people. She happened to be in the village when the policeman was fastening the mobilisation notice to the wall of the church. A group of women and a few men had gathered before he finished. They read it in silence. They were labourers, market gardeners, shop-keepers and their wives. Caroline knew most of them as well as one person knows all the others in a village. Now they stepped back from her and from each other. A change that was the memory of the last War set each of them apart from his life of the past twenty years. Suddenly they were innocent. The impatient became patient, the laziest was the first to walk away briskly.

"Excuse me," a woman said formally to Caroline.

Caroline stepped back to let her pass.

"Don't trouble about those gloves you are repairing for me," she said hurriedly.

"I have to arrange a few things for my husband and the two older ones. I shall bring you your gloves to-morrow," the woman answered calmly.

Caroline had begged Blanche Siguenau to come to tea. She asked her,

"What will the English do?"

"I hope they will fight."

"You hope—?"

Blanche looked at her steadily.

"I detest war," she said. "In peace time one can pretend that life isn't too bad for the poor—after all, they don't starve, do they? But when war comes, and they are taken away from their work and put into a uniform, and their wives can claim a few shillings while they are still living and rather fewer when they are dead—then I'm ashamed of living in a society which dares make its poor fight. After everything that it has not done for them. . . . But I hope we shall fight this time."

Caroline felt the distance between herself and the other woman widening. But it was now she who drew back. She felt a horror of Europe and its peoples. They were mad. Century after century they killed off wilfully millions of their best, and threw them under the soil. They chose only the young, with bodies nearest perfection, and sent these out to die, and kill. For centuries women had consented to the deaths of their husbands, and conceived in order to have young men to hand over. I must go away, she thought, with horror. I can't face it.

Already she was looking at France, at Europe, from the other side of a gulf. Trees, human beings, cupboards, appeared larger or smaller as she wished. She began to feel rather kindly, as well as shocked. Poor naughty little English, they must learn to be humble. Poor naughty little French, they deserved a lesson, but it must not be too severe.

She thought of René Hoffmayer. You never loved me, she said to him.

"You're ten years younger than me," she said to Blanche. "Is that why I can't understand you?"

The English woman lifted her hand in a polite gesture.

"Oh, no. We used to understand each other. I've enjoyed coming here. I like you, you know."

"Then what—why——?"

"It's because I've suddenly become entirely English, and entirely European. One can be altogether of two minds, you know. But of course you don't know."

"I've lived in Europe a long time," Caroline said mildly.

"You mustn't mind what I say," Blanche cried. "I respect you very much. That's why I can risk talking to you like this. You don't know much history. You don't even know you're living in a district more active in human freedoms, defeats, invasions, conquests, than any in the world. You don't feel at this minute that what is beginning at the other side of the Rhine is so old that the oldest memory handed down to you, from one woman to another, a line you can't see either end of, isn't unfamiliar. People talk idiotically about turning back the tide of barbarism—as if a tide ever goes back beyond the point where it begins to return. Barbarism is always marching or waiting. As an American you don't know that. Because—forgive me—you rely on us, us French, us English, to defend you. One of these times we may fail. Perhaps this time: but I don't think so."

When I get home, Caroline thought, I'll see if I can find a green dress the colour of the one my mother used to wear when she was my age. She was going to speak. The door opened and Anne-Marie Eschelmer came in.

She was wearing a white blouse Caroline remembered to have seen on her on a very few occasions. Her hair, still—she was sixty—as thick as a young woman's, had been carefully brushed and coiled. These were not the only signs that she considered her visit a special one. She held herself, with difficulty, upright. It was the first time she had come into this room without something in her hand, a basket she expected to have filled, or a few herbs screwed in paper and handed over with deliberate humility. She wore gloves.

"Good afternoon, Madame," she said.

Caroline, taken aback, tried to smile warmly. "I think you know Mrs. Siguenau?"

"I know about her," Anne-Marie said severely. She looked at Blanche. "I hope, Madame, you have good news."

"Good news of what?" asked Blanche.

"My son has been away for a week. Without him, I hardly know what to think. I must speak as I feel myself. . . . If the Germans are going to make war on us . . . at any rate, I hope there will be no English nonsense. There should be the Rhine between us and them, but nothing wider. Not a bridge without Frenchmen at this end of it."

"God help us if that is what you are all thinking," Blanche said soberly.

"All?"

"All you French. Can't you think of Europe? What sort of a place do you think it will be, afterwards, if that is your idea of it?"

The lines on Anne-Marie's face seemed to darken, as though they were rivers cutting deeper into French soil.

"It will cost us everything to defeat them," she said, simply and harshly. "What more do you expect us to do?"

"I always said the Treaty of Versailles was a mistake," Caroline said.

Naughty little France, naughty little England, take your copies back to your desks and write them ten times again. Both women looked at her, Blanche Siguenau with sudden gaiety. Anne-Marie frowned.

"Everything is the fault of your wretched country," she said in a dry voice. "Abbé Merlin has explained it to us. We believed your sanctimonious old goat, your Wilson, when he promised us a treaty if we gave up the left bank of the Rhine. We gave it up. Then you deserted us. Now you ought to hold your tongues. And finally, who wants to hear anything further from you?"

Caroline saw Blanche look at the old woman with pity. It exasperated her. Really, they make me sick, she thought.

She saw herself crossing the street towards her house in Boston, after a morning blamelessly spent shopping. And at the same moment, as though it had already happened, as though she were pausing in the street to look back, she felt the first anguish of homesickness for France, for the stillness at noonday in summer, on the roads, the fields, the village street, for that sense of life not, as in the East, stunned and deafened by the sun, but life held back, taut, waiting, the life of France, still young behind its old walls.

Blanche was speaking to her. She had missed the first part of the sentence.

“ . . . your people should try to keep out of the war, but they must help us.”

Caroline did not answer.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

WHEN Anne-Marie and her friend—can I think of her any longer as a friend? she wondered—had gone, she went, out of a feeling of duty, to talk to her husband. He was in the library. He was turning over the pages of one of his notebooks, the latest in a series begun by an Etienne Burckheim in the seventeenth century—weather notes, good and bad years, day-to-day, almost minute-by-minute notes on the care of the wine in its first years: the experience of three hundred years, written out as briefly as possible by men who had to drive themselves to write, and yawned as they watched their hands move across the page, each man beginning to make his entries in his own handwriting and insensibly coming to write more and more like his predecessor. Anyone turning the pages hastily would have supposed the whole lot written by the same man, in different inks, and with different—or indifferent—spelling.

When she came in, Honoré pushed the notebook aside and picked up a newspaper from the floor by his chair. It was the day's *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg*.

"Look at that," he said. He was stammering with annoyance.

She pretended to look at the article, which she had seen already. It was an attack on him for what the writer called his "greedy and reactionary policy as an employer and owner of what ought to be a national asset." It accused him of bleeding the Burckheim ironworks for the sake of a vineyard "run simply as a hobby," and of defeating "a government proposal to take over the works for national defence."

The article was signed.

"Do you know the man who wrote it?"

"I used to know him."

He kept to himself one humiliating fact. The same man had written praising him as a model employer, the father of his men, and one of the noblest of Alsatian patriots. That was in the days when people still remembered what he had done after the Armistice.

"But it's not true, is it? You can answer it."

"If? D'you expect me to write to the papers?"

"Of course not. But Edward Berthelin can write for you."

She knew quite well that some of the charges made against him were true. He had cheated his workers. Edward Berthelin was loyally carrying out, under his orders, a policy of dismissals and forced economies he disapproved of. All the same, wouldn't Honoré try to lay the blame on him? She was beginning to realise the frightful strength and tenacity of his passion for seeming in the right. He would always try to put himself in a noble light. He wanted approval and more approval. She didn't condemn him for it. He was obeying his nature, and if, defending himself, he harmed other people, they should know better than to come within range. He ought to wear a label, she thought—This animal is cunning and ferocious: on no account irritate it.

"Berthelin? Nonsense. He's at the bottom of the whole thing," Honoré shouted. "I've been warned already that he's tactless and disloyal."

"Who warned you?"

"Never you mind."

"Was it Ernest Siguenau?" Caroline asked.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Honoré mocked. "Keep your nose out of business, my girl. You can't understand it." He shook a fist at the newspaper. "I'll tell you how I know that Berthelin is at the bottom of it. Didn't you notice the

remark about government control? Berthelin was yammering to me about that in April. Who else could have told the swine of a journalist about it? Perhaps you think I wrote the article myself?"

He lowered his head, as though he were going to charge the bookcase.

"The fact is," he said, "the fellow thinks he has a hold over me. He thinks he did me a favour by giving up his miserable factory in Belfort to come here. If there's one thing I dislike in the world, it's to be put under an obligation."

"There's no need to punish people for obliging you," his wife said.

Burckheim yawned, showing his strong double teeth, as black as roots.

"Don't talk about it," he said. A look of mild cunning came down over his face. "I shan't act against my principles. You can trust me. . . . Now go away, I'm going to work. Here"—he opened a drawer and fumbled among the old notebooks—"these are worth a fortune. Don't overlook them—if you survive me. They're unique. I once thought of printing them. But why give away treasures?"

He opened one at random and began reading:

"July 15, 1762. Most tragic day of my life. A night of extreme clearness last night. Cloudless. Thermometer dropped to 4°, 3°, 2°. This morning not a cloud between the young grapes, frozen hard as they were, and a hot sun. Result—the whole of a splendid growth done for, scorched, burned to tobacco. Devastation complete."

He closed the notebook and said in a severe voice,

"Since that ghastly year, not a Burckheim has been caught out. Why, if there were a frost to-night, I should have the plants sheltered before sunrise. Don't talk to me about policy. If every statesman in Europe had a vineyard to look after, he'd be a wiser and safer man. . . . Go. Do go."

Caroline went.

She met Berthelin in the hall. He had come to make his weekly report, and she made an excuse to take him to her room.

"You look very tired."

"I've been up for three nights."

"Why?"

"It would be better not to tell your husband. . . . As soon as the war starts the works will be taken over. I'm having to prepare statements and reports of this that and everything—as well as the usual troubles."

"You mean the dismissals—"

"Thank God all that will stop. And after the war—if France isn't ruined—we shall have a new society. More just and more Christian."

"Do you believe that?" she asked sadly.

"We shall almost be defeated. At that moment we shall remember our faith—as clearly as, to-day, we remember our dead. As in the past, God will come to our help. What crimes we do after that won't be the same crimes, against the humble."

He stopped, realising she could not understand a word he was saying. It was not only that she was not a Christian, she was not even French. He stood up.

"Your husband is expecting me."

"One moment," Caroline said. "You've read the article in the *Dernières Nouvelles*?"

"Yes."

"Honoré is very angry."

"I knew he would be." Berthelin shrugged his shoulders.

"Who could have given the writer the hint about government control?"

"Probably it was a shot in the dark."

"You haven't spoken about it"—she hesitated—"to anyone?"

"Only to one person. Absolutely trustworthy."

Caroline gave him a shrewd glance.

"Don't trust anyone." Without knowing it, she had begun to speak American. "Certainly not Honoré. You know—you saw the way he turned against René!"

Berthelin talked to her for a few minutes longer, simply out of kindness, hoping to soothe her. What she said made no impression on him, because the moment anyone spoke in an emotional or rasping voice he stopped listening.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

BLANCHE left the château with the feeling that she would never see it again. She shook the feeling off, ashamed of giving way to a sadness without reason, and at a time when every human being living in this quarter of Europe had a sound reason for grief. Was it really possible that Hitler was choosing to write the word "death" against the names of millions? A frightful passage in the Bible came into her head: "*And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee.*" A rictus, beginning on Hitler's face, would pass over the face of Europe; the rivers of Europe would become severed veins; towns and villages tranquil and redolent of life now would be murdered; the small bodies of children would be forced by death. Blanche thought that what had estranged her in the space of an hour from Caroline was simply the shadow thrown back from these mounds of rubble and mutilated bodies disfiguring the future. She has every right to run away, Blanche thought, but it means that she won't be able to understand my jokes any longer. Not to speak of having to avoid her when I feel like crying.

A door led from the park to the dower-house, but Blanche did not take it. She went round by the street. It was empty except for the sunlight and five hundred years of echoes.

She went into the house, and began to look through Fanny's clothes, thinking she might have to pack hurriedly. Her husband came in. She turned to him with a smile.

"Is there any better news?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Edward rang up this morning, and said there was very little hope of avoiding war."

"What nonsense," Siguenau said. "That's absolute rot. There's every hope—our Government has only to warn the Poles we shan't support them in any crazy or unreasonable demands. . . . What else did Edward say?"

"Nothing."

"How often does he ring you up?"

"Not often—he's far too busy." She hesitated, knowing he would be annoyed with her. "This is a much worse crisis than Munich, isn't it? We ought to know what we're going to do if war starts. We're very near Germany."

"You'd better take Fanny and go to England," Siguenau said drily.

"No. I won't take her out of the country."

"Why not?"

"She's French, and must remain French."

A malicious look came into her husband's face.

"As you, in spite of everything, remain English. In spite of having a French"—he paused—"lover."

Blanche smiled.

"When I married you, I gave up England," she said. "Not with my bones—they remain English, and always will. Though, thank God, I don't have rheumatism. But my mind gave it up firmly. I couldn't possibly go back now—I've become too used to living among positive logical people, who know the exact weight and size of everything, think it right to live in a dignified adult way, and would rather prop up their houses than build new ones."

"You don't imagine your ideal Frenchman has any likeness to me, do you?" interrupted Siguenau. "No, do you know who it is you've described?—Edward."

He took hold of her arm.

"You're still as supple as a young woman," he said. "I love your high cheekbones and the flatness of your cheeks. Your round forehead, your long neck, your long legs. The lines from your mouth to the side of your nostrils—how is it you've aged there and nowhere else? I still love you. I never wanted to make love to you."

He saw he had hurt her.

"It didn't enter my head to ask you to be my mistress, I mean. I thought about marrying you."

"Are you sorry?" She made herself smile.

"You're angry."

"No."

"Hurt?"

"Why do you talk as though I had disappointed you in some way?" she asked.

"But surely I've disappointed you?" he said, smiling.

He held her by her wrists, and by the shoulders, kissing her with a quite unaccustomed roughness. She gave up trying to understand his mood, and relaxed. She had no vanity.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

ON THE morning of the 22nd Berthelin tried to telephone to the château from Strasbourg. Burckheim refused to speak to him. He was, he said, just going out.

Berthelin thought this over for a few minutes, and decided to go out to the château. He reached the village towards two o'clock, and instead of going straight to the château stopped at the dower-house. Siguenau had lunched at home, and was just leaving. He drew Berthelin into his room, closed the door, and said in a dry voice,

"Why are you trying to frighten Blanche by telling her there's going to be war?"

"What's the matter with you?" Berthelin said gently.

He realised that Siguenau was attacking him for some quite different reason—by the same signs that, when they were children, gave away the reason for a sudden quarrel. (It was because he had just won a bet and not because he had broken their fishing-rod that Siguenau refused to have anything to do with him and showed the broken pieces of the rod to their parents.) Siguenau was looking him full in the face, with a pretence of candour, and his hands shook.

"You know perfectly well there won't be war. . . ."

"Why not?" Berthelin said.

"For obvious reasons. We're not in a fit state to fight Germany. If the English want to try, let them. We shan't kill off another generation to help them destroy a trade rival. We shall sit quietly behind the Maginot Line and make our own terms."

Berthelin smiled.

"Who has been talking to you?"

"My information is fully as good as yours," Siguenau said furiously. "It's a sight better, in fact—because I don't talk to people who want war."

His bitterness astonished Berthelin. He tried to guess what was in the other's mind, but it had altered too much: he was as taken aback as if he had come home after an absence to find he no longer knew his way from the station to his house.

"What is the matter with you?" he said again.

Siguenau drew back. He knew he had given himself away. He rubbed his hand across his eyes in a gesture Berthelin recognised. . . . Good, he thought, he's coming out of his bad mood.

"Something's worrying you," he said, smiling.

"I'm tired, and my nerves play me up. I'm sorry about it, Edward."

"Heavens, don't apologise to me," Berthelin said. "You can lose your temper with me. I don't mind."

Siguenau walked restlessly about the room for a minute.

"I must go and work," he said.

"Are you going to the château? I'll come with you. I must see Honoré. When I tried to talk to him on the telephone this morning he refused to listen to me."

"Is it important?"

"Very. I must have his written authority to take certain steps at once—I've had air raid shelters built at the works, and I've warned the girl clerks they'll leave without notice. We shall be taken over, but——"

Siguenau interrupted him. "When? Are you really counting on this war?" He smiled nervously. "I tell you, this crisis will blow over—like the others—and instead of being taken over by the Government you'll have to tell Honoré to stop spending money. Do you know how many thousands of francs we've thrown away on the vines this year? If he wants to go

on living at this rate for another three years he'll have to sell Dietrich his farm. You must talk to him, my dear Edward, he won't listen to me."

When they reached the château, Siguenau went off to the stables. Berthelin went in. He sent a servant to tell Burckheim, and after a few minutes Jules Reuss came downstairs. He walked slowly, almost hesitating on each step, so that his short legs in thick broadcloth seemed to move in jerks, balancing his large head. He had an air of fatigue and dignity, the great man aware of his isolation. He came towards Berthelin, holding his mechanical smile in front like a label.

"Mr. Burckheim is not well."

Berthelin felt certain this was not true.

"Is he too ill to see me?"

"Oh, I'm afraid so," Reuss said distantly. He stood waiting, and glanced in a preoccupied way at the wall.

"What is the matter?"

"He is resting."

Berthelin hesitated. Should he say he would wait until Burckheim could see him? His exasperation got the better of him. He turned to go.

"Tell Mr. Burckheim I must see him to-morrow," he said brusquely.

He went back to Strasbourg. He went home before going to the works. When she was opening the door to him, the porter's wife said,

"Mr. Robert has come."

Berthelin was ashamed of using his influence to bring his son home for a week. It was the only time he would use it. No matter how many years the war lasted, and if Robert lived, he would get nothing more in the way of special favours, except that when he came on leave his father would tell him truthfully how the war was going; he would know which officer had been dismissed for a mistake involving the loss of

a division, and the precise meaning of the phrases politicians use to cover up the fact that they have all along been deceiving themselves about the strength of the enemy's resources and have failed completely to prepare an adequate defence. Berthelin believed he owed his son the truth. Since he was not able to protect him against shells he would at least see to it that Robert was immune to the lies both sides send over during a war. There is something to be said for fighting a war every twenty years; sons will be protected by their fathers from the sublime nonsense talked by old men and old women: one experience is enough to teach both generations the real meaning of such words as sacrifice, hate, love.

During their meal Robert asked him,

"Does your sending for me mean there isn't going to be war?"

"No. It means it's certain." Berthelin hesitated. "I wanted you to see Strasbourg again."

"Thanks," Robert said, smiling.

"Of course, you'll be recalled before the end of your week if things move quickly. I advise you, if you want to go out to Burckheim, to go to-morrow."

"Right."

Berthelin did not speak about Fanny Siguenau to his son, but the young woman was as firmly seated beside them as if she had walked into the room. The certainty that his son would live through the war seized Berthelin. He dismissed it at once, for the sake of the others.

"I'm sorry about this war," he said. "And it's not only war we older men ought to apologise for. There's also the catastrophe we haven't managed to avert. We've allowed something to grow in Europe, an evil. We're partly responsible for it. In our own way, I and my friends worked for peace, but it wasn't the same peace some politicians have been working for. When they use it, the word becomes vile. Like other

men of my age—and when I thought of a number of dead young men—I swore I wouldn't be responsible for seducing any more young men to their deaths. It would be easier now simply to keep my mouth shut. . . . But this time it's the consciences of children, yours and Fanny's, which are in mortal danger. This new-old Germany began by warping the consciences of her children, teaching them they are not like other men, placing them outside common humanity. It is a terrible teaching. We shall see the results of it when the war reaches us . . . I remember a Basque priest telling me that when he was lying, wounded in the legs, he watched a German airman come down to within a few feet of a field some children were running across and kill them with his machine-gun. He said, 'After I had finished my prayers for them, I asked that his soul might be restored to him.' That is the crime of the Nazis, to have taken away the consciences of the boys they are going to use. It is a crime for which there is no forgiveness in my mind, though there is pity. It's because of what will be done to the minds of French children, if the Nazis defeat France, that I can't lift a finger to save you now. I apologise humbly for not having managed to set Europe off on a different path in 1919. It's inexcusable."

Robert was silent for a minute.

"I hope Fanny escapes," he said in a light voice.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

WHEN his secretary came back to tell him Berthelin had gone, Burckheim roared with laughter. "That'll teach him to bring his reports on a fine day!" He felt all the better for having snubbed someone, and went out. Part of the courtyard was in shadow: outside it the light was dazzling, and the strong aromatic scent from the rose-trees blew across him as he passed like the spray from a jet of water. He lumbered along, slowly, enjoying the heat as much as when he was a young man. But it affected him a little; by the time he reached the end of the drive he felt giddy. He would have gone into the dower-house, but it struck him that Berthelin might be there. He walked on. The street was empty, and the house-fronts seemed to have been sheared by a white-hot knife, there were no shadows, and no colour.

Burckheim had not meant to call on his daughter, but he turned thankfully under the entrance to her yard; it was dark, as though century after century had added another shadow over the original colours; the tree covering the well was dark, like seaweed in water.

For a long time Anne-Marie had seemed as old as himself. Between a man of eighty and a woman of sixty, and if the woman has not had an easy life of it, there is not a minute to choose. And he had no memories of her as a child to soften his appalling egoism. But this afternoon when he went into her room she was kneeling in front of a cupboard, and something in her glance, defiant and abashed, made him think of a child. He was surprised. Had she actually been a child? Then why had he never noticed her?

"Where's the boy?" he said, sitting down.

Anne-Marie trembled with happiness and dismay.

"Goodness, how unfortunate! He went into Strasbourg this morning, for the day. If he'd only known you were coming, wild horses wouldn't—"

Burckheim silenced her with a movement of his head. He was beginning to recover. He noticed she was trembling, and this reminded him, but so distantly that he thought of something quite different, of the young peasant he seduced.

"What's the matter?" he said kindly. "Sit down."

"Henry respects and admires you"—she couldn't bring herself to the familiarity of using the word "love." "It's natural—he's your nearest relation, unspeakably nearer than Siguenau and Berthelins. Where did that lot come from? From Belfort! They're not even Alsace. No, no, blood is closer to you than education—you won't get the same loyalty from them. Henry, you know, is loyal, mind and heart. You could rely on him."

Burckheim stared fixedly. "Yes, he's a sensible fellow."

For the first time he felt tempted to get rid of the iron-works altogether, leaving himself nothing to think about but the vines. I should live another twenty-five years if I did it, he thought maliciously. He glanced down at his hands, cracked and reddish-brown, like stems.

"I'm as strong as an ox," he said in a sly voice.

He got up to go, and patted his daughter's hand. He was mildly astonished to notice that it was wrinkled and hard.

Siguenau was waiting to see him at the château. He was with Reuss at the foot of the staircase to the south wing, and the two of them standing close together made an unpleasant impression on him. What were they up to? Siguenau came

forward, with his air of a respectful subaltern, and made him laugh with a sly story about the head cowman and his run-away wife. His suspicions were soothed. He leaned on Siguenau's arm to walk upstairs. He thought blissfully and vaguely that he was going to spend hours drinking and telling stories. But Reuss, he saw, was following them. He sighed.

"Is this a conference?" he demanded.

"Which would you rather do, sir? Hear what we have to say, or go into Strasbourg to the works and look into things yourself?"

"Always the works," Burckheim groaned. "Why the devil can't Berthelin run them without all this trouble? I employ him to manage them, don't I? A fat lot of use he is."

He rested his arms and fists on the table, to keep himself upright, and listened with growing resentment to Siguenau's smooth explanation. For a long time now Reuss had been hearing complaints from responsible under-managers—it had seemed better to look into them before telling him. No doubt about it—the situation was dangerous, and Berthelin was to blame. He had been secretly courting popularity for himself with trade union leaders and workers' delegates and stirring up hatred of Burckheim. Why? No doubt so that the Government would have to step in, compel agreement, and nationalise the works on terms that would ruin Burckheim and leave Berthelin himself in charge. A delightfully sly scheme. With an air of reluctance, Siguenau repeated the insulting remarks the men and foremen were making about the owner of the works.

"About me?" Burckheim said heavily. "That sort of thing doesn't alarm me."

The insults had gone home. He was jealous of his reputation with the workers. For a moment he thought of appealing to them again, pulling out the emotional stops which had always worked. The emotion was genuine. When he thought

of his workers it was with a properly fatherly wish to punish and guide them. The idea that they were turning against him made him indignant and queasy, and he longed to thrash them for their own good and then frankly weep over them. Was it too late?

"I'll have a serious talk with Berthelin," he said.

Reuss looked at him with impressive calm.

"You've had several talks in the past year," he said. "It's surely time to act."

"What do you suggest?" Burckheim said sarcastically. "Do you want to take over the works?"

"Certainly not," Reuss said. The only sign of resentment he showed was to close his eyes halfway: it made him look like a mummy. "But you need a man who knows more about business than politics—and isn't afraid to talk to the workers. And you ought to keep an eye on him——"

Siguenau leaned forward. "Forgive me for interrupting. The man I have in mind is Eschelmer. He's energetic and experienced. He loathes socialists, the workers' delegates would get short measure from him. I believe he'd break them in a month."

"Yes, I know his views," Burckheim said in a harsh voice. He looked slowly from one face to the other, and raised his fist, letting it drop again like a weight. "Shut up. Both of you. You confuse me. You, Ernest. You persuaded me to get rid of René and put Edward Berthelin in charge. Now you tell me he's a scoundrel. You may be right, but it's damnably annoying. You, Reuss, you're a sight too clever."

He let his head sink forward. His extraordinarily acute instinct warned him that it was too late to make small concessions to the workers. He had spent his life and cunning in refusing them. Now not one of them was the least use. A revolution was under way. And he was too old, too stiff, to manage it. He had the peasant's distrust of change and

violent methods; his grandson's views, when he took the trouble to listen, alarmed him by their violence.

"Henry may be right," he said inaudibly. "It may be necessary to shoot a few workers as an example. But I don't want to."

"What?" Siguenau asked.

"I didn't say anything."

He was overwhelmed by boredom and heaviness. He had a confused sense that something unpleasant was happening. It might be going to turn cold and nip the vines. He turned his head restlessly to the window. His eyes had filmed over, and his face was as placid and empty as a young child's. Reuss and Siguenau exchanged glances over the head of this old baby. It was no use sitting here any longer.

"Shall we talk about this again?" Siguenau said gently.

A little cunning flickered across Burckheim's face, the single point of life in an inert mass.

"My boy, when in doubt, do nothing!"

As soon as they were outside the room, Reuss turned to Siguenau with a look of austere contempt.

"He's barmy. Senile."

"Don't worry," Siguenau said, smiling. "I understand him better than you do. To-morrow, after Berthelin has talked to him, and bored him to death, he'll be ready enough to listen. The things he's heard just now will have sunk in. I'll talk to him about his duty to Alsace, that always pleases him, you know."

He went off in a hurry. He had an appointment in Strasbourg that evening, with Eschelmer. Lately, he had been seeing him every day. He had not told Reuss about the meetings. He did not trust the secretary, and he knew, and resented it, that he could not be sure of getting the better of him on every occasion. About Eschelmer he had no doubts at all. Eschelmer was grateful, pliant. He came humbly and

trustingly for advice, and shook hands afterwards with tears in his devoted eyes. "Trust me, I'll never forget it, what you've done for me." Siguenau had become almost fond of him.

On his way into Strasbourg he reflected that the wisest thing he could do, now, was to settle Eschelmer so firmly in the old man's good graces that nothing was likely to shake him. Between us we'll *limoger* that fellow Reuss for good, he thought. He felt exhilarated suddenly, and burst out laughing.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

BERTHELIN was not prepared for the coldness of old Burckheim's greeting. He ignored Berthelin's hand, and scarcely gave him time to sit down before saying,

"You've been lying about me in the works."

Berthelin was taken aback. He knew he was unwelcome now, but he thought the old man had been evading him simply out of laziness and hating to be disturbed by bad news: he hadn't expected to be treated like a defaulting clerk.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

He spoke gently. In spite of everything, he could not shake off his admiration for Burckheim. He remembered the courage and generosity he had shown in 1918—it was still, in some families, enough to use the word Burckheim to mean by it honesty, loyalty, good faith. His own experience of the old man as tricky and vindictive did not wipe out the other, the younger Burckheim.

It struck him that Burckheim felt uneasy.

"You allowed the workers to hold a meeting at which I was threatened and insulted."

Berthelin opened his mouth to reply, and the old man struck the table with all his force.

"Hold your tongue. I have something to say to you. You've been carrying on a correspondence behind my back, you've been seeing certain people on your visits to Paris, with the idea of selling the works to the Government——"

"That's impossible," Berthelin interrupted.

Burckheim struck the table again. He had difficulty in speaking.

"I know all about you. I know the name of the official you saw in Paris."

Berthelin started. Only one person knew that when he was in Paris in March he had visited an old schoolfellow at the Air Ministry and talked about the possibility of fitting the Burckheim works into the defence scheme. He felt a sick dismay. He pulled himself together. Ernest obviously didn't realise the importance of keeping his mouth shut, he thought, it was stupid of me to tell him without warning him. In his dismay, he missed part of Burckheim's next accusation.

". . . unwarranted interference, it's no business of yours what I do with my money, and as for selling land, anyone would think you were sole heir, and had a right to talk."

Berthelin felt angry for the first time.

"I must remind you," he said, "with all respect, that when I took over the ironworks you yourself offered to leave them to me—to compensate my son for not inheriting the works in Belfort. Forgive me for pointing out that I relied on your promise so far as it affects my son. I'm indifferent to my own success or failure."

He saw that Burckheim was past listening to reason, and held his tongue.

"The truth is," Burckheim said petulantly, "you're head-strong and disloyal. You knew what my policy was before you accepted the post, and you've wilfully opposed it—"

"Do you wish me to resign at once?"

The old man had not expected this question. He was taken aback. He had not made up his mind about dismissing Berthelin, still less about his successor. An obscure fear sprang in him, so obscure that he took it for a physical pain, and winced, clutching the edge of the table. It confused him and made him feel tired. His thoughts began blowing about like the jets of water that used to fascinate him when he was a child standing in front of the old fountain in the courtyard,

one crossing the other in a ceaselessly-moving shuttle. He looked reproachfully at Berthelin.

"No, no," he stammered. "We're not discussing that."

He became afraid that Berthelin would begin again about the need to make changes at the works, and with an instinctive cunning he exaggerated his tiredness. He dragged himself out of his chair, and shuffled to the window.

"They're talking about an early vintage," he said, in a weak voice. "It's nonsense. Don't you know what Vergil said? 'If you hope for nectar, leave your grapes to the last'—it's sound advice. I never allow them to pick on dull cloudy days, either. You must, you know, pour the sun into the vat. . . . There's one thing I wish. I envy the first wine-growers, pushing their plants into a hole in the ground and leaving them to fruit, without having to struggle against one disease after another. Those old vines of France, as healthy and simple as a young peasant, able to live on nothing . . . and what arms she had—and thighs, and what a round hard belly—what muscles. . . . What a time to live in, my boy."

He rested his hand on the ledge outside the open window. The warmth from the stone ran across his body. He forgot he was not alone, and when Berthelin spoke suddenly he turned round, vexed.

"What, are you still there?"

Turning his back again, he heard the door shut. He sat down in a chair near the window. In the light and warmth he slept. He was walking along a road he knew very well in his youth, in the Vosges west of Colmar: without his noticing, it became a track, and he climbed upwards steadily, towards the White Lake. How long is it since I was here? he thought: he remembered that the last time had been years before the Great War, perhaps nine years after the 1870, when he was a young man. I was about twenty, he thought. Looking over his shoulder, he caught a glimpse very far below of a valley be-

tween gentler hills, smiling, zealous in sunlight, the spire of a church distant in trees: in front of him the mountain reared suddenly, a harsh stone peak among other peaks. Men, in groups, began to meet and pass him on the track, going down towards the lower slopes. It was dark up here; he couldn't see them distinctly at first; then he made out that they were soldiers, *chasseurs*, magnificent men: they passed him without looking at him or answering him. The place had become unfamiliar now. The men jostled him on every side, hundreds on hundreds of them, silent; some, a few, smiling, the other faces close-shut and often distorted. At last one stopped for less than a minute.

"What is it you want to know?"

"Where is this? Who are all these men?"

"Your dead, daddy. Don't you recognise us? It hasn't taken you long to forget. What's your number?"

He tried to remember his name, struggling, his body paralysed, and woke in fear. He had slipped forward in the chair. He stood up. The sun, a noisy young woman, buffeted him in the face.

CHAPTER FIFTY

FANNY listened to Daladier's speech on the wireless. It seemed to her, with its phrases about the defence of liberty, honour, the country, very like other speeches to which, without noticing them very much, she had been listening since she was a child. She had never even wondered what it must have been like to live in times when such speeches were not a routine, like holidays and the milk round. And so this evening, although because of the crisis she tried to listen as if she were hearing them for the first time, most of the serious eloquent phrases slipped off her like water off ivory, and she looked stealthily at her watch. Robert was in the room with her and her mother. She was anxious not to lose a minute of the time they would spend walking slowly to the station for him to catch the last train to Strasbourg. She glanced at him. He was listening with an air of abstraction that might mean he was not listening at all.

The voice, with its undertone of doubt and dread, stopped. Her mother leaned to switch off the set, and without turning said,

"Raising war memorials to young men who are not killed yet."

The words embarrassed Fanny. The echo they made in her mind was false. It was as if her mother, after a lifetime of seeming normal and clear, had suddenly said, "This is what my life has been," and showed her a heap of old letters, clothes, torn stained rags. She avoided Robert's eye.

He pulled himself out of his chair, straightening his long

body with the movement that gave Fanny an exquisite happiness to watch.

"Oh, I hope it's not as bad as that," he said, in his young indistinct voice.

He smiled.

"Does it mean they've given up all hope of peace?" Fanny said.

"I don't know," her mother said. She looked at Robert. "Your father is in a better position to know."

"May I take Robert to the station?"

"Yes," Blanche Siguenau said, smiling. "The chemist's wife said to me yesterday, when I was buying lint to put away, 'Your daughter is very English.' She meant she had seen you both walking to the train the day before."

Robert smiled indulgently. He had no impulse to rebel, except when a convention bored him. Then, so far as it rested with him, he overlooked it. Fanny, and not he, was slightly self-conscious when they passed houses in which shutters were being opened for the first time during the day.

As they crossed the square, the shadow of the Vosges spread like a hand over the wooden tables in front of the cafés. Half of the fountain was in sunlight.

"People are looking at us."

"Let them," Robert said curtly. He lifted his narrow head. "I shall be recalled, I expect."

"But you had a week. We have another three days."

"Yes, but it doesn't look so good, my child."

"You sound cheerful."

"No good crying about it."

He made no attempt to tell her of the excitement, hard and controlled, a stone he was gripping in both hands, that seized him when he thought of war coming. Everything, in war, would be simpler and single. He expected to enjoy that, and at the same moment he hated it: all the double things of life,

sun crossed by shadow, Fanny's soul in Fanny's body, held him, begging him, As you love us stay with us. As I love them, he thought with anguish. The grief and the excitement fought in him. It was the same to-day as it had been in the days when he was learning to double any happiness by finding its brother in Montaigne or Valéry. As then, so now he kept quiet about what he was feeling. He had never formed the habit of relying on anyone.

"People—even my mother sometimes—talk about the meaning of life, what is it we live for," Fanny said. "It's quite simple—the answer, I mean. Simply to live. And what more can one want—except to live?"

"What more have we?" Robert said.

He paused, crossing the courtyard of the Strasbourg house, to look at it, at this modestly handsome house, the high roof, as high as the walls, cut by the slender clock-tower, the exquisite triangle formed by the double staircase mounting to and descending from the door on the first floor. He imagined himself dead, and returning to stand here, with the life of five centuries soundlessly penetrating him.

The wing occupied by his father was at the other side of the house facing the inner garden and the cloister leading to the orangery. He usually went in by a side door on the ground level. To-day, for some unquestioned reason, he walked up the steps and pulled the bell of the main door under the clock-tower. The servant who opened it supposed he had done it for a joke, but when he said, "I thought I'd like to come in this way just once," she said, smiling,

"But why not, Mr. Robert? One should now do everything one has forgotten to do."

His father spoke to him as he passed the library.

"Come in."

He was holding a piece of paper.

"Have I been recalled?" Robert said.

"No. Not yet."

"Not yet? Is the news worse? I thought Daladier sounded so vague there might be a chance. Not that I mind going," he muttered.

"I wish this had happened months ago, or months later," Berthelin said. He handed Robert the letter, and turned to go through a heap of papers on the floor.

Robert read the letter—it was short—in bewilderment, and then with growing anger. It was from old Burckheim. His father had been dismissed and told to clear out of the house at once. There was not a word of thanks or regret. He would be paid a year's salary, "if you feel inclined to take it."

"But this is abominable," Robert stammered. "You can't be turned out like this."

Berthelin yawned and smiled.

"My contract is on a yearly basis. When I signed it—with the old gentleman calling me 'cousin Edward' every time he opened his mouth—he told me, for the second time, that he was leaving me the works. I wanted them for you, of course. . . . I'm very sorry."

"Don't worry about me," Robert said.

The telephone rang on the desk. Berthelin picked it up and listened. Watching him, Robert saw his face change: a look of anger and incredulity gave way to pity.

" What proof have you? Yes, yes. . . . Yes, I see, I ought to have suspected it—I had the chance. Kind of you to let me know. I'm sure you would rather have held your tongue about it. Don't worry, I shall be all right."

He put the instrument down and began to whistle like a schoolboy. It was only when things were going very badly

that his body played tricks on him, and he found himself kicking a stone along the street or humming or snapping his fingers. His son recognised the signs.

"Well?"

"That was Caroline," Berthelin said gently. "She rang me up to say she was sorry. And to tell me that the two men who got me dismissed are—I expected it of one of them—Reuss—and Ernest Siguenau."

"I can't believe he would ever——" Robert began.

"Caroline has seen a letter he wrote a week ago, accusing me of various crimes—treachery is only one of them. The letter referred to talks he and the old man had had about the same thing." His father yawned without trying to hide it. "Heavens, I'm sleepy. I've been working for months without a decent night's rest. I'll have my sleep out to-night. Would you mind telling Martin he's not to call me?"

Berthelin slept for fifteen hours. He woke at three in the afternoon. He had dressed but he had not had time to taste his coffee when his servant came in and said that Siguenau had called to see him.

"Ask him to wait for me in the orangery," Berthelin said.

As he walked across the lawn he noticed, for the first time for weeks, the limpid charm of the sky with its few frivolous clouds. A burden had fallen off his back, he felt like a relieved man. He was going to be atrociously unhappy—he knew that—until he could get used to the loss of his friend. So far he had avoided thinking about it. But the moment he came into the orangery and saw Siguenau, he felt ashamed. How am I going to tell him I know? he thought. Siguenau was smiling.

"What's this I hear from Reuss? You've been quarrelling with the old man. I came to see what I could do about it."

"You could perhaps," Berthelin said gently, "write him another letter—like the one you wrote last week, about my disloyalty, peculation, lies, treachery—and so forth."

Siguenau stepped back. He said nothing. His expression was that of a boy caught cheating. Berthelin was seized by pity for him.

"Why did you do it?"

"Who told you?" Siguenau asked harshly. "Honoré himself? Reuss?"

"Don't you even trust your—your fellow criminal?"

The insult gave Siguenau the chance to pull himself together, as Berthelin had known it would. He said in a jaunty voice,

"You're completely mistaken, my dear Edward. What I've been anxious about is your idiotic attempt to get the works taken over by the Government. I knew as soon as you went to Paris to see our little friend Jeannot that you were up to no good, and I made enquiries——"

"Why go to the trouble of making enquiries?" interrupted Berthelin. "I told you what I was doing myself. If there was anything you didn't know all about, you only needed to ask me."

Siguenau turned pale. The look he gave Berthelin was one of hatred. It shocked Berthelin. The anguish he had been keeping at arm's length seized him. Why has he done it? he thought. He saw himself and Siguenau walking down the rue Soufflot, hatless and arguing furiously: when they stopped at the corner, beside the Capoulade doorway, Siguenau laid a hand on his arm. . . .

"What——"

"Yes, I could have asked you what you and Blanche say about me when you discuss me." Siguenau was scarcely able

to speak. "You would have told me, wouldn't you? Simple."

"Blanche has nothing to do with this, has she?" Berthelin said.

He frowned. He was puzzled now by the sudden twist of the other's mind. For a moment he wondered whether Siguenau was drunk. He looked at him. Completely sober.

Siguenau passed his hand over his mouth. The gesture seemed to give him back his assurance.

"So you haven't discussed me with her?" he said coldly. "It's not important. I came here to see whether I could be any use."

"Surely you came to find out what I'm going to do? I might leave you to guess—but I won't. I'm going to do nothing. I shan't try to see Honoré, or protest against being dismissed—or ask him for reasons. I expect to have other things to do in a few days. . . . I'll only warn you and Reuss that if you're going to try to run the Burckheim works you'll find yourselves in difficulties you won't be able to settle—except by the measures I would have adopted. You'll have to persuade Honoré they're necessary and urgent. And since you've been telling him all these months that I was inventing the difficulties I don't envy you your interviews with him. However, that's your business. It has nothing to do with me any longer, and I'm not sorry to leave it to you." He yawned. "Sorry—I could do with a week's sleep."

Siguenau was stung into saying more than he had meant to say.

"I'm taking over for a few weeks. After that, Henry Eschelmer will be the manager—at least in name."

Berthelin lost his calm.

"So you're working with him, are you? And Reuss. Do you know what you're doing? Your other friends, your supporters of Flandin, readers of *Gringoire*, Maurras's disciples, ex-German officers, stupid women, are bad enough—the people

who've brought France to the edge of war because they thought they were saving their fortunes by backing the Nazis—the people who in 1923 marched into the Ruhr and in 1938 were betraying one of France's allies to Hitler. One of these friends of yours said a year ago that he would rather see a German army in Paris than another socialist government. . . . I've always imagined you played about with these stupid blackguards because you like dinner-parties and pseudo-intellect. You and your shady politics—"

"Shady? A national movement isn't shady," Siguenau said angrily.

Berthelin shrugged his shoulders. He realised at this moment that the other man was genuinely unable to understand what he meant. The simple fact that his political intrigues were carried on in fashionable drawing-rooms, in Paris as well as in the provinces, made them, in his eyes, respectable.

"You're an intriguer," he said drily. "A man of your type always goes too far."

"What do you mean?"

"Eschelmer is paid by Germans to edit a paper full of separatist propaganda. He's connected with certain German firms—"

"That's not a crime," Siguenau interrupted.

"He's probably a German agent."

"You've no proof. . . . And whatever his political views, I'm capable of keeping an eye on him."

Berthelin did not answer. He made a gesture of helplessness with both hands, as though he were dropping a heavy weight. The affection of a lifetime, or the contempt and anger of the last five or six minutes? The only feeling he had left for Siguenau was a curious pity. It made him clear-sighted.

"I don't know what you expect to get out of Eschelmer," he said, slowly. "You might—it's barely possible—be able to

explain it so that I could at least understand your motives. But why did you want to damage me? You were my friend."

As he said this, he was not able to ward off a momentary agony. He looked down, and put his hands in his pockets. Siguenau had seen him standing like this scores of times; he took a step forward, and drew back again as though he had put his foot on a nail. Berthelin lifted his head and looked directly at him. Neither spoke.

Neither of them was willing to break off. They were held by a single thread, and for a minute or two it seemed unbreakable. Even Berthelin's pity could not break it. Siguenau was leaning against a window. He was sweating, and the sight of Berthelin, stiff-shouldered, unbending, as fresh as though he were on holiday, suddenly irritated him.

"I won't discuss it."

"Very well," Berthelin said. He sighed—and then yawned.

"I'll leave you to go back to bed," Siguenau said in an exasperated voice.

"I have only one thing more to say," Berthelin said. He spoke gently. "Until 1914 we shared everything. After that. . . . During the War you were an office soldier, you didn't get the training we mere infantry officers had—in summing men up. It was a few simple qualities we looked for in a man before sending him with an order or to take over a company. I daresay you judged each other differently at G.H.Q. You sometimes told me about intrigues that had come off, or hadn't come off. It was perfectly clear, even to a serving soldier, that abilities which were overworked in the front line would be useless on the Staff, except in very humble positions."

"What are you getting at?" Siguenau asked curtly.

"Trying to warn you," Berthelin spoke in an apologetic tone. "You're not a judge of men like Reuss and Eschelmer. You'll find yourself in a mess—and you'll lose your nerve."

"Nonsense."

"You're out of your depth," Berthelin said.

Siguenau straightened himself with an effort and walked to the door. He was not quick enough; he had to walk past Berthelin, who held it open for him. He hesitated for a fraction of a second, then went out without saying a word.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

ON HIS way home Siguenau could not think, except for an odd minute or two, of the man he had just left. His head felt heavy, as though the energy in it had cooled and was splitting into solid rubble. He felt about in this stony rubbish without being able to make any sense of it. What have I done? he thought at one moment. It was not a question, still less a definite thought: it was a plea. But what answer did he expect—and from Berthelin? With the deceptive sharpness of a scene lit by a flash of lightning, he saw two boys, children, their arms round each other's necks, crossing the quai Vauban in Belfort; he felt under his finger-tips the washed smoothness of his schoolboy's overall. Then the rubble of stones slid over it; he tried to fix his mind on the present—a reckoning of what he had lost and what he had gained by ousting Berthelin could not wait—but it was no use: his mind, usually so nimble and excited in a crisis, was numbed. The confusion in it spread down and down, seizing first one and then another image, until the deepest and most shadowy were involved.

He was driving more carefully than usual, because every street, and when he was clear of Strasbourg every road, gave him a feeling of insecurity. A house he knew very well at a cross-roads was unfamiliar, and the threat hurled at him by a hedge of peonies in the garden of a cottage sent a ball of blood to the back of his head.

When he went into his house he fancied for a moment that it was empty. He shouted. A servant came through from the cellar passage.

"Where is your mistress?"

Blanche had gone up to the attics; he went up, and found her sorting into two piles the contents of a trunk full of papers. The room—it ran the length of the house from front to back, with great joists and uprights of roughly-squared chestnut, bunches of herbs dangling from all of them—was stuffy. It was the topmost section of the roof; the windows at either end were without glass, and closed by shutters. Blanche had opened them both, but there was no movement of air.

She turned quickly.

"Caroline telephoned after you went out. She says Edward has been sacked."

Siguenau felt his mind clear suddenly.

"Have you heard anything about it from Edward?"

"No. I was afraid to ring him up at the works," she said frowning. "It's a dreadful business, Ernest. I was stunned. Why has the old devil done it—do you know?"

"You could have rung him up," Siguenau said calmly. "He's at home. I've seen him." He glanced at the floor. "What are you doing?"

"Sorting out what can be destroyed if we have to leave, if the war. . . . I want to know about Edward—never mind all this. What did he tell you? Is he going to protest?"

She stood in front of her husband, unconsciously aggressive, her body poked forward. He looked at her with curiosity. An extreme bitterness seized him. He had an impulse to push her towards the open window. Instead he went over to it himself, and leaned out, gazing at the ledge that protected the clock immediately below it. He felt himself turning giddy, and stepped back.

"Why are you so anxious about Edward?"

He saw her look at him in astonishment.

"Anxious?" she said vehemently. "But of course I'm anxious. I don't know what you mean, Ernest. Why are you taking it so calmly? I was distracted when I heard."

"Yes, I see."

He came close to her again and looked directly into her eyes: they seemed to him hostile and suspicious. She was very warm from her efforts and the stuffiness of the room, and her hair stuck to her temples and the side of her head. It smelled of the harsh tarry soap she used for washing it.

"You have boarding-school habits," he said to her.

"Ernest!"

"Why do you never use scent on your hair? Why are your elbows always rough? You never try to seem young, but you haven't any real wrinkles. Why haven't I left you?"

"It's not too late," Blanche said, smiling. "But I can't alter my habits. Don't talk about them now. Edward——"

"I won't discuss Edward with you," her husband said coldly. "You don't know all the facts and I'm not able to tell you—yet. I only ask you to be careful what you say to him. Don't tell him any secrets." His face twitched. "Any he doesn't know, I mean. . . . And don't imagine he'll starve because Honoré had to get rid of him—his friends in the Government will look after him."

What he called her English look came over Blanche's face—stupid and rather sneering. He hated it, and turned to go.

"Don't treat me like a child," she called after him. "I simply don't believe that Edward deserved to be sacked in this way."

Her husband hesitated, turning his face towards her. He seemed haggard and miserable.

"Don't let's quarrel like this," she said sadly.

"Never mind. It's nothing."

He shook his head slightly and went. She felt an impulse to hurry after him. The idea that she was being given a last chance to understand something seized her and pushed her towards the ladder leading down. But she was hot and dusty. Patches of dust clung to her dress. She hesitated. The thought

of showing herself to him again in this state—my boarding-school habits, she thought wryly—was unpleasant. She drew back. A shadow crossing and re-crossing the wall opposite the window caught her eye; she turned to look at a pigeon flying backwards and forwards, softly white in the sun. The brief distraction dulled her strange feeling of urgency. A door slammed somewhere in the house, and she kneeled again among the litter of papers and set to work.

Without giving himself time to think, Siguenau telephoned to Reuss and asked him whether he knew who had given Berthelin the facts about his dismissal.

"What facts?" asked Reuss.

On the telephone, his voice was overbearing and flat. It gave away completely his pretence of charm. You understood at once, only by his way of answering a question, that he was an egoist, cautious, ungenerous, and despised all but a few of his fellow-beings.

"He knows that you—that we advised Burckheim to dismiss him."

"Oh, yes?"

"Who told him?"

"I have no idea."

"He has no intention of protesting to Burckheim."

"That hardly surprises me."

"I suppose there are one or two things we ought to discuss."

"Shall I come down and talk them over with you this evening?" Reuss said at once.

"It's not possible now. I have someone coming to dinner."

"Oh, yes? Eschelmer? I'll see you to-morrow, then. Good night."

Did he know Eschelmer was coming, or had he made a shrewd guess? He was obviously offended and suspicious. Siguenau considered a moment with quickly growing satisfaction. His distrust of Reuss had grown—the fellow was unscrupulous and ambitious and, for all his air of dignity, vulgar. I'll sack him as soon as Honoré dies, he thought.

He had Eschelmer to himself at dinner. Blanche refused to see him: she had pitied him for some time, and now had an irrational horror of him. "He's not sane," she said, "I can't bear his hands." Eschelmer's hands were, in fact, a parody of old Burckheim's, but flabby where his were tough and thick; they were like roots which have gone soft.

He noticed that Eschelmer was excited this evening. An insolent note sounded in his voice for the first time. Vexed, Siguenau tried to snub him, but the other, usually so touchy, noticed nothing. He began to talk about himself.

"I was at the château yesterday afternoon, and saw"—he hesitated for a second—"my grandfather—you understand—he seemed to me very old and very tired, almost gaga, in fact. Very sad, eh? He managed to pull himself together long enough to fetch out the draft of his new will." Eschelmer's voice cracked. "It's exactly what you told me I could expect. And now, thank God, I can look ahead. Reorganise the whole works. I shall have unlimited resources and power, not only the—the family in Germany. More important people still. I haven't wasted my time the last few years, I can tell you. And, by God, I'll clean things up. I'll clear out every sea-lawyer and Bolshevik in the works. I'll—the sooner the old gentleman dies the better. Not that I need to do more than weep at him now and then. He'll sign anything. Anything."

"You're mistaken," Siguenau said.

Brought up sharp, Eschelmer sent him a spiteful glance.

"You haven't seen him since he had another stroke, a slight one, three nights ago——"

"What did you say?"

"Ah-h, you didn't know, then? Well, well. Mrs. Burckheim didn't intend anyone to know about it. It was Reuss told me. The old fellow, he's as stubborn as a donkey, went out in the hot sun on Tuesday afternoon, the next day he had a row with Berthelin—and the two things together . . . he's very feeble, sits there staring at nothing. He must be near his last end."

Siguenau tried to look indulgent. He was angry. Reuss had kept him, on one excuse and another, from asking to see the old man since Wednesday. Why? Probably out of mischief—to make him look foolish when he found out.

"You don't know our friend Reuss as well as I do," he said. "He wanted you to believe no one else knew about the old gentleman's stroke. He was flattering you. You mustn't let him pull your leg."

Eschelmer reddened with anger.

"Oh, I'm not taken in by Master Reuss. I'll use him as long as I need him, and then—one kick——"

Siguenau's mind had never been steadier. He reminded himself of the use he intended to make of Eschelmer. The fellow was coarse and unbalanced, he had energy: he would make an excellent go-between with the sort of people it was better not to meet. I shall keep effective control of the works, he thought coolly: with the weight of the steel industry behind me I can become anything I like in Paris. No more of the provinces, by God.

He looked at Eschelmer, who was a little drunk. A feeling of the deepest distaste and uncertainty filled him. What a loathsome fellow you are, he thought drily: unpleasant as he is, Reuss is not hysterical, and doesn't carry a soiled silk handkerchief in his sleeve. The idea of taking Reuss into his confidence again came into his head for a moment. No—impossible. He had gone too far with Eschelmer.

His mind plunged forward, sweeping him into a future of exhilarating brilliance—Eschelmer a mere figurehead in the firm, ignored by the pompous German financiers who relied, naturally, on the real brain, the director of policy, the—why not?—Councillor of the Bank of France. It would be almost too easy to convince them that Eschelmer was not trustworthy.

He leaned forward, smiling.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

ROBERT BERTHELIN had tried earlier in the day to see Burckheim. He had been turned away by Reuss, who said the old gentleman was too ill to see anyone. Robert did not believe him. He waited, out of sight of the windows of the château, until the evening, then climbed into the still-room through a half-open window on that side of the house. He reached the servants' staircase without being seen and ran quickly up to the first floor. The door of Caroline's sitting-room was closed. He could hear her moving about. He hesitated, then tip-toed along the corridor to the library, and went in.

Burckheim was alone. He was sitting close to one of the windows, rigid, the huge stump of his body thrust out of the chair, his head sunk. He did not hear the young man until Robert was beside him. He lifted his head, slowly. His mouth was drawn down at one side, and the flesh had shrunk under his cheek-bones, leaving them standing out like chalk ridges. He looked at Robert without a flicker of recognition.

"Who are you?"

"Robert—Robert Berthelin. I've come——" he hesitated. It was no use speaking about his father. The anger he had been feeling left him, he felt ashamed and foolish.

"Who are you?"

"I came to say goodbye," Robert said.

He noticed a gleam of cunning in Burckheim's blue eyes, the first sign of intelligence. Was he shamming? The suspicion crossed his mind, and he dismissed it. The only things still alive in Burckheim were his primitive instincts, slyness,

and acute senses. He turned his head suddenly, pointing it at the window.

"It'll be a long winter," he muttered.

"How d'you know that, sir?"

"Don't be a fool . . . who did you say you were?"

"Robert Berthelin."

"Ah, yes. Well, where is it you're going now? Wait—I know. You're joining the others. I saw them, you know. I didn't see you there, though. Well, goodbye, goodbye. For the soil of France, you know."

"Goodbye, sir."

Burckheim pulled himself upright, with an effort that made him choke. Holding on to the window, he watched Robert until the door closed on him.

"Good boy, good boy. A pity."

He remained standing in the window: it was less trouble than lowering himself into the chair. From here he looked across the park, between two small islands of trees, to the vines, and beyond them the hills. It was an hour or so after sunset, and the light, no longer broken by innumerable reflections from every surface reached by the sun, was delicately clear. In the calm wide space of this evening, sounds—a wheel creaking, a man's voice, the chattering of bats—were shaken to the lowest level, and scattered there like pebbles on the floor of the sea. The sense of a persistent serious effort, withdrawn for a moment into rooms no ancestor would lose his way in if he came back, of empty country, of warmth sheltering in the ground, in the dust, in the walls of houses, sense of a ferment not less good and ceaseless than the change going on in last year's new wine in the casks, sense, in a word, of France, came to him. He watched the light changing, becoming as visible as water, darkening what it pretended to reveal. The darkness rose

from the ground and began to cover it, until only what backed against the sky was alive and identifiable.

Caroline came into the room. He watched her as she walked heavily towards him—the big, barren woman: the American woman, he thought, stripping her in one second of thirty years of marriage, and of all her anxious honourable wish to become French.

"I thought Mr. Reuss was with you," she said.

"That ape!"

"I wouldn't have left you alone. . . . Why are you standing?"

Burckheim did not speak, and she went on nervously,

"I didn't want to worry you when you were tired"—she was afraid to say "when you were ill"—"but I wish you hadn't sent Edward off just now. Quite apart from the injustice to him. He looked on himself as"—she hesitated—"as one of the family—"

"More fool he," Burckheim interrupted.

"And just now—with war threatening. It seems mad." She sat down. The way she usually sat, knees apart, hands laid open on them, gave her an air of being defenceless which always irritated her husband. "I don't know how much longer this crisis is going on. I'm sick of it. It's shocking, but it seems as if war would be better than this waiting month after month and now day after day. We shall soon be counting in hours. And the Germans I used to know—poor things, it does seem a shame they have to suffer again—"

Burckheim's anger had been growing, since she began to talk about Berthelin. It now burst from him in a torrent of fury. His body was stiff with it, his eyes shone. He shook his fist.

"You—you—what do you know about anything? You foreigner. You don't understand anything. But for your

country we shouldn't be going to war again in 1939. It was *you* tricked us out of the left bank of the Rhine. *You* cheated us of our reparation, with your generous Hoover moratorium to save the money you'd lent Germany—at exorbitant interest. You idealists. You served your regular summons every year on two million dead, and pretended to be astonished when they didn't fork out. You—miserable. Someone shall speak for Germany, but it won't be you, you know nothing about Germans looking at their vines and fields and praying. Did you ever pray to anyone? You'd better go home. Yes, go home. Clear out of France.”

In another tone, he added,

“And don't take anything of mine with you.”

He turned back to the window. He heard her dress rustling. She went out slowly, and as soon as she was gone he went over to a cupboard between two bookcases and took out a bottle of the wine his man had brought up earlier in the day. It was his grandfather's bottling, from a year when the vintage had been exceptionally late. If it was like the others he had opened of this lot, it would be smooth, aromatic, full. He felt in the darkness growing at this side of the room for glass and corkscrew, and opened the bottle with a steady hand. It was magnificent.

His anger had given him an astonishing energy. The wine affected him as though he were tasting it for the first time. He felt it prick him in every nerve.

He drank the whole bottle, and marched downstairs, and out by the side door into the park. The night air was exquisitely cool.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

DIETRICH with two other men had sat on in the square, in the growing darkness, his glass empty, arms folded on the table in front of him. It was quieter here than in his own house, where his daughters-in-law, who had not troubled themselves during last year's crisis, were getting ready to take his grand-children to a third cousin Bourges. His wife refused to go with them.

He stretched his legs under the table, and stared at the other side of the square, at walls dimly white, stained, rough, at the black semi-circle of a door shut for the night, at the fountain he saw as a wash-place. A round-shouldered old woman passed it; he saw her drag her hand over the stone rim. Without needing to think it, he knew she had had the same impulse as himself, to touch, to handle. It might be the last time. Other invasions had left this square untouched. Could one count on it?

He got up to go. The others, one a farmer and wine-grower like himself, the other a teacher at the village school, stood up too.

"To-morrow night, eh?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Good night."

"Night."

Dietrich caught up with a young man in the road leading out of the village and to his own farm; he turned a stealthy inquisitive eye on him. It was the young Berthelin. The young man had missed the last train on the light railway to Strasbourg and was going to sleep under a hedge until the one starting at five o'clock. Dietrich offered him a bed at the farm.

Robert thanked him, smiled, but he would rather sleep in the open.

They walked in silence to the farm, and stood for a moment beside the entrance to the courtyard. The night was perfectly still. A light breeze came from the east, from the Rhine.

"They let us in for this," Dietrich said suddenly.

"Who?"

"The others—the Allies."

"I suppose so."

"It's once too often. Time we finished it." He peered up at the young man, trying to read his face and reading there nothing but youth. "Well, good luck. Do the best you can."

"What are you going to do?" Robert asked.

"I? What d'you think?"

"You may be invaded."

"It wouldn't be the first time," Dietrich said, grinning. "I shall manage—and if he knows what's good for him, God will do his share."

He watched the young man out of sight. Long after the darkness swallowed him, his footsteps sounded on the cobblestones of the road. There goes some degree of a Burckheim, he thought.

During the evening, the schoolmaster had been repeating all he had heard from his wife's brother, a clerk in the Burckheim ironworks, about the state of the firm. It was common gossip among the clerks that the works had been kept going during the past three years thanks to Berthelin's sharpness in getting orders farmed out by other better-placed firms.

"You can take it from me, that is, from my brother-in-law, he was waiting for the old man to die, and then the firm would have begun working for the Government—and why not? What luck, after all, for the men to be sure of their

wages. I'm not one of your anarchists. If you ask me, the real anarchists, the dangerous ones, are the old devils of Burckheims, with their swollen heads."

Since no one contradicted him, the schoolmaster was quiet. The silence of the square, with no groups of young men standing against the pavement at traditional points on a circle, its centre the girls clustered about the fountain, rose to the level of the table, to the level of their faces. They were all quiet. Dietrich was thinking, drily and without malice, of the old man—dying, it was said. After all, what a pity.

He walked across his courtyard towards the house door, his foot seeking in the darkness worn-down places it had known since he was able to walk. He did not go in. He stood there, feeling at his back the life of the house, asleep and living, dead and asleep in things the dead had used, tables they had eaten at, banisters they had fingered on their way to bed, a nail on which their garments still hung.

He reckoned afterwards that he must have waited more than an hour. But waited for what? He was the one wakeful point of all the Dietriches of these few hectares of land. All the dead, from the first to take up a handful of the soil and crumble it between his fingers, drew together in him, their point of mobilisation. Through him, they listened, not even troubling to look east. The living—these included his old wife—turned to him in their sleep.

He heard someone walking up the road from the village. After a second or two—not more—he recognised the step. He went back and undid the door in time to let Honoré Burckheim step straight into the courtyard without waiting.

As he came in, Burckheim stumbled. He had not been stumbling in the road; he must have used the last of his strength. Dietrich helped him into the house.

He left Burckheim standing for a minute while he lit the lamp in the kitchen. The old man swayed, and fell clumsily

on to the settle. The look of anger that had been on his face when he came in had changed in this minute to one of contentment. Dietrich looked at him.

"Wait a minute, I'll call the women."

"No need," Burckheim said, "I'm comfortable."

He seemed to be. His body had relaxed, and he was lying on his back with one arm lying on his chest and the other doubled back, fingers seeking the edge of a pillow that was not there. Dietrich picked up a child's jacket and rolled it. When he raised Burckheim's head, although it was the first time he had touched it, the bones seemed familiar. Some other Dietrich had done as much for another Burckheim.

He roused his wife and the two other women, and sent the eldest of his grandchildren to the village, to the doctor's. Then he drew a chair near the settle and sat down.

He had set the lamp so that its weakest circle of light touched Burckheim's face—untroubled.

"I did right to come here, didn't I?" Burckheim said.

"Certainly."

Dietrich's wife came and whispered in his ear. Burckheim caught the word "priest."

"Thanks very much, but we'll let that pass," he said, slowly and softly. "I know what I need."

Dietrich waved his wife brusquely out of the way, and bent down.

"The women sometimes know something," he said.

"I'm too old," Burckheim said.

He put his hand out and took Dietrich's hand, as old as his own, drier, scarred with black seams. It was the gesture his father had made towards him when he was dying, but it was his own, too, as a child when his father came into his room at night. Everything in him that was good, simple, modest, came forward at the approach of death, and he had no trouble in remembering words he had not heard since he used to

repeat them as a lesson, without any interest, and without listening to them. Dietrich saw his lips moving, and caught a few of the words. ". . . they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid." A movement of his index finger on the ball of his thumb was a trick he had caught from his grandmother in her old age and his childhood.

Dietrich knew very well that he was sitting beside an Honoré Burckheim he had never known. The man he had known was not trustful, not pious, not simple. Who would have expected him to die with quietness and confidence? His heir won't spend money on the vines, Dietrich thought; he won't be called Burckheim, either; the family is being driven off at last, I shall be able to buy the farm.

His grandson had come back, and sidled across the room with one shoulder lifted higher than the other in the effort to walk noiselessly. My uncle Martin over again, Dietrich thought.

Burckheim allowed the doctor to listen to his heart.

"Can you hear it?" he asked.

Dietrich had moved out of the way to let the doctor come near the settle. He saw Burckheim looking at him and came back. Caroline Burckheim came into the room; out of politeness Mrs. Dietrich walked with her to the settle: she was the only one in the room who knew from the slight shadow on his face that Burckheim had thought for a moment of Geneviève and had not the least idea who this other woman was. Dietrich had not moved aside again. He did not see any reason why he should: he put his hand out and Burckheim tried to touch it and sighed wearily and heavily, closing his eyes.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

TOWARDS eight o'clock the next morning, August 27, Siguenau returned from the château to find Eschelmer waiting to see him. Blanche had taken him into the dining-room on the ground floor and left him there. He jumped up when Siguenau came in and stood stiffly; he made no effort to hide his excitement.

"Well?"

"You've heard the news?" Siguenau said.

"Of course. Everyone in the village has heard it." Eschelmer tried to control his voice. "Well?"

"What is it you want to know?" Siguenau said irritably.

Simply from the tone of his voice Eschelmer knew he had been cheated. The draft will he had seen had not been signed, he was nobody; he was no more use to Siguenau. For a long minute he felt all the terror of a man facing a line of rifles. Then an hysterical anger got the better of him. Siguenau had tricked him with offers of friendship; he had used him and lied to him. To me, Eschelmer thought, choking. To *me*. The shock to his vanity was unbearable.

"Nothing from you," he stammered. "If the old man had signed another will before he died, you'd be speaking to me in a very different way. . . . It was you advised me to come here." His voice rose. "It's my opinion you thought you could make use of me. Wait. I'm not going away with nothing. You didn't know about the thousand pounds he gave me—in cash—"

Siguenau was outraged. He tried to insult Eschelmer.

"Probably you helped yourself to money he had in his room."

Eschelmer turned pale. He lost control and screamed at the top of his voice.

"The day Alsace is German again you'll lose everything, do you hear? Everything—as well as being shot. I'll see to it myself. Do you hear?"

"I hear you saying an extraordinary thing," Siguenau said in a dry voice. "Then it's true you're a German agent, is it?"

Eschelmer was stopped. His eyes became dull all at once, and his lower lip trembled. He was on the point of bursting into tears.

"No. I'm not," he said softly.

He turned and shuffled out of the room.

Jules Reuss watched Mrs. Burckheim come out of her husband's room and go into her own. Walking in that soundless way of his, the weight lowered gently on each foot, he went into the room himself and closed the door. The housekeeper had sent for watchers, and Caroline had sent them away again; Burckheim was alone.

It was a large room. The bed stood on a shallow platform, between a walnut commode and a long elaborately carved chest: the figures on the chest were the same as those on the stone canopy above the stove. Reuss walked over to the bed. He was surprised by the youthful look of Burckheim's face; it was smooth and ruddy. The last time he saw Burckheim living his face had been that of an exhausted old man; this new youthfulness stood only for death: for the first time since he had heard that Burckheim was dead he believed it. Until now he had expected a miracle—but from this youth

that a man recovers when he dies no return is ever made. Burckheim's eyelids were firm. Reuss could imagine the eyes under them clear, shrewd, ironical.

He felt safer here from interruption than in his own room. His mind, confusing himself and Alsace, was paralysed by the danger approaching both of them. Was it too late to save his job here by coming closer to Siguenau? Was the country committed, hopelessly, insanely, to war with Germany? Could nothing be done? He regretted bitterly that he had not made friends with any of the groups and persons who were openly in favour of Germany. They must surely be acting now. Moves of some sort were surely being made. At the last minute a miracle would happen.

Burckheim's placid ruddy face, with its supreme indifference, reminded him that miracles can go wrong. War could be averted, but Alsace, by some flaw in the miracle, not saved. Or if war broke out he might, through another twist, keep his job in the château.

He went across to a window facing the courtyard and parted the shutters so that he could look through a crack between them. The stone baluster of the outside staircase, the walls of the south wing, flung back the light of a midday so intense that it was audible, vibrant with warmth. I can't go away, he thought.

He went out without looking at Burckheim again. He saw Siguenau coming out of the library, and forced himself to smile. Siguenau gave him an unfriendly glance.

"Have your files ready for me to look at to-morrow morning," he said coldly.

Before he left the dower-house after breakfast, Siguenau had telephoned to Berthelin, asking him—since he would be

coming out to the château—not to go away without seeing him. Half an hour ago he had heard Berthelin arrive. He was still with Caroline in her room. Distracted and impatient, Siguenau began to walk up and down the corridor, between the library and the head of the staircase. As soon as Caroline's door opened at the other end of the east corridor, he doubled back to the library. He tried to seem at his ease.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. Do you mind?"

"Not at all."

Berthelin waited. He knew the other man too well to be taken in by the smile and the lazy gestures. Siguenau was uncertain. Either he hasn't planned what he wants to say, or he intends to keep something back, Berthelin said to himself. He was less indifferent than he had hoped he would be.

"Do you know that Eschelmer has been robbing the old man?"

"How?"

"A large sum of money. Five thousand dollars. Honoré drew it out of the bank on Wednesday—Mrs. Eschelmer says he promised it to her on Tuesday afternoon, when he went to see her. But that's certainly a lie."

"Very likely. But you can't prove it, can you?" Berthelin said.

"No."

Siguenau was silent. He could not bring himself to give away the fact that he had been working with a man who was a German agent. The scandal and ignominy were too great. He had been trying frantically to think of some way of shutting Eschelmer up without laying himself open to suspicion. His vanity and tortuous egoism were involved. It was worse than that. All his adroit efforts to get rid of Reuss and Berthelin as rivals had recoiled on himself, he was without trustworthy friends or allies—at a moment when he needed

both. Any day, if Eschelmer got into trouble, he might be drawn into it, and short of exposing himself completely he could not get advice or help. It was the incredible that had happened—as it might happen in a war—and he had lost his nerve. He was in a panic already. He sat there, with a self-assured smile on his lips, his mind turning up nothing but the most fantastic and useless suggestions.

It suddenly occurred to him that he ought to keep Reuss and Berthelin apart—at all costs.

"I don't suppose you know that a few days before he died Honoré got the lawyers to draft a new will, leaving the iron-works to Eschelmer. He had days, you know, during the last fortnight, when he didn't know what he was doing. It was on one of them that Reuss persuaded him he ought to make a new will. I only heard about it yesterday."

Berthelin looked at him.

"Reuss? You say Reuss wanted the works to belong to Eschelmer?"

"Yes."

"What nonsense," Berthelin said calmly. "It wouldn't have been to Reuss's interest at all." He watched Siguenau's hands. "Why don't you keep your hands in your pockets, Ernest? You know they give you away when you're lying. . . . I suppose it was your idea."

Siguenau said nothing.

"My poor Ernest," Berthelin said, with pity, "anyone but you would have been content to think of inheriting the château. Without trying to get hold of everything in sight. Did you think you were still at G.H.Q.? You weren't fit to run the works. The château and the vineyard—yes. I'm delighted you've got them."

Siguenau stood up and walked over to the window. Without turning his head, he said drily,

"Yes, I know what to do with the estate. But Blanche—why did you take Blanche from me?"

Berthelin was stupefied. His first impulse was anger.

"Why bring Blanche, poor girl, into your nonsense?"

"You've made a fool of me," Siguenau said, "the two of you. It suited me better to say nothing and let you think you were being careful."

Berthelin saw that he was in agony. Dismayed, feeling helpless, he asked dully,

"How long have you——"

"For the last three years," interrupted Siguenau. "Since you came to live here."

After a pause Berthelin said,

"Do you remember the phrase we used, when it was something so serious none of the others were solemn enough? . . . 'I promise by the dead lizard. . . .' You remember?"

Siguenau nodded.

"Very well. I promise by the dead lizard that I have never been in love with Blanche, nor made love to her. Nor she with me."

"I believe you," Siguenau said.

He looked as though he had scarcely recovered from a stroke. The muscles of his face were not under control. He had difficulty with his words.

Berthelin stood up. "I must go."

"Don't go yet."

"I have too much to do." Berthelin hesitated. "If you need me, you can ring up the works. I shall be there until midnight. I'll do anything I can."

"Why should I come to you for help, d'you suppose?"

"Why not?"

"Can you trust me?"

"No," Berthelin said. "I can't do that, but I can't drop you, either."

Without looking up, Siguenau made a gesture of profound tiredness.

"Did you come by car? Stupid of me—I know you did. I was watching. Would you mind stopping at my house on your way back—and tell Blanche I shall be busy here all the afternoon. I'll try to get back for supper. You'll find her packing. I've persuaded her to take Fanny to Lyons, to the Felix-Burckheims, until we know what's going to happen. Not that any place is safe now."

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

ROBERT walked towards the Cathedral, scarcely looking at it. He was more alive to the old houses on either side of him—Fanny and I, he thought sharply, might have been living in such a room. He felt a passionate wish to be settled, to be bored if necessary for a lifetime, if that were the alternative to living an exciting life without her. When he stepped out of the street into the sunlight, the swarming front of the Cathedral, alive as with sap, moving like a vast ant-heap with visions, fears, hopes, the whole flung up suddenly into the spire of reddish stone, visibly alive, halted him for a minute. He almost felt the great hand on his chest, holding him back. It was withdrawn, and he went in, with the familiar sense of stepping into a forest supported on every side by an enclosing force. He went directly—like a man to whom the forest is only the way he takes every day to return to his house—to the small chapel.

There was no service. Several women were there, and some men, an old colonel, and two soldiers in the same drab ill-fitting uniform as his own. He knelt, prayed, and realised for a moment that a second prayer was going on below the one on his lips and in his thoughts, as a current will flow under and across the main current in a stream. It was carrying him towards the side, towards the soil under Burckheim's vines, towards a feeling for Fanny which was also a feeling for their children.

His candle burned steadily. He glanced hurriedly at the placid face of the saint, deliberately placid, to give room for

the thoughts of ordinary men and women. His time over, he was in a hurry to leave.

As soon as he was outside, in the delicious warmth, he looked at his watch. I shall just do it. He took a cab to the quai de l'Abattoir, starting-point for the light train to Burckheim. A face he noticed in the street reminded him of a vulgar story he heard lately; he burst out laughing and the driver turned round and winked. The streets, stupid with sunlight, seemed half empty. He felt excited now and gay.

When he reached Fanny's house he talked to her mother for a few minutes while Fanny waited. He watched her without seeming to. She stood on one foot, scuffling at the floor with the other, impatient, and as little able to hide it as a child. Mrs. Siguenau left them; he did not move, he stood looking at her, and she at him.

"When are you going?" she asked.

"This evening."

Fanny sighed. "You didn't get your week after all."

"Never mind."

"Is it certain now there'll be war?"

"Oh, I think so," he said easily. "Time we finished it."

Fanny turned her head away. He thought she might be crying; he went to her quickly and put his arms round her, his heart breaking with his longing to make things easy for her. She was smiling.

"You said that like one of Uncle Honoré's workers. Oh, Robert, I do love you."

"You look beautiful in this dress."

"It's shabby, I'm growing out of it. I put it on because we're packing all my things, we're going to Lyons, I shall join the French Women's Union. I shall put a note in every parcel I wrap and every sweater I knit—the shortest anyone can write, *F. to R.* So if you get it you'll know who it's from, and you'll know what I mean."

"Right."

"Is there anything else?"

"No," Robert said, smiling.

He stroked her hair and the back of her neck, feeling the smallness and weakness of her girl's skull under his fingers.

"Take care of yourself," he said.

"I ought to be saying that to you."

"I? Oh, I shall be all right."

"That's the correct thing for soldiers to say, isn't it?"

"Don't change at all, will you? I don't want to come back and find you've got rid at last of the freckles on your arms, or learned a new dance-step, or taken up botany or fencing. I should loathe it."

"On condition you don't change."

"I'll do my best."

"You won't write to me, will you?" Fanny said in a light voice. "You'll keep me waiting for weeks and then send a short letter with nothing at all in it; and when I grumble you'll say, There isn't any news. You'll forget to answer a single question, and be surprised if I don't answer yours; and when you come on leave—you will come at least once, won't you?—you'll mistrust me for the first ten minutes, and then——"

"In two minutes, I must go."

"Well—" Fanny leaned back, to be able to look at him. She was still smiling. "You can kiss me when you are going, Mamma won't mind, but now, hold me so closely that I can't see anything or breathe. Hurry, hurry, my love. Now you can go. Now we can both go."

"Wait patiently for me."

"Of course."

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

BLANCHE expected her husband to supper. He did not turn up until almost nine o'clock, and said he was too tired to eat. She made him sit down in her room and brought him a cup of soup and some bread and wine. While he ate she moved idly about the room: he asked her to sit near him, and talk to him.

"What shall I talk about?" she asked, smiling.

"Anything. I want to hear you. Read, if you like."

She looked behind her at the book-shelves, and chose a book quickly.

"Light began coming into the sky, and with it the coolness of early morning. It was so clearly France, in spite of the background of magnolias and pines. Now a magpie flew out from one of the thickest of these trees, like a French word it could keep back no longer. Now two magpies, three, four, now whole phrases. . . . I've come back to you without even a suitcase, France, but with a body ready for you, hungering and thirsting, a body starved for your wine and your omelette.' "

"That will do," Siguenau interrupted. He took the book out of her hand, laid it down, and lifted both her hands to hold them against his cheeks. "You're always cool."

Blanche freed an arm, laying it across his shoulder—with a slight feeling of constraint—it was long since he had asked her for tenderness. She passed her finger over his forehead and felt a new deep line and the hair thinner round his temples. If he has been in love with some woman during these months, she certainly hasn't been good for him, she

thought. A sharp grief and pity nipped her: her hand shook slightly.

"Tired?" Siguenau asked.

"No. Yes. It's been a long day."

"Have I altered a great deal?" he said abruptly. "I looked at myself in the glass just now, at the château, and felt disgusted. I look like an old man."

Blanche shook her head. She was not surprised to find he resented growing old, but the question was so stupid, so puerile, that she couldn't answer it. She slid her hand over his eyes, and felt the lids twitch nervously.

"You don't answer."

"No, you don't look any older," she said firmly.

Siguenau had been leaning against her. He moved away and said in a gentle voice,

"Well, go to bed now."

She hesitated.

"Go. You're tired. I have a letter to write. I'll come then." He laid a finger lightly on her throat. "I'll come, hungry and thirsting, a body starved for your wine and your omelette."

He sat for some minutes after she had gone: he was not very tired, but he felt incapable of the effort of writing a letter. His mind turned restlessly and blindly round the trap. How could he denounce Eschelmer without accusing himself? Even the hint of a scandal would destroy a reputation he had spent half his life making. If he could save it he would. And even although it was not worth saving. . . . He had discovered something in him firmer than his vanity. A sense of dignity which was the duty he owed France. And at the same time he could not even think calmly. He jumped up, and began to walk up and down. His head was throbbing.

Edward was right, he thought, smiling a little: my nerves

aren't as steady as his, I wasn't in charge of a battalion—I suppose I have wind up.

He went downstairs to write his letter. As he reached the foot of the staircase someone knocked loudly at the house door. "All right," he shouted to the servant he heard moving.

He opened the door. Eschelmer was standing there.

Siguenau glanced quickly over his shoulder. The servant had gone back without opening the door leading to the kitchens.

"Come in."

He took Eschelmer into the room at the side of the front door. The shutters were closed; it was dark, he turned a light on.

"What do you want?"

Eschelmer, he noticed, was sweating: wisps of hair stuck to his forehead, he was pale. He sat down at a small table and rested his arms on it, closing his fists. It was one of Honoré's gestures.

Siguenau asked again impatiently,

"What have you come here for?"

He guessed that Eschelmer had had one of his fits of hysteria, and was now exhausted or simply angry. What a bore the fellow is, he thought mechanically.

Eschelmer was looking at him with hatred. At last he said,

"What did you mean by calling me a German agent this morning?"

"I have no doubt you are one," Siguenau said coldly. "The police will be able to find out easily enough."

"You haven't talked to the police."

Siguenau hesitated. Can I frighten him into hanging himself? he thought. The thought excited him a little. He looked at Eschelmer with a sarcastic smile.

"I haven't had time to-day. To-morrow——"

He heard the door opening and turned his back on Eschel-

mer. His wife, a coat wrapped over her nightgown, came into the room.

"I heard someone at the door," she said, looking gravely at Siguenuau.

"You shouldn't have come down. I shan't be a minute."

Blanche gave a little cry and rushed forward. He turned to see her catch Eschelmer by the left arm, throwing him off his balance, so that the shot he fired at the same moment passed through her chest. Eschelmer fired again, twice. Siguenuau fell on his knees and slipped forward, falling across his wife's body.

The murderer ran to the door Blanche had left open: he ran, pushing the revolver in his pocket, to the house door, closing it, and ran down the steps. The street was deserted. He went on running, mechanically, close to the houses. He expected to hear shouts, but there was not a sound apart from his own footsteps. A man came out of a side-street as he reached it, and he passed him without seeing him. He had to slow down now, his heart was knocking too much; he could only drag himself along, and he broke down and sobbed.

When he reached the entrance to his yard he tried to look over his shoulder, and couldn't bring himself to do it. Once in the courtyard he felt almost secure. He leaned against the edge of the well, trying to control his sobs.

Jacob Dietrich had recognised him. He stood still, twitching with curiosity, and stared after him. Eschelmer disappeared, and Dietrich turned round cautiously. There were no lights in the street but, as he always said of himself, his eyes felt in the dark; he felt before he saw a man come out of the dower-house and run towards him. He waited.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" the servant said breathlessly. "Did you see anyone leave the house?"

"Only you," Dietrich said. "What's the matter?"

The man turned and ran back. Dietrich followed him,

hobbling as rapidly as he could. What's up, what's up? he wondered ironically. The doctor, and then a policeman, Dietrich's sister's nephew-in-law, hurried past and annoyed him by taking no notice of him. He found the door of the house open, and looked in at the servants standing about, women crying. One of them answered his question. Siguenau and Mrs. Siguenau had been shot, killed. Both were dead.

Dietrich went back quietly into the street, and stood there thinking. If he told them whom he had seen, he would be in for no end of trouble—just when he was busiest—and neither of his sons at home. Why should I get mixed up in it? he thought drily. They bring trouble on themselves and on us, these people, Siguenaus, Burckheims, all their sort. They can't live quiet lives. They want excitement—and then they get themselves killed—for nothing. Why should I run into trouble for them?

He looked up at the house and at the wall of the park at the side, and walked off.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

FOR Berthelin, Honoré Burckheim's funeral on the Wednesday morning, attended by less than a quarter of those who would have followed it if he had had the wit to die a month earlier, was a room he had to hurry through to be in time to mourn, in the afternoon of that day, his friend and his friend's wife. It was the day, too, when the order was given to evacuate Strasbourg. He left directly after breakfast a city with the life pouring from it, and in the village street of Burckheim carts and wheelbarrows were being loaded with more than they would hold, and the first and weakest of the refugees were already on the move. It was as though in dying Burckheim had ordered every member of the community to break off their lives and make a journey as difficult and doubtful as his own. He had left a document with Reuss asking to be buried in the park, not with the other Burckheims in the chapel added on the north side of the church, in 1655, by Gilbert Burckheim in memory of his sons. He wanted to be the only one of them to whom the park, its trees, stream, rough grass, would belong after his death. It was probably nothing but his greater respect for the vines that kept him from demanding to be buried at the other side of the low wall separating vineyard from park.

Berthelin was grateful to him for the half hour in the open air. This first day of September was mild, clear, almost windless. It had all the calm expectancy that begins what the spectators know is going to be a tragedy. Clouds at a great height, and men erect on the lowest slope of a path followed, blindly, since 1918. It was precisely the moment for Burck-

heim to die and trust himself, with his greed, cunning, possessiveness, courage, to Burckheim earth. Stay there, Berthelin thought, smiling, and wait for my son and his wife to glance at you sometimes of a peaceful evening.

He had less to say to his friend. All those things he had to say could wait. If necessary they could wait until the end of the coming war—now, since the Germans had invaded Poland that morning, a matter of hours. There was only time for the prayers that were for all the dead, not especially for a friend, and for one or two memories he had not managed to dodge—the day they were allowed to join a hare shoot with the older men, the hideous tie his friend bought in the boulevard St Michel, the first purchase one of them made in Paris.

It was easier to think about Blanche Siguenau. Before leaving the house he had picked up the Chinese figure on her desk. The fifty-franc note was still inside. For less than a moment he saw the young girl it belonged to; she vanished quickly, too quickly, leaving him with a woman he knew less intimately. He did everything he could in the way of politeness and kindness to make her comfortable in his mind, then left her there.

He went back afterwards to the château. A divisional general and his staff had arrived and were settling themselves in. The notary was still there, the only member of the family council that would have to be convoked, as soon as possible, to look after Fanny's interests. Since Sunday night the young girl had been living in the château. She was going away at once, this afternoon, but not to the Felix-Burckheims at Lyons. The evening before, she had talked to Berthelin.

"You are all the family I have now," she said calmly. "You must tell me what to do, but I don't want to go to these cousins. They're wealthy and dull, I know them."

Berthelin hesitated.

"Would you like to go to my sister? She's not wealthy. She is living in Bordeaux, and she'll certainly be working among the refugees we're sending to the Charente. It won't be easy——"

"That's exactly what I want. Please arrange it for me."

He spoke to her about it now.

"If you change your mind when you see the sort of thing you'll be wanted to do, don't be afraid to tell me."

"I shan't change my mind. I'm a Berthelin now with my heart—my hands naturally follow."

Her eyes sparkled, with a happiness she did not try to hide. A minute later, when she had to leave, she cried and let the tears run over her face and hands.

"Don't," Caroline said.

"It's because I'm leaving her here, when she always said she would go back to England before she was old, and now there's no time."

After he had settled various matters with the notary, Berthelin had to see Reuss. With some hesitation he had agreed with the lawyer that Reuss had better stay on as bailiff of the estate. He did not like Reuss. He suspected him of a dishonesty that was a question of the bone more than the will. Reuss would not falsify the accounts or mishandle property, but would if he got the chance further his own interests at the expense of Burckheim and its spirit. He would leave his finger-marks everywhere in the house, where in Honoré's lifetime he had been confined to one or two rooms. It might be difficult to get rid of him. But there was no one who could be called in at short notice to take the place of a man who knew everything about the estate and, perhaps, in his own way cherished it.

Reuss sat facing him. When Berthelin asked him to stay on he nodded, lowering his eyelids. He wanted to make sure of hiding the extremity of his triumph. I shall be able to make myself indispensable, he thought.

"If the Germans invade Burckheim——"

"I shall stay," Reuss said, interrupting him. "Of course I shall stay. There would be things to arrange, and I can see that nothing is destroyed, I can hide what can be hidden." He looked at Berthelin for the first time, his eyes alert and as flat as though covered with a film of dust. "Let's hope the war will be ended at the first opportunity."

"As soon as the German nation admits defeat," Berthelin said.

"At the first opportunity."

Berthelin shrugged his shoulders. What was the good of talking to a man insensitive enough to believe that this war is a regrettable accident, that the millions who are going to die will be dying for anything smaller than Europe itself, that a bargain can still be struck between freedom and treachery, faith and lies?

Reuss, too, had nothing to say. Earlier in the afternoon when he was in the village, he had stood in the shadow of a street, looking at the square in sunlight, at the fountain the mayor had ordered to be turned off, at the clouds resting lightly on the Vosges. He felt the anguish of a peasant in the ruin of his fields. A woman who passed him speaking the dialect, and another calling her child in French, were both to his present thinking aliens. There was a second dialect of Alsace, a dialect of the houses, rivers, trees, the fields and vines; it seemed that he and only he heard it. He crossed the square into a shabby street at the other side. Awkward bundles were being carried out of a cottage and placed in a hand-cart: a woman lifted her child on top of

them. The language of Alsace is spoken also by the gestures of refugees.

Caroline had decided, before she left Dietrich's kitchen, to go back to America at once. She would stay in Paris long enough to buy clothes, and avoid seeming to hurry, and then leave. She made excuses for herself to Berthelin.

"But why should you stay?" he said gently.

"I could help."

"There are plenty of women. French women."

"I'm not afraid of being killed—but I don't want to have to live in a war," she said, ashamed. "I should be an old woman when it ended—I'm fifty-two—too old to enjoy going home. And home I must go. I've had too much Burckheim. . . . If Fanny Siguenau had wanted me——"

"I'll look after her."

"I know."

Caroline was silent. She was finding it more and more difficult to think in French. Phrases she had understood without thinking had become meaningless. She did not understand anything except the words themselves when one of the servants said to her, "It's once too often, this war. This time we're going to finish with it."

"Will it be a long war?" she asked Berthelin.

"As long as it takes us to make Germany powerless for the future."

"Surely that's impossible——"

"Perhaps. It will have to be done."

Berthelin smiled.

"And you—what are you going to do?" she asked timidly.

"The works have been taken over," Berthelin said. He went on, out of politeness. "We shall go on working, of course. If we are invaded I can ruin the place for the Germans by removing or destroying certain essential parts. . . ."

He stopped. Caroline had given up any pretence of listening to him: she was not interested.

"Anne-Marie turned up here this morning," she said, frowning. "I really believe she knows where her son is, but she says she doesn't. I sent her off and told her she mustn't show herself here again—"

"Eschelmer is probably in Germany by now," Berthelin said. He looked down at his fingers. All the hatred he was not, not yet, able to feel for the German nation recoiled on this one man, in theory a Frenchman. "I have no doubt he's the murderer. There's not a scrap of proof. The police—I advised it—questioned his mother and the neighbours. Two of them had seen him come in that afternoon at six o'clock, no one saw him go out later. His mother—"

"Don't talk about her any more. I detest her."

Caroline stood up and walked restlessly about the room. She was relieved when Berthelin went, but the moment he had gone she called him back.

"Before you go—I shan't see you again, I'm leaving at five o'clock to-morrow morning—one more question. Only one. This country isn't going to be defeated, is it? If there is any danger I'll stay. I couldn't sit comfortably in America, if—"

"The danger is as great as possible," Berthelin said, looking at her. "But France can't be defeated."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Don't be ashamed of going back to your country. Your enviable country."

"Why enviable? Because we are safer?"

"Heavens, no. America isn't safe. You're not nearly so

safe as we are, for the reason, it's the only reason, that you haven't been defeated yet. You have a great many kinds of suffering to learn still. You're under the comfortable illusion that barbarism is an enemy one can defeat once and for all, a Rockefeller Trust will invent a serum against it, no new barbarians will threaten a civilisation they weren't born into, which offends them. . . . Even the stones in France know better than that. . . . No, no, my dear Caroline—what I love in your country is the goodness, just that, of your countrymen.”

Towards evening Caroline went from room to room of the château, hoping at this last minute to find some part of it that belonged more to her than to the Burckheims. Not a single room, not a panel or carved chest, that did not turn from her and keep its obedient glance fixed on its real owners, men and women she had never seen living and only knew by their marks on Honoré himself, a muscle belonging to one, a way of snapping his fingers practised by another, the quick temper of a third. In the library she unlocked the drawer into which she had pushed René's manuscript. She was not taking it with her. Partly because she imagined she would have trouble in taking it out of France, but really from indifference. Let the dead Burckheims look after their dead, if they were interested in what a stranger had written about them.

She turned to go out. An image of her husband, so vivid that she cried out, stood in her way. He had smiled, with that offhand malice he felt for his step-brother, and she supposed he must be pleased with her.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

TOWARDS midnight on September 3rd Dietrich left the château, where he had been talking to Reuss for more than five hours about the vines: he had agreed to look after the Burckheim vineyard with his own until the end of the war, or such time as an invasion betrayed vines and land to barbarians who might—one can't know—turn a man off his own farm and take it. In his heart he did not believe this could happen to a Dietrich.

Instead of going home he prowled round the château for an hour, and at last sat down on a bench in the park itself, and waited, he didn't know for what. Simply he waited. So far as he could tell, France was passing her first night of the war in complete silence. Not a sound that was in any degree different from the usual sounds of this hour. The same light breath of wind he had felt on other autumn nights touched him from the same quarter, and forced him to turn towards the Rhine not in fear of a danger to which a Roman looking after his vines on this slope would have been alert, but to seize the first hint of the day's weather. No one, he grudgingly admitted, would ever be better at that than Burckheim: he had only to finger a stem of one of his vines to know whether the mild heat needed after the flowering was likely or whether a late frost was threatened. You had sound ideas but you were lazy, he said to Burckheim. As for the others, they killed each other . . . some others will be ruined by the war . . . but I'm not done for, I, Dietrich. He remembered abruptly that a year ago almost to the day he turned up a Roman coin of the fourth century in one of his fields. That's

mine now, he thought. Centuries from to-night a Dietrich might turn up a Boche coin in the same field and pocket it. He glanced towards the château, slowly becoming visible again. Dietriches but no Burckheim, he said: I've beaten you. As for the Boches, he thought drily: this time they should be dug into the ground—they've asked for it.

The first touch of cold in the air brought the first light. He heard round him the first words spoken to him by fields, a stream, hills terraced for vines, trees, stones, which owed themselves to him in a closer sense than yesterday. They depended on him. They looked to him like good servants to a master who knows when to be angry, and when to be satisfied and to give. From the alders at the edge of the near field three magpies loosed themselves, an arrow pointed towards the Rhine. The slow movement of the earth, noticeable only before dawn, steadied itself now round a point indubitably French, round his feet set on a morsel of France in his charge.

The first sound made by a man in this new day reached him. A bugle gave the Reveille; he stood up at the same moment as his sons, as young Berthelin, as millions of Frenchmen. What difference there was between their first conscious thought and his as he walked stiffly, turning his back on the château, towards the village, was too slight to give him any trouble. He was of their mind. He was hungry, as they were, for the first mouthful of bread he would eat, standing, before he went out again. And now the sun rose and gilded the weathercock of the farm, as he was going in at the gate, and he remembered Honoré Burckheim repeating to him,

Burckheim, Burckheim,
A little town, a great wine

when they stood here one evening not many weeks back. You're dead now and I'm living, he thought, with a feeling of friendly and simple satisfaction.

Strasbourg at dawn. Berthelin had spent the night from eleven o'clock until three at the ironworks. He set out to walk home. The streets were as empty now as they would be at noon, and in the evening of the day and every day until the war ended or the Germans entered the city. The silence of the last two days seemed a silence of centuries, as though the handful of people left were the survivors of a deluge. Berthelin stood still on one of the quays to look in the courtyard of a shabby sixteenth century house: its window-boxes were now the same age as the wooden bridge spanning the narrow part of the yard, and as the timbers of the walls, and the vine covering a corner of the roof. The pigeons strutting on the stones had all the air of a gargoyle. He crossed the river. In this light the reflected images of gables, shuttered windows, wash-houses moored at the edge of the water, had a solidity given up by the deserted houses themselves. Each street, each house, had hurried to lose itself in the depth of the time since it was built, as if by a trick of this sort it could cheat its persecutors. The invader would find only a husk, an empty tomb, the stone rolled away.

It seemed to Berthelin that he was walking through any moment, it might be as distant in the past as the first Roman fort set here, in which the city was in danger, and through his own life, and the life at this time of every man in Europe. Streets, houses, the Cathedral itself, with its spire and pinnacles of endurance, were the thoughts and fears, the solitude, the endless curiosity, the sins, the crowded estate of pain

and helplessness, the unconquered mind, all that he is, all he has lost the habit of, all that is only habit, proper to a Frenchman. He remembered that Péguy said, "Christendom will come back in the hour of distress." Would it, when it came back to France, find all this untouched, this body made lightly of stone? Or would these be broken, the past smouldering, and the future a weight lying across the living bones of a hand? Of whose hands?

Let there be French hands and feet and a brain, Berthelin prayed. Risen behind the spire, the sun promised at least that.

Storm Jameson says:

"This book was begun last winter and finished just a week before the resignation of Reynaud's government in France and the formation of a government under Pétain, determined on surrender to the Nazis.

"On re-reading the book, I saw how many passages in it were prophetic. Others had become ironical. But I have not made any changes, nor added a word. I have let it stand exactly as it was written. There is nothing in it that I want to alter. Indeed it seems to me that the luck which sometimes attends on a writer who is trying only to be honest, attended on me in writing this book, and things in it now mean more than they did, or than I knew they did, when I was writing.

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