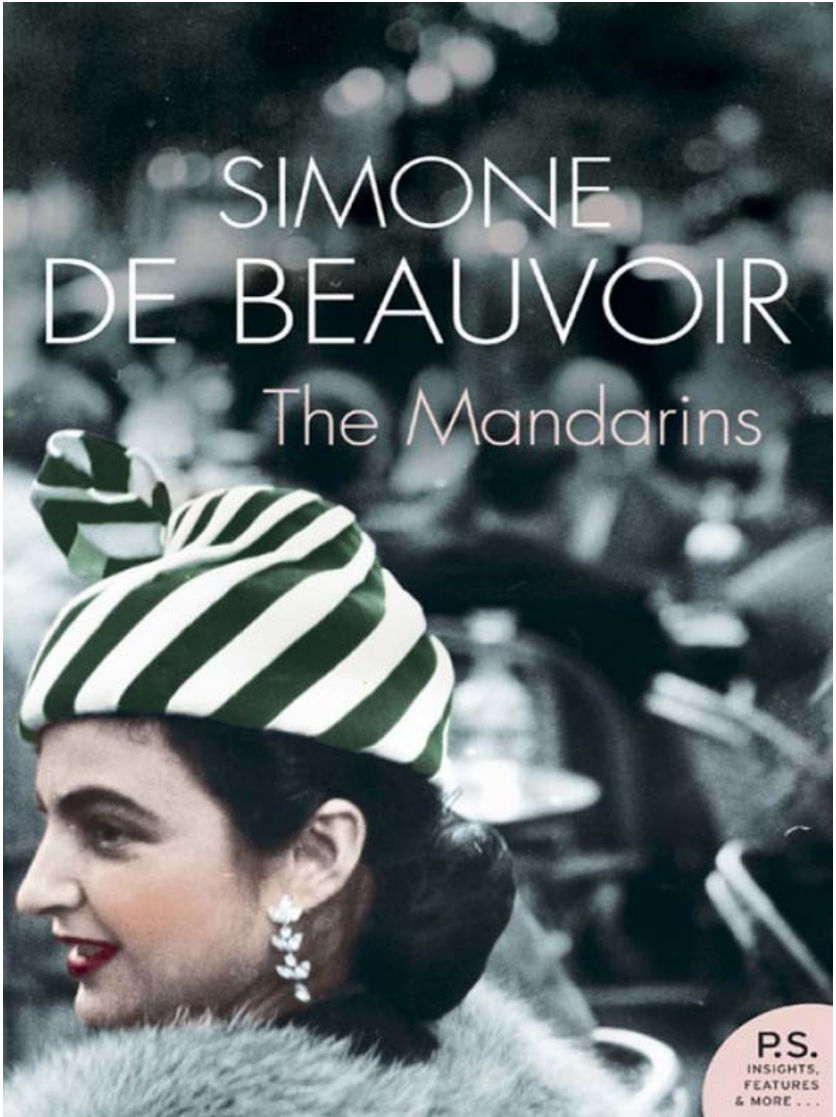
SIMONE
DE BEAUVOIR
The Mandarins
P.S.
INSIGHTS,
FEATURES
& MORE . . .

Simone de Beauvoir
The Mandarins

Аннотация

A Harper Perennial Modern Classics reissue of this unflinching examination of post-war French intellectual life, and an amazing chronicle of love, philosophy and politics from one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century.An epic romance, a philosophical argument and an honest and searing portrayal of what it means to be a woman, this is Simone de Beauvoir's most famous and profound novel. De Beauvoir sketches the volatile intellectual and political climate of post-war France with amazing deftness and insight, peopling her story with fictionalisations of the most important figures of the era, such as Camus, Sartre and Nelson Algren. Her novel examines the painful split between public and private life that characterised the female experience in the mid-20th century, and addresses the most difficult questions of gender and choice.It is an astonishing work of intellectual athleticism, yet also a moving romance, a love story of passion and depth. Long out of print, this masterpiece is now reissued as part of the Harper Perennial Modern Classics series so that a whole new generation can discover de Beauvoir's magic.

Содержание

Harper Perennial Modern Classics

The Mandarins

Simone de Beauvoir

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

The Mandarins

Translated by Leonard M. Friedman

With an introduction by Doris Lessing

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DEDICATION

To Nelson Algren

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INTRODUCTION
by Doris Lessing

Even before *The Mandarins* arrived in this country it was being discussed with the lubricious excitement used for fashionable gossip. Everyone knew the novel was about the political and sexual lives of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and their friends, a glamorous group for several reasons. First, they were associated with the French Resistance, and of all the heroic myths of the Second World War the Resistance was the most potent. Then, they were French, and it is hard now to explain the degree of attractiveness France had for the British after the war. It was only partly that we knew our cooking and our clothes to be inferior, that they had a style and panache we lacked. The British had been locked up in their island for the long years of the war, could not refresh themselves outside it, and France wore the features of some forbidden Paradise. And, too, intellectual communism, intellectuals generally, were glamorous in a way they never have been here, not least because what *The Mandarins* were debating along the Left Bank were questions about the Soviet Union scarcely acknowledged in socialist circles here, or, if so, only in lowered voices. There was another reason why *The Mandarins* was expected to read like a primer to better living, and that was the relationship between Sartre and de

Beauvoir, presented by them, or at least by Sartre, as exemplary. It was close and matey, like a marriage, but without the legalities and obligations of one, while both partners had absolute freedom to pursue sexual adventures they fancied. This arrangement, needless to say, appealed particularly to men, and innumerable sceptical women were lectured by actual or possible mates on how they should take a lesson from Simone, a woman above the petty jealousies that disfigure our sex. As it turned out, women were right to be sceptical, but there was for us too an attraction in that comradely relationship over there in *Les Deux Magots* and the *Flore*, where Jean-Paul and his long-term woman Simone together with all his *petites amies*, where Simone and her steady, Jean-Paul, and her other little loves, male and female, all forgathered daily to partake of lofty intellectual fare, watched by hundreds of reverential disciples. But it turned out there was nothing of this ideal relationship in the novel, and the Simone figure, Anne, was presented as a dry and lonely woman, in a companionable marriage, resigned to early middle age.

Sartre then stood for an adventurous optimism about science. There was a film about him, showing him stepping out of a helicopter, then the newest of our toys, hailing the brave new world of technology, the key to unlimited progress. We needed this kind of re-evaluation, after watching for the years of the war how war used our inventions and discoveries for destruction.

And then, there was Existentialism. Just as most communists had never read more of Marx than *The Communist Manifesto*,

most people attracted by Existentialism had read Sartre's plays and novels. Thus diluted, it was agreeable latter-day stoicism that steadily confronted the terrors of the Universe while refusing the weakminded consolations of religion; courageous, solitary, clear-minded.

The Left Bank was, quite simply, the intellectual centre of the world, no less, and here was *The Mandarins*, a guide to it written by one of its most glittering citizens.

But Paris was only the half of it. Simone de Beauvoir had had a much publicized affair with Nelson Algren, and the novel describes it. Algren, then, was famous for *The Man with the Golden Arm*, and *A Walk on the Wild Side*, cult novels romanticizing the drug and crime cultures of big American cities. Drugs, crime and poverty were as glamorous as, earlier, had been La Vie Bohème with its TB, its drunkenness, the misery of poverty. The bourgeoisie have always loved squalor – in fiction. (In those days the words bourgeoisie, bourgeois, petit-bourgeois tripped off all our tongues a dozen times a day, but now it is hard to use them without being overcome by staleness, by boredom.) To be bourgeois was bad, middle-class values so disgusting that people dying of drugs, or in prison for selling drugs, or with lives wasted by poverty were in every way preferable, full of poetry and adventure that cocked a snook at capitalism and the middle class. Where Simone de Beauvoir loved and was loved by Nelson Algren it was the symbolical mating of worlds apparently opposite but linked by a contempt for the established order, and

a need to destroy it.

All that has gone, no glamour left, and to read *The Mandarins* without those flattering veils has to be a sobering experience. What remains? For one, the politics of that time. Young people are always asking, But how was it possible that people could support the Soviet Union at all? Here it all is, the debates, the agonizings, the betrayals, the hair-splittings, the compromises and the self-deceptions. What it was all based on, what was never questioned, was the belief that no matter how terrible the Soviet Union was, it had to be better than capitalism, bound to be the future of the whole world once the infant communism was over its teething troubles. Another never-questioned pillar was that whatever decisions one made, whatever stance one took, were of importance to the whole world: the future of the world was at stake, dependent on the 'correct' or otherwise decisions of those people who – as the phrase then went – knew the score. Initiates – that was what they were, or how they saw themselves.

These politics already have something of the flavour of ancient religious squabbles, but the novel will continue to be read, I think, for an ironical reason: its brilliant portraits of women.

There is Josette, the sweet, passive beauty who was a collaborator with the Germans because of a rapacious and brutal mother, quite one of the nastiest women in fiction. There is Paula who will not admit that her great love is in fact ditching her, and lives in a state of delusion, claiming him for herself. Above all, there is Nadine, daughter as it were of this group of

mandarins, sullen, angry, always resentful because of past but unspecified wrongs, unscrupulous, manipulative, unlovable and unloving, and finally getting her man by the oldest trick in the book. She is a psychological black hole, absorbing into itself all life, joy, pleasure, love. Never has there been a more unlikeable character, nor a more memorable one, for she dominates the book, even when she is off-stage. And finally, there is Anne Dubreuilh herself, the psychiatrist, whose kindness, patience and commonsense on behalf of others do not seem to do much for her own happiness.

The Mandarins is a novel that chronicles its time, but with all the advantages and disadvantages of immediacy, for large parts of it are like the hot, quick impatience of reporting.

CHAPTER ONE

Henri found himself looking at the sky again – a clear, black crystal dome overhead. It was difficult for the mind to conceive of hundreds of planes shattering that black crystalling silence! And suddenly, words began tumbling through his head with a joyous sound – the offensive was halted … the German collapse had begun … at last he would be able to leave. He turned the corner of the quay. The streets would smell again of oil and orange blossoms, in the evening there would be light, people would sit and chat in outdoor cafés, and he would drink real coffee to the sound of guitars. His eyes, his hands, his skin were hungry. It had been a long fast!

Slowly, he climbed the icy stairs. 'At last!' Paula exclaimed, hugging him tightly, as if they had just found each other again after a long, danger-filled separation. Over her shoulder, he looked at the tinselled Christmas tree, reflected to infinity in the large mirrors. The table was covered with plates, glasses, and bottles; bunches of holly and mistletoe lay scattered at the foot of a step-stool. He freed himself and threw his overcoat on the couch.

'Have you heard the wireless?' he asked. 'The news is wonderful.'

'Is it?' Paula said. 'Tell me, quickly!' She never listened to the wireless; she wanted to hear the news only from Henri's mouth.

'Haven't you noticed how clear the sky is tonight? They say there are a thousand planes smashing the rear of von Rundstedt's armies.'

'Thank God! They won't come back, then.'

'There never was any question of their coming back,' he said. But the same thought had crossed his mind, too.

Paula smiled mysteriously. 'I took precautions, just in case.'

'What precautions?'

'There's a tiny room no bigger than a cupboard in the back of the cellar. I asked the concierge to clear it out for me. You could have used it as a hiding place.'

'You shouldn't have spoken to the concierge about a thing like that; that's how panics are started.'

She clutched the ends of her shawl tightly in her left hand, as if she were protecting her heart. 'They would have shot you,' she said. 'Every night I hear them; they knock, I open the door, I see them standing there.' Motionless, her eyes half closed, she seemed actually to be hearing voices.

'Don't worry,' Henri said cheerfully, 'it will not happen now.'

She opened her eyes and let her hands fall to her sides. 'Is the war really over?'

'Well, it won't last much longer,' Henri replied, placing the stool under one of the heavy beams that crossed the ceiling. 'Want me to help you?' he asked.

'The Dubreuilhs are coming over early to give me a hand.'

'Why wait for them?' he said, picking up a hammer.

Paula put her hand on his arm. 'Aren't you going to do any work?' she asked.

'Not tonight.'

'But you say that every night. You haven't written a thing for more than a year now.'

'Don't worry,' he said. 'I *feel* like writing now, and that's what counts.'

'That newspaper of yours takes up too much of your time; just look at how late you get home. Besides, I'm sure you haven't eaten a thing since noon. Aren't you hungry?'

'No, not now.'

'Aren't you even tired?'

'Not at all.'

Those searching eyes of hers, so constantly devouring him with solicitude, made him feel like an unwieldy and fragile treasure. And it was that feeling which wearied him. He stepped up on the stool and with light, careful blows – the house had long since passed its youth – began driving a nail into the beam.

'I can even tell you what I'm going to write,' he said. 'A light novel.'

'What do you mean?' Paula asked, her voice suddenly uneasy.

'Exactly what I said. I feel like writing a light novel.'

Given even the slightest encouragement, he would have made up the story then and there, would have enjoyed thinking it out loud. But Paula was looking at him so intensely that he kept quiet.

'Hand me that big bunch of mistletoe,' he said instead.

Cautiously, he hung the green ball, studded with small white berry eyes, while Paula held out another nail to him. Yes, he thought, the war was really over. At least it was for him. This evening was going to be a real celebration. Peace would begin, everything would begin again – holidays, leisure trips, pleasure – maybe even happiness, but certainly freedom. He finished hanging the mistletoe, the holly, and the puffs of white cotton along the beam.

'How does it look?' he asked, stepping off the stool.

'Perfect.' She went over to the tree and straightened one of the candles. 'If it's no longer dangerous,' she said quietly, 'you'll be going to Portugal now?'

'Naturally.'

'And you won't do any work during the trip?'

'I don't suppose so.'

She stood nervously tapping one of the golden balls hanging from a branch of the tree, waiting for the words she had long been expecting.

'I'm terribly sorry I can't take you with me,' he said finally.

'You needn't feel sorry,' she said. 'I know it's not your fault. And anyhow, I feel less and less these days like traipsing about. What for?' She smiled. 'I'll wait for you. Waiting, when you know what you're waiting for, isn't too bad.'

Henri felt like laughing aloud. What for? All those wonderful names – Lisbon, Oporto, Cintra, Coimbra – came alive in his mind. He didn't even have to speak them to feel happy; it

was enough to say to himself, 'I won't be here any more; I'll be somewhere else.' Somewhere else! Those words were more wonderful than even the most wonderful names.

'Aren't you going to get dressed?' he asked.

'I'm going,' she said.

Paula climbed the stairway to the bedroom and Henri went over to the table. Suddenly he realized that he had been hungry. But he knew that whenever he admitted it a worried look would come over Paula's face. He spread himself some pâté on a slice of bread and bit into it. Resolutely he told himself, 'As soon as I get back from Portugal, I'll move to a hotel. What a wonderful feeling it will be to return at night to a room where no one is waiting for you!' Even when he was still in love with Paula, he had always insisted on having his own private four walls. But in '39 and '40, while he was in the army, Paula had had constant nightmares about falling dead on his horribly mutilated body, and when at last he was returned to her, how could he possibly refuse her anything? And then, what with the curfew, the arrangement turned out to be rather convenient, after all. 'You can leave whenever you like,' she would say. But up to now he hadn't been able to. He took a bottle and twisted a corkscrew into the squeaking cork. Paula would get used to doing without him in less than a month. And if she didn't, it would be just too damn bad! France was no longer a prison, the borders were opening up again, and life shouldn't be a prison either. Four years of austerity, four years of working only for others – that was

a lot, that was too much. It was time now for him to think a little about himself. And for that, he had to be alone, alone and free. It wouldn't be easy to find himself again after four years; there were so many things that had to be clarified in his mind. What for instance? Well, he wasn't quite sure yet, but there, in Portugal, strolling through the narrow streets which smelled of oil, he would try to bring things into focus. Again he felt his heart leap. The sky would be blue, laundry would be airing at open windows; his hands in his pockets, he would wander about as a tourist among people whose language he didn't speak and whose troubles didn't concern him.

He would let himself live, would *feel* himself living, and perhaps that alone would be enough to make everything come clear.

Paula came down the stairs with soft, silken steps. 'You uncorked all the bottles!' she exclaimed. 'That was sweet of you.'

'You're so positively dedicated to violet!' he said, smiling.

'But you adore violet!' she said.

He had been adoring violet for the past ten years; ten years was a long time.

'You don't like this dress?' Paula asked.

'Yes, of course,' he said hastily. 'It's very pretty. I just thought that there were some other colours which might become you. Green, for example,' he ventured, picking the first colour that came to mind.

She looked at herself in one of the mirrors. 'Green?' she said,

and there was bewilderment in her voice. 'You really think I'd look well in green?'

It was all so useless, he told himself. In green or yellow he would never again see in her the woman who, that day ten years earlier, he had desired so much when she had nonchalantly held out her long violet gloves to him.

Henri smiled at her gently. 'Dance with me,' he said.

'Yes, let's dance,' she replied in a voice so ardent that it made him freeze up. Their life together had been so dismal during the past year that Paula herself had seemed to be losing her taste for it. But at the beginning of September, she changed abruptly; now, in her every word, every kiss, every look, there was a passionate quivering. When he took her in his arms she moved herself hard against him, murmuring, 'Do you remember the first time we danced together?'

'Yes, at the Pagoda. You told me I danced very badly.'

'That was the day I took you to the Musée Grévin. You did not know about it. You did not know about anything,' she said tenderly. She pressed her forehead against his cheek. 'I can see us the way we were then.'

And so could he. They had stood together on a pedestal in the middle of the Palais des Mirages and everywhere around them they had seen themselves endlessly multiplied in a forest of mirrored columns. *Tell me I'm the most beautiful of all women … You're the most beautiful of all women … And you'll be the most glorious man in the world …*

Now he turned his eyes towards one of the large mirrors. Their entwined dancing bodies were infinitely repeated alongside an endless row of Christmas trees, and Paula was smiling at him blissfully. Didn't she realize, he asked himself, that they were no longer the same couple?

'Someone just knocked,' Henri said, and he rushed to the door. It was the Dubreuilhs, heavily laden with shopping bags and baskets. Anne held a bunch of roses in her arms, and slung over Dubreuilh's shoulder were huge bunches of red pimentos. Nadine followed them in, a sullen look on her face.

'Merry Christmas!'

'Merry Christmas!'

'Did you hear the news? The air force was able to deliver at last.'

'Yes, a thousand planes!'

'They wiped them out.'

'It's all over.'

Dubreuilh dumped the load of red fruit on the couch. 'Here's something to decorate your little brothel.'

'Thanks,' Paula said coolly. It annoyed her when Dubreuilh called her studio a brothel – because of all the mirrors and those red draperies, he said.

He surveyed the room. 'The centre beam is the only place for them; they'll look a lot better up there than that mistletoe.'

'I like the mistletoe,' Paula said firmly.

'Mistletoe is stupid; it's round, it's traditional. And moreover

it's a parasite.'

'Why not string the pimentos along the railing at the head of the stairs,' Anne suggested.

'It would look much better up here,' Dubreuilh replied.

'I'm sticking to my holly and my mistletoe,' Paula insisted.

'All right, all right, it's your home,' Dubreuilh conceded. He beckoned to Nadine. 'Come and help me,' he said.

Anne unpacked a pork pâté, butter, cheese, cakes. 'And this is for the punch,' she said, setting two bottles of rum on the table. She placed a package in Paula's hands. 'Here, that's your present. And here's something for you,' she said, handing Henri a clay pipe, the bowl shaped like a bird's claw clutching a small egg. It was the same kind of pipe that Louis used to smoke fifteen years before.

'Remarkable,' said Henri. 'How did you ever guess that I've been wanting a pipe like this for the past fifteen years?'

'Simple,' said Anne. 'You told me.'

'Two pounds of tea!' Paula exclaimed. 'You've saved my life! And does it smell good! Real tea!'

Henri began cutting slices of bread which Anne smeared with butter and Paula with the pork pâté. At the same time, Paula kept an anxious eye on Dubreuilh, who was hammering nails into the railing with heavy blows.

'Do you know what's missing here?' he cried out to Paula. 'A big crystal chandelier. I'll dig one up for you.'

'Don't bother. I don't want one.'

Dubreuilh finished hanging the clusters of pimentos and came down the stairs.

'Not bad!' he said, examining his work with a critical eye. He went over to the table and opened a small bag of spices; for years, on the slightest excuse, he had been concocting that same punch, the recipe for which he had learned in Haiti. Leaning against the railing, Nadine was chewing one of the pimentos; at eighteen, in spite of her experiences in the various French and American beds, she still seemed in the middle of the awkward age.

'Don't eat the scenery,' Dubreuilh shouted at her. He emptied a bottle of rum into a salad bowl and turned towards Henri. 'I met Samazelle the day before yesterday and I'm glad to say that he seems inclined to go along with us. Are you free tomorrow night?'

'I can't get away from the paper before eleven,' Henri replied.

'Then stop by at eleven,' Dubreuilh said. 'We have to go over the whole deal, and I'd very much like you to be there.'

Henri smiled. 'I don't quite see why.'

'I told him that you work with me, but your actually being there will carry more weight.'

'I doubt if it would mean very much to someone like Samazelle,' Henry said, still smiling. 'He must know I'm not a politician.'

'But, like myself, he thinks that politics should never again be left to politicians,' Dubreuilh said. 'Come over, even if it's only for a few minutes. Samazelle has an interesting group behind

him. Young fellows; we need them.'

'Now listen,' Paula said angrily, 'you're not going to start talking politics again! Tonight's a holiday.'

'So?' Dubreuilh said. 'Is there a law against talking about things that interest you on holidays?'

'Why do you insist on dragging Henri into this thing?' Paula asked. 'He knocks himself out enough already. And he's told you again and again that politics bore him.'

'I know,' Dubreuilh said with a smile, 'you think I'm an old reprobate trying to debauch his little friends. But politics isn't a vice, my beauty, nor a parlour game. If a new war were to break out three years from now, you'd be the first to howl.'

'That's blackmail,' Paula said. 'When *this* war finally ends its coming to an end, no one is going to feel like starting a new one.'

'Do you think that what people *feel* like doing means anything at all?' Dubreuilh asked.

Paula started to answer, but Henri cut her off. 'Look,' he said. 'It's not that I don't want to. It's just that I haven't got the time.'

'There's always time,' Dubreuilh countered.

'For you, yes,' Henri said, laughing. 'But me, I'm just a normal human being; I can't work twenty hours at a stretch or go without sleep for a month.'

'And neither can I!' Dubreuilh said. 'I'm not eighteen any more. No one is asking that much of you,' he added, tasting the punch with a worried look.

Henri looked at him cheerfully. Eighteen or eighty, Dubreuilh,

with his huge, laughing eyes that consumed everything in sight, would always look just as young. What a zealot! By comparison, Henri was often tempted to think of himself as dissipated, lazy, weak. But it was useless to drive himself. At twenty, he had had so great an admiration for Dubreuilh that he felt himself compelled to ape him. The result was that he was constantly sleepy, loaded himself with medicines, sank almost into a stupor. Now he had to make up his mind once and for all. With no time for himself he had lost his taste for life and the desire to write. He had become a machine. For four years he had been a machine, and now he was determined above all else to become a man again.

'I wonder just how my inexperience could help you,' he said.

'Oh, inexperience has its advantages,' Dubreuilh replied with a wry smile. 'Besides, just now you have a name that means a lot to a lot of people.' His smile broadened. 'Before the war, Samazelle was in and out of every political faction and all the factions of factions. But that's not why I want him; I want him because he's a hero of the Maquis. His name carries a lot of weight.'

Henri began to laugh. Dubreuilh never seemed more ingenuous to him than when he tried being cynical. Paula was right, of course, to accuse him of blackmail; if he really believed in the imminence of a third world war, he would not have been in so good a mood. The truth of the matter was that he saw possibilities for action opening before him and he was burning to exploit them. Henri, however, felt less enthusiastic. Clearly, he had changed since '39. Before then, he had been

on the left because the bourgeoisie disgusted him, because injustice roused his indignation, because he considered all men his brothers – fine, generous sentiments which involved him in absolutely nothing. Now he knew that if he really wanted to break away from his class, he would have to risk some personal loss. Malefilatre, Bourgoin, Picard had taken the risk and lost at the edge of the little woods, but he would always think of them as living men. He had sat with them at a table in front of a rabbit stew, and they drank white wine and spoke of the future without much believing in what they were saying. Four of a kind, they were then. But with the war over they would once again have become a bourgeois, a farmer, and two mill hands. At that moment, sitting with them, Henri understood that in the eyes of the three others, and in his own eyes as well, he was one of the privileged classes, more or less disreputable, even if well-intentioned. And he knew there was only one way of remaining their friend: by continuing to do things with them. He understood this even more clearly when in '41, he worked with the Bois Colombes group. At the beginning things didn't go very well. Flamand exasperated him by incessantly repeating, 'Me, I'm a worker, you know; I think like a worker.' But thanks to him Henri became aware of something he knew nothing about before, something which, from that time on, he would always feel menacing him. Hate. He had taken the bite out of it; in their common struggle, they had accepted him as a comrade. But if ever he should become an indifferent bourgeois again,

the hatred would come to life, and with good reason. Unless he showed proof to the contrary, he was the enemy of several hundred million men an enemy of humanity. And that he did not want at any price.

Now he had to prove himself. The trouble was that the struggle had shifted its form. The Resistance was one thing, politics another. And Henri had no great passion for politics. He knew what a movement such as Dubreuilh had in mind would mean: committees, conferences, congresses, meetings, talk, and still more talk. And it meant endless manoeuvring, patching up of differences, accepting crippling compromises, lost time, infuriating concessions, sombre boredom. Nothing could be more repulsive to him. Running a newspaper, that was the kind of work he enjoyed. But, of course, one thing did not preclude the other, and as a matter of fact they even complemented each other. It was impossible to use his paper as an excuse. Henri did not feel he had the right to look for an out; he would only try to limit his commitments.

'Look,' he said, 'I can't refuse you my name. I'll put in a few appearances, too. But you mustn't ask much more of me.'

'I'll certainly ask more of you than that,' Dubreuilh replied.

'Well, at any rate, not straight away. From now until I leave, I'll be up to my ears in work.'

Dubreuilh looked Henri straight in the eyes. 'The trip still on?' he asked.

'More than ever. Three weeks from now, at the latest, I'll be

gone.'

'You're not serious!' Dubreuilh said angrily.

'Now I've heard everything!' Anne exclaimed, giving Dubreuilh a bantering look. 'If *you* suddenly got an urge to go somewhere, you'd just pick yourself up and go, and you'd tell people it's the only intelligent thing to do.'

'But I don't get those urges,' Dubreuilh replied, 'and that's precisely wherein my superiority lies.'

'I must say that the pleasures of travelling seem to me pretty much overrated,' Paula said. She smiled at Anne. 'A rose you bring me gives me more pleasure than the gardens of the Alhambra after a fifteen-hour train journey.'

'Travel can be exciting enough,' Dubreuilh said. 'But just now it's much more exciting being here.'

'Well, as for me,' Henri said, 'I've got so strong an urge to be somewhere else that I'd go by foot if I had to. And with my shoes full of pebbles!'

'And what about *L'Espoir?* You'll just take off and leave it to itself for a whole month?'

'Luc will get along quite well without me,' Henri replied.

He looked at the three of them in amazement. 'They don't understand,' he said to himself. 'Always the same faces, the same surroundings, the same conversations, the same problems. The more it changes, the more it repeats itself. In the end, you feel as if you're dying alive.' Friendship, the great traditional emotions – he had valued them all for what they were worth. But now he

needed something else, and the need was so violent that it would have been ridiculous even to attempt an explanation.

'Merry Christmas!'

The door opened. Vincent, Lambert, Sézenac, Chancel, the whole gang from the newspaper, their cheeks pink from the cold. They had brought along bottles and records, and at the top of their voices they were singing the old refrain they had so often sung together during the feverish August days:

We've seen the last of the hun,

The bastards are all on the run.

Henri smiled at them cheerfully. He felt as young as they, and yet at the same time he also felt as if he had had a small hand in creating them. He joined in the chorus. Suddenly the lights went out, the punch flamed up, sparklers flared and Lambert and Vincent showered Henri with sparks. Paula lit the tiny candles on the Christmas tree.

'Merry Christmas!'

Couples and small groups continued to arrive. They listened to Django Reinhardt's guitar, danced, drank; everyone was laughing. Henri took Anne in his arms. In a voice filled with emotion she said, 'It's just like the night of the invasion; the same place, the same people.'

'And now it's all over.'

'For *us*, it's over,' she corrected.

He knew what she was thinking. At that very moment Belgian villages were ablaze, the sea was foaming over the

Dutch countryside. And yet here in Paris, it was a night of festivities, the first Christmas of the peace. There had to be festivities, sometimes. Because, if there weren't, what good were victories? This was a holiday; he recognized that familiar smell of alcohol, of tobacco, of perfume and face powder, that smell of long nights. A thousand rainbow-tinted fountains danced in his memory. Before the war there had been so many nights – in the Montparnasse café where they all used to get drunk on coffee and conversation, in the old studios that smelled of still-wet oil paintings, in the little dance halls where he had held the most beautiful of all women, Paula, tightly in his arms. And always at dawn, accompanying the metallic sounds of morning, a gentle ecstatic voice inside him would whisper that the book he was writing would be good and that nothing in the world was more important.

'You know,' he said, 'I've decided to write a light novel.'

'You?' Anne looked at him in amusement. 'When do you begin?'

'Tomorrow.'

Suddenly there was in him the urgent hurry to become again what he had once been, what he had always wanted to be – a writer. Deep inside him he knew again that uneasy joy that came with 'I'm starting a new book.' He would write of all those things that were just now being born again: the dawns, the long nights, the trips, happiness.

'You're in fine fettle tonight, aren't you?' Anne said.

'I am. I feel as if I've just come out of a long dark tunnel. Don't you?'

She paused a moment and then answered, 'I don't know. In spite of everything, there were some good moments in that tunnel.'

'Yes, I suppose there were, at that.'

He smiled at her. She was looking pretty tonight, and he found her appealing in her severely tailored suit. If she hadn't been an old friend – as well as Dubreuilh's wife – he would willingly have tried his chances. He danced with Anne several times in succession and then with Claudie de Belzunce who, in plunging neckline and bedecked with the family jewels, had come slumming among the intellectual elite. Next time he danced with Jeanette Cange, then Lucie Lenoir. He knew them all too well, those women; but there would be other parties, other women.

Henri smiled at Preston who, somewhat unsteadily, was walking towards him across the room. He was the first American acquaintance Henri had come upon during the liberation of Paris in August, and they had fallen happily into each other's arms.

'Had to come and celebrate with you,' Preston said.

'Then let's celebrate,' said Henri.

They drank and then Preston began speaking sentimentally about New York nights. He was quite drunk and he leaned heavily on Henri's shoulder. 'You must come to New York,' he said, and it sounded like a command. 'I guarantee that you'll be

a huge success.'

'Wonderful,' said Henri. 'I'll come to New York.'

'As soon as you get over, rent yourself a small plane,' said Preston. 'Best possible way to see the country.'

'But I don't know how to fly.'

'Nothing to it. Easier than driving a car.'

'Then I'll learn to fly,' said Henri.

Yes, decidedly, Portugal would be only a beginning. After that, there would be America, Mexico, Brazil, and maybe even Russia and China. In every place in the world Henri would drive cars again, would fly planes. The blue-grey air was great with promises; the future stretched away to infinity.

Suddenly a silence fell over the room. Henri saw with surprise that Paula was sitting down at the piano. She began to sing. It had been a very long time since that had happened. Henri tried to listen to her with an impartial ear; he had never been able to form a true opinion as to the value of that voice. Certainly it wasn't mediocre; at times it even sounded like the echo of a bronze bell, muffled in velvet. Once again he asked himself why, exactly, she had given up singing. At the time, he had looked upon it as a sacrifice, an overpowering proof of her love for him. Later he was surprised to find that Paula continually avoided every opportunity that would have challenged her, and he had often wondered if she hadn't used their love simply as a pretext to escape the test.

There was a burst of applause; Henri applauded with the

others.

'Her voice is still as beautiful as ever,' Anne said quietly. 'If she appeared in public again, I'm certain she'd be well received.'

'Do you really think so?' Henri asked. 'Isn't it a little late?'

'Why? A few lessons …' Anne looked hesitantly at Henri. 'You know, I think it would do her good. You ought to encourage it.'

'Perhaps you're right,' he said.

He studied Paula, who was smiling and listening to Claudie de Belzunce's gushing compliments. No doubt about it, he thought. It would change her life. Being without anything to do was not doing her any good. And wouldn't it just simplify things for him. And, after all, why not? Tonight everything seemed possible. Paula would become famous, she would devote herself to her career. And he would be free, would travel wherever he liked, would have brief, happy affairs here and there. Why not? He smiled and walked over to Nadine; she was standing next to the heater, gloomily chewing gum.

'Why aren't you dancing?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'With whom?' she asked.

'With me, if you like.'

She was not pretty. She looked too much like her father, and it was disturbing to see that surly face on the body of a young girl. Her eyes, like Anne's, were blue, but so cold they seemed at once both worn-out and infantile. And yet, under her woollen dress, her body was more supple, her breasts more firm, than Henri had thought they would be.

'This is the first time we've danced together,' he said.

'Yes,' she replied. 'You dance well, you know.'

'And that surprises you?'

'Not particularly. But not one of these little snot-noses here knows how to dance.'

'They hardly had the chance to learn.'

'I know,' she said. 'We never had a chance to do anything.'

He smiled at her. A young woman is a woman, even if she is ugly. He liked her astringent smell of eau de Cologne, of fresh linen. She danced badly, but it didn't really matter; there were the youthful voices, the laughter, the trumpet taking the chorus, the taste of the punch, the evergreens with their flaming, sparkling blossoms reflected in the depths of the mirrors, and, behind the curtains, a pure black sky. Dubreuilh was performing a trick; he had cut a newspaper into small pieces and had just put it together again with a sweep of his hand; Lambert and Vincent were duelling with empty bottles; Anne and Lachaume were singing grand opera; trains, ships, planes were circling the earth, and they could be boarded.

'You dance pretty well yourself,' he said politely.

'I dance like a cow. But I don't give a damn; I hate dancing.' She looked at him suspiciously. 'Jitterbugs, jazz, those cellars that stink of tobacco and sweat, do you find that sort of thing entertaining?'

'From time to time,' he replied. 'Why? What do you find entertaining?'

'Nothing.'

She spoke the word so fiercely that he looked at her with growing curiosity. He wondered if it was pleasure or disappointment that had thrown her into so many arms. Would true passion soften the hard structures of her face? And what would Dubreuilh's head on a pillow look like?

'When I think that you're going to Portugal … well, all I can say is that you have all the luck,' she said bitterly.

'It won't be long before it's easy for everyone to travel again,' he said.

'It won't be long! You mean a year, *two* years! How did *you* ever manage it?'

'The French Propaganda Service asked me to give a few lectures.'

'Obviously no one would ever ask *me* to give lectures,' she muttered. 'How many?'

'Five or six.'

'And you'll be roaming around for a month!'

'Well,' he said gaily, 'old people have to have *some* rewards.'

'And what if you're young?' Nadine asked. She heaved a loud sigh. 'If something would only happen …'

'What, for instance?'

'We've been in this so-called revolutionary era for ages. And yet nothing ever seems to change.'

'Well, things did change a little in August, at any rate,' Henri replied.

'As I remember it, in August there was a lot of talk about *everything* changing. And it's just the same as ever. It's still the ones who work the most who eat the least, and everyone goes right on thinking that's just marvellous.'

'No one here thinks that's marvellous,' Henri protested.

'Well, anyhow, they all learn to live with it,' Nadine said irritably. 'Having to waste your time working is lousy enough, and then on top of it you can't eat your fill … well, personally, I'd rather be a gangster.'

'I agree wholeheartedly; we all agree with you,' Henri said. 'But wait a while; you're in too much of a hurry.'

Nadine interrupted him. 'Look,' she said, 'the virtues of waiting have been explained to me at home at great length and in great detail. But I don't trust explanations.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'Honestly, no one ever really tries to *do* anything.'

'And what about you?' Henri asked with a smile. 'Do *you* ever try to do anything?'

'Me? I'm not old enough,' Nadine answered. 'I'm just another butter ration.'

Henri burst out laughing. 'Don't get discouraged; you'll soon be old enough. All too soon!'

'Too soon! There are three hundred and sixty-five days in a year!' Nadine said. 'Count them.' She lowered her head and thought silently for a moment. Then, abruptly, she raised her eyes. 'Take me with you,' she said.

'Where?' Henri asked.

'To Portugal.'

He smiled. 'That doesn't seem too feasible.'

'Just a little bit feasible will do fine,' she said. Henri said nothing and Nadine continued in an insistent voice, 'But why can't it be done?'

'In the first place, they wouldn't give me two travel orders to leave the country.'

'Oh, go on! You know everyone. Say that I'm your secretary.' Nadine's mouth was smiling, but her eyes were deadly serious.

'If I took anyone,' he said, 'it would have to be Paula.'

'But she doesn't *like* travelling.'

'Yes, but she'd be happy being with me.'

'She's seen you every single day for the last ten years, and there's a lot more to come. One month more or less, what earthly difference could that make to her?'

Henri smiled at her. 'I'll bring you back some oranges,' he said.

Nadine glowered at him, and suddenly Henri saw before him Dubreuilh's intimidating mask. 'I'm not eight years old any more, you know.'

'I know.'

'You don't! To you I'll always be the little brat who used to kick the logs in the fireplace.'

'You're completely wrong, and the proof of it is that I asked you to dance.'

'Oh, this thing's just a family affair. I'll bet you'd never ask me to go out with you, though.'

He looked at her sympathetically. Here, at least, was one person who was longing for a change of air. Yes, she wanted a great many things, different things. Poor kid! It was true she had never had a chance to do anything. A bicycle tour of the suburbs: that was about the sum total of her travelling. It was certainly a rough way to spend one's youth. And then there was that boy who had died; she seemed to have got over it quickly enough, but nevertheless it must have left a bad scar.

'You're wrong,' he said. 'I'm inviting you.'

'Do you mean it?' Nadine's eyes shone. She was much easier to look at when her face brightened.

'I don't go back to the newspaper on Saturday nights. Let's meet at the Bar Rouge at eight o'clock.'

'And what will we do?'

'That will be up to you.'

'I don't have any ideas.'

'Well don't worry, I'll get one by then. Come and have a drink.'

'I don't drink. I wouldn't mind another sandwich though.'

They went to the buffet. Lenoir and Julien were engaged in a heated discussion; it was chronic with them. Each reproached the other for having betrayed his youth – in the wrong way. At one time, having found the excesses of surrealism too tame, they jointly founded the 'para-human' movement. Lenoir had since become a professor of Sanskrit and he spent his free time writing obscure poetry. Julien, who was now a librarian, had stopped writing altogether, perhaps because he feared becoming a mature

mediocrity after his precocious beginnings.

'What do you think?' Lenoir asked, turning to Henri. 'We ought to take some kind of action against the collaborationist writers, shouldn't we?'

'I've stopped thinking for tonight,' Henri answered cheerfully.

'It's poor strategy to keep them from being published,' Julien said. 'While you're using all your strength preparing cases against them, they'll have all the time in the world to write good books.'

A heavy hand came down on Henri's shoulder: Scriassine.

'Take a look at what I brought back. American whisky! I managed to slip two bottles into the country, and I can't think of a better occasion than this to finish them off.'

'Wonderful!' said Henri. He filled a glass with bourbon and held it out to Nadine.

'I don't drink,' she said in an offended voice, turning abruptly and walking off.

Henri raised the glass to his mouth. He had completely forgotten what bourbon tasted like; he did remember, though, that his preference used to be Scotch, but since he had also forgotten what Scotch tasted like, it made no difference to him.

'Who wants a shot of real whisky?'

Luc came over, dragging his large, gouty feet; Lambert and Vincent followed close behind. They all filled their glasses.

'I like a good cognac better,' said Vincent.

'This isn't bad,' Lambert said without conviction. He gave Scriassine a questioning look. 'Do they really drink a dozen of

these a day in America?'

'*They*? Who are *they*?' Scriassine asked. 'There are a hundred and fifty million Americans, and, believe it or not, not all of them are like Hemingway heroes.' His voice was harsh and disagreeable; he seldom made any effort to be friendly to people younger than himself. Deliberately, he turned to Henri. 'I came over here tonight to have a serious talk with Dubreuilh. I'm quite worried.'

He looked preoccupied – his usual expression. He always created the impression that everything happening where he chanced to be and even where he chanced not to be – was his personal concern. Henri had no desire to share his worries. Offhandedly, he asked, 'What's worrying you so much?'

'This movement he's forming. I thought its principal objective was to draw the proletariat away from the Communist Party. But that's not at all what Dubreuilh seems to have in mind,' Scriassine said gloomily.

'No, not at all,' Henri replied.

Dejectedly, he thought, 'This is just the kind of conversation I'll be letting myself in for for days on end, if I get mixed up with Dubreuilh.' From his head to his toes, he again felt an overpowering desire to be somewhere else.

Scraissine looked him straight in the eyes. 'Are you going along with him?'

'Only a little way,' Henri answered. 'Politics isn't exactly my meat.'

'You probably don't understand what Dubreuilh is brewing,' Scriassine said, giving Henri a reproachful look. 'He's trying to build up a so-called independent left-wing group, a group that approves of a united front with the Communists.'

'Yes,' Henri said. 'I know that. So?'

'Don't you see? He's playing right into their hands. There are a lot of people who are afraid of Communism; by winning them over to his movement, in effect he'll be throwing their support to the Communists.'

'Don't tell me you're against a united front,' Henri said. 'It would be a fine thing if the left started splitting up!'

'A left dominated by the Communists would be nothing but a sham,' Scriassine said. 'If you've decided to go along with Dubreuilh, why not join the Communist Party? That would be a lot more honest.'

'Completely out of the question. We disagree with them on quite a few points,' Henri answered.

Scriassine shrugged his shoulders. 'If you really do disagree with them, then three months from now the Stalinists will denounce you as traitors to the working class.'

'We'll see,' Henri said.

He had no desire to continue the discussion, but Scriassine fixed him insistently with his eyes. 'I've been told that *L'Espoir* has a lot of readers among the working people. Is that true?'

'Yes.'

'Which means you have in your hands the only non-

Communist paper in France that reaches the proletariat. Do you realize the grave responsibility you have?'

'I realize it.'

'If you put *L'Espoir* at Dubreuilh's service, you'll be acting as an accomplice in a thoroughly disgusting manoeuvre,' Scriassine said. 'Dubreuilh's friendship doesn't matter here,' he added, 'you've got to go the other way.'

'Listen, as far as the paper is concerned, it will never be at anyone's service. Neither Dubreuilh's nor yours,' Henri said emphatically.

'One of these days, you know, *L'Espoir* is going to have to define its political programme,' Scriassine said.

'No. I refuse to have any predetermined programme,' said Henri. 'I want to go on saying exactly what I think when I think it. And I'll never let myself become regimented.'

'That kind of policy won't stand up,' Scriassine said.

Luc's normally placid voice suddenly broke in. 'We don't want any political programme; we want to preserve the unity of the Resistance.'

Henri poured himself a glass of bourbon. 'That's all a lot of crap!' he grumbled. Old, worn-out cliches were all that Luc ever mouthed – The Spirit of the Resistance! The Unity of the Resistance! And Scriassine saw red whenever anyone mentioned Russia to him. It would be better if they each had a corner somewhere where they could rave by themselves! Henri emptied his glass. He needed no advice from anyone; he had his own ideas

about what a newspaper should be. Obviously, *L'Espoir* would eventually be forced to take a political stand – but it would do it entirely independently. Henri hadn't kept the paper going all this time only to see it turn into something like those pre-war rags. Then, the whole press had been dedicated to fooling the public; the knack of presenting one-sided views in a convincing, authoritative manner had become an art. And the result soon became apparent: deprived of their daily oracle, the people were lost. Today, everyone agreed more or less on the essentials; the polemics and the partisan campaigns were out. Now was the time to educate the readers instead of cramming things down their throats. No more dictating opinions to them; rather teach them to judge for themselves. It wasn't simple. Often they insisted on answers, and he had to be constantly on his guard lest he gave them an impression of ignorance, doubt, or incoherence. But that was precisely the challenge – meriting their confidence rather than robbing them of it. And the fact that *L'Espoir* sold almost everywhere in France was proof enough that the method worked. 'No point in damning the Communists for their sectarianism if you're going to be just as dogmatic as they are,' Henri said to himself.

'Don't you think we could put this discussion off to some other time?' Henri asked, interrupting Scriassine.

'All right,' Scriassine answered. 'Let's make a date.' He pulled a note-book from his pocket. 'I think it's important for us to talk over our differences.'

'Let's wait until I get back from my trip,' Henri said.

'You're going on a trip? News-hawking?'

'No, just for pleasure.'

'Leaving soon?'

'Very soon,' Henri answered.

'Wouldn't you call that deserting?' Scriassine asked.

'Deserting?' Henri said with a smile. 'I'm not in the army, you know.' With his chin, he pointed to Claudie de Belzunce. 'You ought to ask Claudie for a dance. Over there … the half-naked one dripping with jewellery. She's a real woman of the world, and, confidentially, she admires you a lot.'

'Women of the world are one of my weaknesses,' Scriassine said with a little smile. He shook his head. 'I have to admit I don't understand why.'

He moved off towards Claudie. Nadine was dancing with Lachaume, and Dubreuilh and Paula were circling around the Christmas tree. Paula did not like Dubreuilh, but he often succeeded in amusing her.

'You really shocked Scriassine!' Vincent said cheerfully.

'My going on a trip seems to shock damned near everyone,' Henri said. 'And Dubreuilh most of all.'

'That really beats me!' Lambert said. 'You did a lot more than any of them ever did. You're entitled to a little holiday, aren't you?'

'There's no doubt about it,' Henri said to himself. 'I have a lot more in common with the youngsters.' Nadine envied him,

Vincent and Lambert understood him. They, too, as soon as they could, had rushed off to see what was happening elsewhere in the world. When assignments as war correspondents were offered them, they had accepted without hestitation. Now he stayed with them as for the hundredth time they spoke of the exciting days when they had first moved into the offices of the newspaper, when they had sold *L'Espoir* right under the noses of the Germans while Henri was busy writing his editorials, a revolver in his desk drawer. Tonight, because he was hearing them as if from a distance, he found new charm in those old stories. In his imagination he was lying on a beach of soft, white sand, looking out upon the blue sea and calmly thinking of times gone by, of faraway friends. He was delighted at being alone and free. He was completely happy.

At four in the morning, he once again found himself in the red living-room. Many of the guests had already gone and the rest were preparing to leave. In a few moments he would be alone with Paula, would have to speak to her, caress her.

'Darling, your party was a masterpiece,' Claudie said, giving Paula a kiss. 'And you have a magnificent voice. If you wanted to, you could easily be one of the sensations of the post-war era.'

'Oh,' Paula said gaily, 'I'm not asking for that much.'

No, she didn't have any ambition for that sort of thing. He knew exactly what she wanted: to be once more the most beautiful of women in the arms of the most glorious man in the world. It wasn't going to be easy to make her change her

dream. The last guests left; the studio was suddenly empty. A final shuffling on the stairway, and then steps clicking in the silent street. Paula began gathering up the glasses that had been left on the floor.

'Claudie's right,' Henri said. 'Your voice is still as beautiful as ever. It's been so long since I last heard you sing! Why don't you ever sing any more?'

Paula's face lit up. 'Do you still like my voice? Would you like me to sing for you sometimes?'

'Certainly,' he answered with a smile. 'Do you know what Anne told me? She said you ought to begin singing in public again.'

Paula looked shocked. 'Oh, no!' she said. 'Don't speak to me about that. That was all settled a long time ago.'

'Well, why not?' Henri asked. 'You heard how they applauded; they were all deeply moved. A lot of clubs are beginning to open up now, and people want to see new personalities.'

Paula interrupted him. 'No! Please! Don't insist. It horrifies me to think of displaying myself in public. Please don't insist,' she repeated pleadingly.

'It horrifies you?' he said, and his voice sounded perplexed. 'I'm afraid I don't understand. It never used to horrify you. And you don't look any older, you know; in fact, you've grown even more beautiful.'

'That was a different period of my life,' Paula said, 'a period that's buried forever. I'll sing for you and for no one else,' she

added with such fervour that Henri felt compelled to remain silent. But he promised himself to take up the subject again at the first opportunity.

There was a moment of silence, and then Paula spoke.

'Shall we go upstairs?' she asked.

Henri nodded. 'Yes,' he said.

Paula sat down on the bed, removed her earrings, and slipped her rings off her fingers. 'You know,' she said, and her voice was calm now, 'I'm sorry if I seemed to disapprove of your trip.'

'Don't be silly! You certainly have the right not to like travelling, and to say so,' Henri replied. The fact that she had scrupulously stifled her remorse all through the evening made him feel ill at ease.

'I understand perfectly your wanting to leave,' she said. 'I even understand your wanting to go without me.'

'It's not that I want to.'

She cut him off with a gesture. 'You don't have to be polite.' She put her hands flat on her knees and, with her eyes staring straight ahead and her back very straight, she looked like one of the infinitely calm priestesses of Apollo. 'I never had any intention of imprisoning you in our love. You wouldn't be you if you weren't looking for new horizons, new nourishment.' She leaned forward and looked Henri squarely in the face. 'It's quite enough for me simply to be necessary to you.'

Henri did not answer. He wanted neither to dishearten nor encourage her. 'If only I had something against her,' he thought.

But no, not a single grievance, not a complaint.

Paula stood up and smiled; her face became human again. She put her hands on Henri's shoulders, her cheek against his. 'Could you get along without me?'

'You know very well I couldn't.'

'Yes, I know,' she said happily. 'Even if you said you could, I wouldn't believe you.'

She walked towards the bathroom. It was impossible not to weaken from time to time and speak a few kind words to her, smile gently at her. She stored those treasured relics in her heart and extracted miracles from them whenever she felt her faith wavering. 'But in spite of everything, she knows I don't love her any more,' he said to himself for reassurance. He undressed and put on his pyjamas. She knew it, yes. But as long as she didn't admit it to herself it meant nothing. He heard a rustle of silk, then the sound of running water and the clinking of glass, those sounds which once used to make his heart pound. 'No, not tonight, not tonight,' he said to himself uneasily. Paula appeared in the doorway, grave and nude, her hair tumbling over her shoulders. She was nearly as perfect as ever, but for Henri all her splendid beauty no longer meant anything. She slipped in between the sheets and without uttering a word, pressed her body to his. Paula withdrew her lips slightly, and, embarrassed, he heard her murmuring old endearments he never spoke to her now.

'Am I still your beautiful wisteria vine?'

'Now and always.'

'And do you love me? Do you really still love me?'

He did not have the courage at that moment to provoke a scene, he was resigned to avow anything – and Paula knew it. 'Yes, I do.'

'Do you belong to me?'

'To you alone.'

'Tell me you love me, say it.'

'I love you.'

She uttered a long moan of satisfaction. He embraced her violently, smothered her mouth with his lips, and to get it over with as quickly as possible immediately penetrated her.

When finally he fell limp on Paula, he heard a triumphant moan.

'Are you happy?' she murmured.

'Of course.'

'I'm so terribly happy!' Paula exclaimed, looking at him through shining tear-brimmed eyes. He hid her unbearably bright face against his shoulder. 'The almond trees will be in bloom …' he said to himself, closing his eyes. 'And there'll be oranges hanging from the orange trees.'

II

No, I shan't meet death today. Not today or any other day. I'll be dead for others and yet I'll never have known death.

I closed my eyes again, but I couldn't sleep. Why had death entered my dreams once more? It is prowling inside me; I can feel it prowling there. Why?

I hadn't always been aware that one day I would die. As a child, I believed in God. A white robe and two shimmering wings were awaiting me in heaven's vestry and I wanted so much to break through the clouds and try them on. I would often lie down on my quilt, my hands clasped, and abandon myself to the delights of the hereafter. Sometimes in my sleep I would say to myself, 'I'm dead,' and the voice watching over me guaranteed me eternity. I was horrified when I first discovered the silence of death. A mermaid had died on a deserted beach. She had renounced her immortal soul for the love of a young man and all that remained of her was a bit of white foam without memory and without voice. 'It's only a fairy tale,' I would say to myself for reassurance.

But it wasn't a fairy tale. I was the mermaid. God became an abstract idea in the depths of the sky, and one evening I blotted it out altogether. I've never felt sorry about losing God, for He had robbed me of the earth. But one day I came to realize that in renouncing Him I had condemned myself to death. I was fifteen, and I cried out in fear in the empty house. When I regained my

senses, I asked myself, 'What do other people do? What will I do? Will I always live with this fear inside me?'

From the moment I fell in love with Robert, I never again felt fear, of anything. I had only to speak his name and I would feel safe and secure: he's working in the next room … I can get up and open the door … But I remain in bed; I'm not sure any more that he too doesn't hear that little, gnawing sound. The earth splits open under our feet, and above our heads there is an infinite abyss. I no longer know who we are, nor what awaits us.

Suddenly, I sat bolt upright, opened my eyes. How could I possibly admit to myself that Robert was in danger? How could I ever bear it? He hadn't told me anything really disturbing, nothing really new. I'm tired, I drank too much; just a little four-o'clock-in-the-morning frenzy. But who's to decide at what hour one sees things clearest? Wasn't it precisely when I believed myself most secure that I used to awaken in frenzies? And did I ever really believe it?

I can't quite remember. We didn't pay very much attention to ourselves, Robert and I. Only events counted: the flight from Paris, the return, the sirens, the bombs, the standing in lines, our reunions, the first issues of *L'Espoir*. A brown candle was sputtering in Paula's apartment. With a couple of tin cans, we had built a stove in which we used to burn scraps of paper. The smoke would sting our eyes. Outside, puddles of blood, the whistling of bullets, the rumbling of artillery and tanks. In all of us, the same silence, the same hunger, the same hope. Every morning we

would awaken asking ourselves the same question: Is the swastika still flying above the Senate? And in August, when we danced around blazing bonfires in the streets of Montparnasse, the same joy was in all our hearts. Then the autumn slipped by, and only a few hours ago, while we were completing the task of forgetting our dead by the lights of a Christmas tree, I realized that we were beginning to exist again each for himself. 'Do you think it's possible to bring back the past?' Paula had asked. And Henri had said, 'I feel like writing a light novel.' They could once again speak in their normal voices, have their books published; they could argue again, organize political groups, make plans. That's why they were all so happy. Well, almost all. Anyhow, this isn't the time for me to be tormenting myself. Tonight's a holiday, the first Christmas of peace, the last Christmas at Buchenwald, the last Christmas on earth, the first Christmas Diego hasn't lived through. We were dancing, we were kissing each other around the tree sparkling with promises, and there were many, oh, so many, who weren't there. No one had heard their last words; they were buried nowhere, swallowed up in emptiness. Two days after the liberation, Geneviève had placed her hand on a coffin. Was it the right one? Jacques's body had never been found; a friend claimed he had buried his notebooks under a tree. What notebooks? Which tree? Sonia had asked for a sweater and silk stockings, and then she never again asked for anything. Where were Rachel's bones and the lovely Rosa's? In the arms that had so often clasped Rosa's soft body, Lambert was now holding

Nadine and Nadine was laughing the way she used to laugh when Diego held her in his arms. I looked down the row of Christmas trees reflected in the large mirrors and I thought, 'There are the candles and the holly and the mistletoe they'll never see. Everything that's been given me, I stole from them,' They were killed. Which one first? He or his father? Death didn't enter into his plans. Did he know he was going to die? Did he rebel at the end or was he resigned to it? How will I ever know? And now that he's dead, what difference does it make?

No, tombstone, no date of death. That's why I've been groping for him through that life he loved so tumultuously. I hold out my hand towards the light switch and hesitantly withdraw it. In my desk is a picture of Diego, but even though I looked at it for hours I would never find again under that head of bushy hair, his real face of flesh and bones, that face in which everything was too large – his eyes, nose, ears, mouth. He was sitting in the study and Robert had asked, 'What will you do if the Nazis win?' And he had answered, 'A Nazi victory doesn't enter into my plans.' His plans consisted of marrying Nadine and becoming a great poet. And he might have made it, too. At sixteen he already knew how to turn words into hot, glowing embers. He might have needed only a very little time – five years, four years; he lived his life so fast. Huddled with the others around the electric heater, I used to enjoy watching him devour Hegel or Kant; he would turn the pages as rapidly as if he were skimming through a murder mystery. And the fact of the matter is that he understood

perfectly everything he read. Only his dreams were slow.

He had come one day to show Robert his poems, which was how we first got to know him. His father was a Spanish Jew who was stubbornly determined to continue making money in business even during the Occupation. He claimed the Spanish consul was protecting him. Diego reproached him for his luxurious style of living and his opulent blonde mistress; he preferred our austerity and spent almost all his time with us. Besides, he was at the hero-worshipping age; and he worshipped Robert. The moment he met Nadine, he impetuously gave her his love, his first, his only love. For the first time she had a feeling of being needed; it overwhelmed her. She immediately made room in the house for Diego and invited him to live with us. He had a great deal of affection for me as well, even though he found me much too rational. At night, Nadine insisted upon my tucking her in, the way I used to when she was a child. Lying next to her, he would ask me, 'And me? Don't I get a kiss?' And I would kiss him. That year, we had been friends, my daughter and I. I was grateful to her for being capable of a sincere love and she was thankful to me for not opposing her deepest desire. Why should I have? She was only seventeen, but both Robert and I felt that it's never too early to be happy.

And they knew how to be happy with so much fire! When we were together, I would rediscover my youth. 'Come and have dinner with us. Come on, tonight's a holiday,' they would say, each one pulling me by an arm. Diego had filched a gold piece

from his father. He preferred to take rather than to receive; it was the way of his generation. He had no trouble in changing his treasure into negotiable money and he spent the afternoon with Nadine on the roller coaster at an amusement park. When I met them on the street that evening, they were devouring a huge pie they had bought in the back room of a nearby bakery; it was their way of working up an appetite. They called up Robert and asked him to come along too, but he refused to leave his work. I went with them. Their faces were smeared with jam, their hands black with the grime of the fairground, and in their eyes was the arrogant look of happy criminals. The maître d'hôtel must have surely believed we had come there with the intention of squandering some ill-gotten gains. He showed us to a table far in the rear of the room and asked Diego with chilly politeness, 'Monsieur has no jacket?' Nadine threw her jacket over Diego's threadbare sweater, revealing her own soiled, wrinkled blouse. But in spite of it all, we were served. They ordered ice cream first, and sardines, and then steaks, fried potatoes, oysters, and still more ice cream. 'It all gets mixed up inside anyhow,' they explained to me, stuffing the food into their mouths. They were so happy to be able for once to eat their fill! No matter how hard I tried to get enough food to go around, we were always more or less hungry. 'Eat up,' they said to me commandingly, as they slipped slices of pâté into their pockets for Robert.

It wasn't long after this that the Germans one morning knocked at Mr Serra's door. No one had informed him that the

Spanish consul had been transferred. Diego, as luck would have it, had slept at his father's that night. They didn't take the blonde. 'Tell Nadine not to worry about me,' Diego said. 'I'll come back, because I want to come back.' Those were the last words we ever heard from him; all his other words were drowned out forever, he who loved so much to talk.

It was springtime and the sky was very blue, the peach trees a pastel pink. When we would ride our bicycles, Nadine and I, through the flag-decked parks of Paris, the fragrant joy of peacetime weekends filled our lungs. But the tall buildings of Drancy, where the prisoners were kept, brutally crushed that lie. The blonde had handed over three million francs to a German named Felix who transmitted messages from the prisoners and who had promised to help them escape. Twice, peering through binoculars, we were able to pick out Diego standing at a distant window. They had shaved off his woolly hair and it was no longer entirely he who smiled back at us; his mutilated head seemed even then to belong to another world.

One afternoon in May we found the huge barracks deserted; straw mattresses were being aired at the open windows of empty rooms. At the café where we had parked our bicycles, they told us that three trains had left the station during the night. Standing by the barbed-wire fence, we watched and waited for a long time. And then suddenly, very far off, very high up, we made out two solitary silhouettes leaning out of a window. The younger one waved his beret triumphantly. Felix had spoken the truth: Diego

had not been deported. Choked with joy, we rode back to Paris.

'They're in a camp with American prisoners,' the blonde told us. 'They're doing fine, taking lots of sun baths.' But she hadn't actually seen them. We sent them sweaters and chocolate, and they thanked us for the gifts through the mouth of Felix. But we stopped receiving written messages. Nadine insisted upon some sort of sign to prove they were still alive – Diego's ring, a lock of his hair. But it was just then that they changed camps again, were sent somewhere far from Paris. It became increasingly difficult to locate them in any particular place; they were gone, that was all. To be nowhere or not to be at all isn't very different. Nothing really changed when at last Felix said irritably, 'They killed them a long time ago.'

Nadine wept frantically night after night, and I held her in my arms from evening till morning. Then she found sleep once more. At first Diego appeared every night in her dreams, a wretched look on his face. Later even his spectre vanished. She was right; I can't really blame her. What can you do with a corpse? Yes, I know. They serve as excuses for making flags, heroic statues, guns, medals, speeches, and even souvenirs for decorating the home. It would be far better to leave their ashes in peace. Monuments or dust. And they had been our brothers. But after all, we had no choice in the matter. Why did they leave us? If only they would leave us in peace! Let's forget them, I say. Let's think a little about ourselves now. We've more than enough to do remaking our own lives. The dead are dead; for them there

are no more problems. But after this night of festivity, we, the living, will awaken again. And then how shall we live?

Nadine and Lambert were laughing together, a record was playing loudly, the floor was trembling under our feet, the blue flames of the candles were flickering. I looked at Sézenac who was lying on the rug, thinking no doubt of those glorious days when he strutted down the boulevards of Paris with a rifle slung over his shoulder. I looked at Chancel who had been condemned to death by the Germans and at the last moment exchanged for one of their prisoners. And Lambert whose father had denounced his fiancée, and Vincent who had killed a dozen of our home-grown Nazi militiamen with his own hands. What will they all do with those pasts of theirs, so grievous and so brief? And what will they do with their shapeless futures? Will I know how to help them? Helping people is my job; I make them lie down on a couch and pour out their dreams to me. But I can't bring Rosa back to life, nor the twelve Nazis Vincent killed. And even if I were somehow able to neutralize their pasts, what kind of future could I offer them? I quiet fears, harness dreams, restrain desires; I make them adjust themselves. But to what? I can no longer see anything around me that makes sense.

No question about it, I had too much to drink. After all, it wasn't I who created heaven and earth; no one's asking me to give an accounting of myself. Why must I forever be worrying about others? I'd do better to worry a little about myself for a change. I press my cheek against the pillow; I'm here, it's I. The trouble

is there's nothing about me worth giving much thought to. Oh, if someone asks who I am, I can always show him my case history; to become an analyst, I had to be analysed. It was found that I had a rather pronounced Oedipus complex, which explains my marriage to a man twenty years my elder, a clear aggressiveness towards my mother, and some slight homosexual tendencies which conveniently disappeared. To my Catholic upbringing I owe a highly developed super ego – the reason for my puritanism and my lack of narcissism. The ambivalent feelings I have in regard to my daughter stem from my aversion to my mother as much as to my indifference concerning myself. My case is one of the most classic types; its segments fall neatly into a predictable pattern. From a Catholic point of view, it's also quite banal: in their eyes I stopped believing in God when I discovered the temptations of the flesh, and my marriage to an unbeliever completed my downfall. Politically and socially Robert and I were left-wing intellectuals. Nothing in all this is entirely inexact. There I am then, clearly catalogued and willing to be so, adjusted to my husband, to my profession, to life, to death, to the world and all its horrors; me, precisely me, that is to say, no one.

To be no one, all things considered, is something of a privilege. I watched them coming and going in the room, all of them with their important names, and I didn't envy them. For Robert it was all right; he was predestined to be what he was. But the others, how do they dare? How can anyone be so arrogant or so rash as to serve himself up as prey to a pack of strangers?

Their names are dirtied in thousands of mouths; the curious rob them of their thoughts, their hearts, their lives. If I too were subjected to the cupidity of that ferocious mob of ragpickers, I would certainly end up by considering myself nothing but a pile of garbage. I congratulated myself for not being someone.

I went over to Paula. The war had not affected her aggressive elegance. She was wearing a long, silk, violet-coloured gown, and from her ears hung clusters of amethysts.

'You're very lovely tonight,' I said.

She looked at herself quickly in one of the large mirrors. 'Yes, I know,' she said sadly. 'I'm lovely.'

She was indeed beautiful, but under her eyes there were deep circles that matched the colour of her dress. At heart she knew very well that Henri could have taken her to Portugal. She knew much more than she pretended to know.

'You must be very happy; your party's a great success.'

'Henri loves parties so much,' Paula said, her hands, heavy with rings, mechanically smoothing her shimmering silk dress.

'Won't you sing something for us? I'd so much like to hear you sing again.'

'Sing?' she said, surprised.

'Yes, sing,' I replied laughingly. 'Have you forgotten that you used to sing once upon a time?'

'Once – but that was long ago,' she answered.

'Not any more it isn't. Now it's like old times again.'

'Do you really think so?' Paula asked, staring intently into my

eyes. She seemed to be peering into a crystal ball somewhere beyond my face. 'Do you think it's possible to bring back the past?'

I knew how she wanted me to answer that question, but with a slightly embarrassed laugh I said only, 'I don't know; I'm not an oracle.'

'I must get Robert to explain the meaning of time to me,' she said meditatively.

She was ready to deny the existence of space and time rather than admit that love might not be eternal. I was afraid for her. She had been well aware during these past four years that Henri no longer felt anything more than a wearied affection for her. But ever since the liberation, I don't know what insane hope had awakened in her heart.

'Do you remember the Negro spiritual I used to like so much? Won't you sing it for us?'

She walked over to the piano and lifted the keyboard cover. Her voice seemed slightly hollow, but it was just as moving as ever. 'You know, she ought to appear in public again,' I said to Henri, who greeted my words with a look of astonishment. When the applause died down, he went over to Nadine and began dancing with her. I didn't like the way she was looking at him. There was nothing I could do to help *her*, either. I had given her my only decent dress and lent her my prettiest necklace; that was all I had the power to do. I knew it would be useless to probe her dreams; all she needed was the love Lambert was so anxious to

give her. But how could I prevent her from destroying it, as I knew she ultimately would? And yet when Lambert entered the room, she raced down the little stairway from the top of which she had been surveying us with a look of disapproval. She stopped dead on the last step, embarrassed by her too-open display of affection.

Lambert walked over to her and smiled gravely. 'I'm glad you came,' he said.

'The only reason I came was to see you,' she said brusquely.

He looked handsome this evening in his dark, well-cut suit. He always dresses with the studied severity of a person much older than himself; he has ceremonious ways, a sober voice, and he exercises a very careful control over his smiles. But his confused look and the softness of his mouth betray his youthfulness. Nadine, obviously, is at once flattered by his seriousness and reassured by his weakness.

'Did you have a good time?' she asked, looking at him with an affable, somewhat silly expression. 'I hear that Alsace is very beautiful.'

'Once a place is militarized, you know, it becomes utterly dismal.'

They sat down on one of the steps of the stairway, chatted, danced, and laughed together for quite a long while. And then they began to argue. With Nadine it always ended like that. Lambert, a sullen look on his face, was now sitting next to the heater, and Nadine was standing by the stairway. Bringing them

together from opposite ends of the room and joining their hands was completely out of the question.

I walked over to the buffet and poured myself a brandy. My eyes glanced down along my black skirt and stopped at my legs. It was funny to think I had legs; no one ever noticed them, not even myself. They were slender and well-shaped in their beige stockings, certainly no less well-shaped than many another pair. And yet one day they'd be buried in the earth without ever having existed. It seemed unfair. I was still absorbed in contemplating them when Scriassine came over to me.

'You don't seem to be having a very good time,' he said.

'Well, I'm doing the best I can.'

'Too many young people here. Young people are never gay. And far too many writers.' He pointed his chin towards Lenoir, Pelletier, and Cange. 'They're all writers, aren't they?'

'Every one of them.'

'And you, do you write, too?'

'God, no!' I said, laughing.

I liked his brusque manner. Like everyone else, I had read his famous book, *The Red Paradise*. But I had been especially moved by his book on Austria under the Nazis. It was something much more than a mere journalistic account; it was an impassioned testimony. He had fled Austria after having fled Russia and finally became a naturalized French citizen. But he had spent the last four years in America and we had met him for the first time only this autumn. Almost immediately he began calling Robert

and Henri by their first names, but he never seemed to notice that I existed.

'I wonder what's going to become of them,' he said, turning his eyes from me.

'Who?'

'The French in general and these people here in particular.'

I studied his triangular face with its prominent cheekbones, its hard, fiery eyes, its thin, almost feminine mouth. It wasn't at all the face of a Frenchman. To him Russia was an enemy nation, and he did not have any great love for the United States. There wasn't a place on earth where he really felt at home.

'I returned from New York on an English boat,' he said with a slight smile. 'One day the steward said to me, "The poor French! They don't know if they won the war or lost it." It seems to me that that sums up the situation rather well.'

There was an irritating complacency in his voice. 'I don't think it matters much what kind of tag you put on things that happened in the past,' I said. 'What does matter is the future.'

'That's just it,' he said spiritedly. 'To make something good of the future, you have to look the present in the face. And I get the distinct impression that these people here aren't doing that at all. Dubreuilh talks to me of a literary review, Perron of a pleasure trip. They all seem to feel they'll be able to go on living just like before the war.'

'And of course, you were sent from heaven to open their eyes,' I said dryly.

Scriassine smiled. 'Do you know how to play chess?'

'Very poorly.'

He continued to smile and all trace of pedantry vanished from his face – we were intimate friends, accomplices, had known each other since childhood. 'He's working his Slavic charm on me,' I thought. And as a matter of fact, the charm worked; I smiled back at him.

'When I'm just watching chess, I can spot good moves more clearly than the players themselves, even if I'm not as good at the game as they are. Well, that's the way it is here; I'm an outsider, an onlooker, so I can pretty well see what's in store for you people.'

'What?'

'An impasse.'

'An impasse? What do you mean by that?'

Suddenly, I found myself anxiously awaiting his reply. We had all been living together in such a tightly sealed circle for so long a time, with no intrusions by outsiders, any witnesses, that this man from without troubled me.

'French intellectuals are facing an impasse. It's their turn now,' he added with a kind of satisfaction. 'Their art, their philosophies can continue to have meaning only within the framework of a certain kind of civilization. And if they want to save that civilization, they'll have no time or energy left over to give to art or philosophy.'

'This isn't the first time Robert's been active in politics,' I said. 'And it never before stopped him from writing.'

'Yes, in '34 Dubreuilh gave a great deal of his time to the struggle against fascism,' Scriassine said in his suave voice. 'But to him, that struggle seemed morally reconcilable with literary preoccupations.' With a slight trace of anger, he added, 'In France, the pressure of history has never been felt in all its urgency. But in Russia, in Austria, in Germany, it was impossible to escape it. That's why I, for example, was never able to write.'

'But you have written.'

'Don't you think I dreamed of writing other kinds of books, too? But it was out of the question.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'To be able to continue taking an interest in things cultural in the face of Stalin and Hitler, you have to have one hell of a humanistic tradition behind you. But, of course,' he went on, 'in the country of Diderot, Victor Hugo, Jaurès, it's easy to believe that culture and politics go hand in hand. Paris has thought of itself as Athens. But Athens no longer exists; it's dead.'

'As far as feeling the pressure of history is concerned,' I said, 'I think Robert could give you a few pointers.'

'I'm not attacking your husband,' Scriassine said, with a little smile that reduced my heated words to nothing more than an expression of conjugal loyalty. 'As a matter of fact,' he continued, 'I consider Robert Dubreuilh and Thomas Mann to be the two greatest minds of this age. But that's precisely it; if I predict that he'll give up literature, it's only because I have confidence in his lucidity.'

I shrugged my shoulders. If he was trying to soften me up,

he was certainly going about it the wrong way. I detest Thomas Mann.

'Robert will never give up writing,' I said.

'The remarkable thing in all of Dubreuilh's works,' said Scriassine, 'is that he was able to reconcile high aesthetic standards with revolutionary inspiration. And in his own life, he attained an analogous equilibrium: he was organizing vigilance committees at the same time he was writing novels. But it's precisely that beautiful equilibrium that's now becoming impossible.'

'You can count on Robert to devise some new kind of equilibrium,' I said.

'He's bound to sacrifice his aesthetic standards,' Scriassine said. Suddenly his face lit up and he asked in a triumphant voice, 'Do you know anything about prehistoric times?'

'Not much more than I do about chess.'

'But perhaps you know this: that for a vast period of time the wall paintings and objects found in caves and excavations bear witness to a continuous artistic progress. Abruptly, both drawings and sculptures disappear; there's an eclipse lasting several centuries which coincides with the development of new techniques. Well, just now we're at the edge of a new era in which, for different reasons, humanity will have to grapple with all sorts of difficult problems, leaving us no time for the luxury of expressing ourselves artistically.'

'Reasoning by analogy doesn't prove very much,' I said.

'All right then, let's forget that comparison,' Scriassine said patiently. 'You've probably been too close to this war we've gone through to properly understand it. Actually, it was something entirely different from a war – the liquidation of a society, and even of a world, or rather the beginning of their liquidation. The progress that science and engineering have made, the economic changes that have come about, will convulse the earth to such an extent that even our ways of thinking and feeling will be revolutionized. We'll even have difficulty remembering just who and what we had once been. And among other things art and literature will become nothing more than peripheral divertissements.'

I shook my head and Scriassine resumed heatedly: 'Don't you see? What weight will the message of French writers have when the earth is ruled by either Russia or the United States? No one will understand them any more; very few will even speak their language.'

'From the way you talk, it would seem you're rather enjoying the prospect,' I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Now isn't it just like a woman to say a thing like that! They're simply incapable of being objective.'

'Well, let's be objective then,' I said. 'Objectively, it's never been proved that the world *must* become either American or Russian.'

'In the long run, give or take a few years, it's bound to happen.' With a gesture of his hand, he stopped me from interrupting him

and then gave me one of his charming Slavic smiles. 'I think I understand you. The liberation is still fresh in your mind. All of you are wading shoulder deep in euphoria. For four years you suffered a great deal and now you think you've paid enough. Well, you never can pay enough,' he said with a sudden harshness. He looked me squarely in the eyes. 'Do you know there's a very powerful faction in Washington that would like to see the German campaign continued right up to Moscow? And from their point of view they're right. American imperialism, like Russian totalitarianism, requires unlimited expansion. In the end, one or the other has to win.' A note of sadness entered his voice. 'You think you're celebrating the German defeat, but what you're actually witnessing is the beginning of World War Three.'

'Those are *your* prognostications,' I said.

'I know Dubreuilh believes in peace and in the possibility of maintaining a free and independent Europe,' Scriassine said. 'But even brilliant minds can sometimes be mistaken,' he added with an indulgent smile. 'We'll be annexed by Russia or colonized by America, of that you can be sure.'

'Well, if that's the case, then there's no impasse,' I said gaily. 'If it's inevitable, what's the sense of worrying about it? Those who enjoy writing will just go right on writing.'

'What an idiotic game that would be! To write when there's no one to read what you've written.'

'When everything has gone to hell, there's nothing to do but to play idiotic games.'

Scriassine remained silent for a moment and then a half-smile crossed his face. 'Nevertheless, certain conditions would be less unfavourable than others,' he said confidently. 'If Russia wins, there's no problem: it's the end of civilization and the end of all of us. But if America should win, the disaster wouldn't be quite so bad. If we were able to give her certain values while maintaining some of our own ideas, there'd be some hope that future generations would one day re-establish the ties with our own culture and traditions. But to succeed in that would require the total mobilization of all our potential.'

'Don't tell me that in case of a war you'd hope for an American victory!' I said.

'No matter what happens, history must inevitably lead to a classless society,' Scriassine said in reply. 'It's a matter of two or three centuries. But for the happiness of those men who'll be living during the interval, I ardently hope that the revolution takes place in a world dominated by America and not by Russia.'

'In a world dominated by America,' I said, 'I have a sneaking suspicion that the revolution will cool its heels a good long time.'

'And you think that it should be a Stalinist revolution? The idea of revolution had quite an appeal in France, around 1930. But let me tell you, in Russia it wasn't quite so appealing.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'You're preparing a big surprise for yourselves! The day the Russians occupy France you'll begin to realize what I mean. Unfortunately, it'll be too late then.'

'You yourself don't believe in a Russian occupation,' I said.

Scriassine sighed. 'So be it,' he said. 'Let's be optimists. Let's admit that Europe has a chance of remaining independent. But we can't keep her that way except by waging a constant, interminable battle. Working for oneself will be entirely out of the question.'

I did not attempt to answer him. All that Scriassine wanted was to reduce French writers to silence, and I clearly understood why. There was nothing really convincing in his prophecies, and yet his tragic voice awakened an echo in me. 'How shall we live?' The question had been painfully pricking me all evening and for God knows how many days and weeks.

Scriassine looked at me intently. 'One of two things can happen. If men like Dubreuilh and Perron look the situation square in the face, they'll become involved in things that will demand all their time, all their energies. Or if they cheat and obstinately continue to write, their works will be cut off from reality, and deprived of any future; they'll be like the words of blind people, as distressing as Alexandrine poetry.'

It's difficult to engage in a discussion with someone who, while talking of the world and of others, talks constantly of himself. I was unable to speak my mind without hurting him. Nevertheless I said, 'It's useless trying to imprison people in dilemmas; life always causes them to break out.'

'Not in this case. Alexandria or Sparta, there's no other choice. It's far better to admit a thing like that today than to put it off,' he said rather gently. 'Sacrifices are no longer painful when they're

behind you.'

'I'm sure Robert won't sacrifice anything.'

'We'll talk about it again a year from now,' Scriassine said. 'A year from now he'll either have deserted politics or he'll have stopped writing. I don't think he'll desert.'

'And he won't stop writing either.'

Scriassine's face grew animated. 'What would you like to bet? A bottle of champagne?'

'I'm not betting anything at all.'

He smiled. 'You're the same as all women; you need fixed stars in the heavens and milestones on the highways.'

'You know,' I said, shrugging my shoulders, 'those fixed stars did quite a lot of dancing around during the last four years.'

'Yes, and nevertheless you're still convinced that France will always be France, and Robert Dubreuilh, Robert Dubreuilh. If not, you'd be lost.'

'Listen,' I said cheerfully. 'Your objectivity begins to seem rather doubtful.'

'I'm forced to follow you on your grounds; you oppose me with nothing but subjective convictions,' Scriassine said. A smile warmed his inquisitive eyes. 'You take things very seriously, don't you?'

'That depends.'

'I was warned about that,' he said. 'But I like serious women.'

'Who warned you?'

With a vague gesture, he indicated every one and no one.

'People.'

'What did they tell you?'

'That you were distant and austere. But I don't really think so.'

I pressed my lips together, hoping it would prevent me from asking further questions. I've always been able to avoid being caught by the snare of mirrors. But the glances, the looks, the stares of other people, who can resist that dizzying pit? I dress in black, speak little, write not at all; together, all these things form a certain picture which others see. I'm no one. It's easy of course to say 'I am I.' But who am I? Where find myself? I would have to be on the other side of every door, but when it's I who knock the others grow silent. Suddenly I felt my face burning; I felt like ripping it off.

'Why don't you write?' Scriassine asked.

'There are enough books in the world.'

'That's not the only reason,' he said, staring at me through small, prying eyes. 'The truth is you don't want to expose yourself.'

'Expose myself to what?'

'On the surface, you seem very sure of yourself, but basically you're extremely timid. You're one of those people who pride themselves on not doing things.'

I interrupted him. 'Don't try analysing me; I know every dark recess of myself. I'm a psychiatrist, you know.'

'I know,' he said smiling. 'Do you think we could have dinner together one evening? I feel lost in this blacked out Paris; I don't

seem to know anyone any more.'

Suddenly, I thought, 'Well, well! At least for him I have legs!' I took out my note-book; I had no reason for refusing.

'All right, let's have dinner together,' I said. 'Can you make it the third of January?'

'It's a date. Eight o'clock at the Ritz bar. Does that suit you?'

'Fine.'

I felt ill at ease. Oh, it isn't that I cared much what he thought of me. No, not that. When I see my own likeness in the depths of someone else's consciousness, I always experience a moment of panic. But it doesn't last very long; I snap right out of it. What did bother me was having glimpsed Robert through eyes that weren't mine. Had he really reached an impasse? I looked over at him and saw him take Paula by the waist and spin her around; with his other hand, he was drawing God only knows what in the air. Perhaps he was explaining something about the flow of time to her. In any case, they were both laughing; he didn't give the least impression of being in danger. Were he in danger, he would surely have known it; Robert isn't often mistaken and he never lies to himself. I went to the bay window and hid myself behind the red draperies. Scriassine had spoken quite a bit of nonsense, but he had posed certain questions I was unable to brush off so easily. During all these weeks, I had fled from questions. We'd been waiting so long for this moment – the liberation, victory – that I wanted to get all I could out of it. There would always be time enough tomorrow

to think of the next day. Well, now I had thought of it, and I wondered what Robert thought. His doubts never produced a diminishing of activity, but on the contrary they stimulated him to excesses. Didn't those long-drawn-out conversations, those letters, those telephone calls, those nocturnal debauches of work cover up a deep disturbance? He never hides anything from me, but sometimes he keeps certain worries temporarily to himself. And besides, I thought remorsefully, tonight he again repeated to Paula, 'We're at the crossroads.' He said it often, and through cowardice I avoided giving those words their true weight. The crossroads. Therefore, in Robert's eyes, the world *was* in danger. And he is the world for me. *He* was in danger! He spoke volubly as we were returning home, arm in arm, through the familiar darkness along the quays. But tonight his voice wasn't enough to reassure me. He was bursting with what he had seen and heard, and he was very gay; when he has remained shut in for days and nights on end, the least occasion to go out becomes an event. When he spoke of the party, it seemed to me as if I had spent the evening with my eyes blindfolded and my ears stuffed with cotton. *He* had eyes all around his head and a dozen pairs of ears. I listened to him, but at the same time I continued questioning myself. He was never going to complete that journal he had kept so conscientiously all during the war. Why not? Was that a symptom? Of what?

'Poor, unhappy Paula! It's a catastrophe for a woman to be loved by a writer,' Robert was saying. 'She believed everything

Perron told her about herself.'

I tried to concentrate on Paula. 'I'm afraid the liberation went to her head,' I said. 'Last year, she had practically wiped out all her illusions. And now she's beginning to play at being madly in love again. But she's only playing.'

'She wanted absolutely to make me say that time doesn't exist,' Robert said. 'The best part of her life is behind her, and now that the war's over she's hoping to relive the past.'

'Isn't that what we were all hoping for?' I asked. I thought I had spoken the words lightly, but Robert's hand tightened around my arm.

'What's wrong?' he asked.

'Not a thing; everything's perfect,' I said flippantly.

'Come now! I know what it means when you start speaking in your worldly woman's voice,' Robert said. 'I'm sure something's churning in that little head of yours. How many glasses of punch did you have?'

'Certainly less than you. And anyhow, the punch has nothing to do with it.'

'Ah! You admit it!' Robert said triumphantly. 'Something *is* the matter and the punch has nothing to do with it. What is it then?'

'Scriassine,' I answered, laughing. 'He explained to me why French intellectuals are done for.'

'He'd like that!'

'I know, but he frightened me anyhow.'

'A great big girl like you who lets herself be frightened by the first prophet who comes along! I get a big kick out of Scriassine; he's restless, he rambles on, boils up, makes you know he's there. But you shouldn't take him seriously.'

'He said that politics will eat you up, that you'll stop writing.'

'And you believed him?' Robert said gaily.

'Well, it *is* true you're not showing any sign of finishing your memoirs,' I replied.

Robert paused for a second and then said, 'That's a special case.'

'But why?'

'There are too many weapons in those memoirs that can be used against me.'

'That's precisely why the thing is worth what it's worth,' I said spiritedly. 'It's so rare to find a man who dares to come out in the open! And when he *does* accept the dare, he invariably wins in the end.'

'Yes,' Robert said, 'after he's dead.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'Now that I'm back in politics I have a lot of enemies. Do you realize how delighted they'd be the day those memoirs appeared in print?'

'Your enemies will always find weapons to use against you, the ones in the journal or others,' I said.

'Just imagine those memoirs in the hands of Lafaurie, or Lachaume, or young Lambert. Or in the hands of any journalist, for that matter,' Robert said.

Cut off completely from politics, from the future, from the public, not even knowing whether his journal would ever be published, Robert had rediscovered in its writing the adventure of the explorer venturing into an unnamed wilderness at random, without a trail to follow, without signs to warn him of its dangers. In my opinion, he had never written anything better. 'If you become involved in politics,' I said impatiently, 'then you no longer have the right to write sincere books. Is that it?'

'No, you can write sincere books but not scandalous ones,' Robert replied. 'And you know very well that nowadays there are a thousand things a man can't speak about without causing a scandal.' He smiled. 'To tell the truth there isn't much about any individual that doesn't lend itself to scandal.'

We walked a few steps in silence and then I said, 'You spent three years writing those memoirs. Doesn't it bother you to leave them lying in the bottom of a drawer?'

'I've stopped thinking about them. I have another book on my mind now.'

'What's it about?'

'I'll tell you all about it in a few days.'

I looked at Robert suspiciously. 'And do you really believe you'll find enough time to write?'

'Of course.'

'It doesn't seem that certain to me. At the moment you don't have a minute to yourself.'

'In politics, it's the beginning that's the hardest. Afterwards

you can take it easier.'

His voice sounded too confident. 'And what if it doesn't become easier?' I persisted. 'Would you get out of politics or would you stop writing?'

'You know, it really wouldn't be a great tragedy if I stopped writing for a little while,' Robert answered with a smile. 'I've scribbled a lot of words on a lot of paper in my life!'

I felt a wrench at my heart. 'Just the other day you were saying your best works are still ahead of you.'

'And I still think so. But they can wait a while.'

'How long? A month? A year? Ten years?' I asked.

'Listen,' Robert said in a conciliatory tone of voice, 'one book more or less on earth isn't as important as all that. And the political situation at present is extremely stimulating; I hope you realize that. This is the first time the left has ever held its fate in its own hands, the first chance to try to organize a group independent of the Communists without running the risk of serving the cause of the right. I'm not going to let this opportunity slip by! I've been waiting for it all my life.'

'For my part, I think your books are more important,' I said. 'They bring people something unique and different. But when it comes to politics, you're not the only one about who can become involved in it.'

'But I'm the only one who can steer things in the direction I want them to take,' Robert said cheerfully. 'You of all people ought to understand me. The vigilance committees and

the Resistance were useful, all right, but they were negative things. Today, it's a question of building, and that's much more interesting.'

'I understand you very well, but your writing interests me more.'

'Haven't we always agreed that one doesn't write just for the sake of writing?' Robert said. 'At certain times, other forms of action become more urgent.'

'Not for you,' I replied. 'First and foremost, you're a writer.'

'You know that's not true,' Robert said reproachfully. 'For me, the revolution comes first.'

'Yes,' I said, 'but you can best serve the revolution by writing your books.'

Robert shook his head. 'That depends on the circumstances. We're at a critical moment of history just now; first we have to win the political battle.'

'And what happens if we don't win it?' I asked. 'Do you really believe there's a chance of a new war?'

'I don't believe a new war is going to start tomorrow,' Robert replied. 'But what has to be avoided at all cost is the creation of a situation in the world which might easily lead to war. If that happens, then we'll sooner or later come to blows again. And we also have to prevent this victory from being exploited by capitalism.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'There are a lot of things that have to be prevented before one can afford to amuse oneself writing books that no one might ever read.'

I stopped dead in the middle of the street. 'What? Do you believe that too? That people will lose interest in literature?'

'Believe me, they'll have a lot of other things to keep themselves busy with,' Robert said in a voice that again seemed to me too reassuring.

'The prospect doesn't seem to bother you at all,' I said indignantly. 'But a world without literature and art would be horribly sad.'

'In any event, there are millions of men at this very moment to whom literature means absolutely nothing,' Robert replied.

'Yes, but you always expected that to change.'

'I still expect it to. What makes you think I don't?' Robert asked. 'But that's precisely it,' he went on without waiting for me to answer. 'If the world decides to change, there's no doubt we'll go through a period in which literature will be almost completely out of the picture.'

We went into the study and I sat down on the arm of one of the leather chairs. Yes, I had certainly drunk too much punch; the walls were spinning crazily. I looked at the table on which Robert had been writing night and day for twenty years. He was sixty now, and if this period of political upheaval dragged on for very long he ran the risk of never seeing the end of it. He couldn't possibly be as indifferent to such a prospect as he tried to appear.

'Let's look into this thing a little,' I said. 'You believe your major works are still ahead of you and just five minutes ago you said you were going to begin a new book. That implies that you

believe there are people around who want to read what you've written …'

'Oh, I suppose that's more than likely,' Robert said. 'But the opposite view can't be rejected out of hand.' He sat down next to me in the chair. 'It's not really as horrible as you might think,' he added cheerfully. 'Literature is created for men and not men for literature.'

'It would be sad for you,' I said. 'You wouldn't be happy if you stopped writing.'

'I don't know,' Robert replied with a grin. 'I have no imagination.'

But he has. I remember how worried he was the night he said to me, 'My major works are still ahead of me!' He's determined that those works shall have weight, permanence. It's useless for him to protest; above all else he's a writer. At first perhaps he had dreamed only of serving the revolution; literature was just a means. But it soon became an end; he loved it for itself and all his books prove it, especially those memoirs he doesn't want published. He wrote them purely for the pleasure of writing. No, the truth is that he simply doesn't want to talk about himself, and that reluctance isn't a good sign.

'As for me,' I said, 'I have plenty of imagination.'

The walls were spinning, but I was thinking very lucidly, much more lucidly than I do in the morning before breakfast. In the morning before eating, you're on the defensive, you manage somehow not to know things you really do know. Suddenly I saw

everything with perfect clarity. The war was ending and a new history in which nothing was guaranteed was beginning. And Robert's future wasn't guaranteed; it was perfectly possible for him to stop writing and even for all his published works to be swallowed up into nothingness.

'What do you really think?' I asked. 'Do you think things will turn out good or bad?'

Robert began to laugh. 'I'm not a prophet! But one thing is certain,' he added. 'We're holding a lot of trumps.'

'But what are the chances of winning?'

'Shall I look into my crystal ball? Or would you like me to read your tea leaves?'

'You don't have to make fun of me,' I said. 'I have a right to ask a few questions from time to time.'

'I ask myself a few, too, you know,' Robert said.

Yes, he does ask himself questions, and graver ones than I do. Personally, I rarely act on my beliefs; that's why I so easily become unhappy. I realize I'm wrong being that way, but with Robert it costs so little to be wrong.

'But you only ask yourself those questions you're able to answer,' I said.

He laughed again. 'Preferably, yes. The others don't serve much purpose.'

'That's no reason not to ask them,' I said. My voice was rising, but I wasn't angry with Robert. I was angry with myself, with my blindness during these past weeks. 'I'd still like to have some idea

of what's going to happen to us,' I persisted.

'Don't you think it's rather late?' Robert asked. 'We've both had a lot of punch to drink, and our minds will be a lot clearer tomorrow morning.'

Tomorrow morning the walls will stop spinning, the furniture and books will be in their proper places, always the same places. And my ideas, too, will fall back into place, and I'll begin to live again from day to day, without turning my head, looking just so far and no farther into the future. I'll stop paying attention to that discordant clatter in my heart. I'm tired of that diet. I looked at the cushion by the fireplace on which Diego used to sit. 'A Nazi victory doesn't enter into my plans,' he had said. And then they had killed him.

'Ideas are always too definite!' I said. 'The war is won. There's a definite idea for you. Well, in my opinion we went to a very peculiar party tonight, with all the dead who weren't there.'

'There's quite a difference between saying that their deaths served some purpose and none at all,' Robert said.

'Diego's served no purpose at all,' I retorted. 'And what if it had?' I added irritably. 'It's fine for the living, this system by which everything leads to something else. But the dead stay dead and we're constantly betraying them; they don't lead to anything.'

'We don't betray them by choice,' Robert protested.

'We betray them when we forget them and when we use them,' I said. 'Regret has to be useless or else it's not really regret.'

Robert thought for a moment and then, with a perplexed look

on his face, said, 'I suppose I've no great talent for regretting. I don't bother myself much with questions I can't answer, things I can't change.' He paused a moment and added, 'I don't say I'm right about that.'

'And I don't say you're wrong. In any case, the dead are dead and we go on living. All the regretting in the world won't change that.'

Robert took my hand. 'Don't go looking for things to make you remorseful,' he said. 'We'll also die, you know; that brings us very close to them, doesn't it?'

I withdrew my hand; at that moment I was the enemy of all friendly feelings. I didn't want to be consoled, not yet.

'Your damned punch has really gone to my head,' I said. 'I'm going to bed.'

'Yes, go to bed now. And tomorrow we'll ask each other all the questions you want, even those that serve no purpose,' Robert said.

'And you? Aren't you coming to bed?'

'No, I think I'll have a shower and do some work.'

'There's no doubt Robert is better armed than I against regrets,' I thought, getting into bed. He works, acts; the future is more real to him than the past. And he writes. All the things that fall outside his normal course of life – misfortune, defeat, death – he puts into his books and considers himself rid of them. But I have no recourse; whatever I lose I can never regain, and there's nothing to redeem my infidelities. Suddenly I began

to weep. 'These are *my* eyes that are weeping,' I thought. 'He sees everything, but not through my eyes.' I was weeping, and for the first time in twenty years I was alone, alone with my remorse, my fear. I fell asleep and dreamed I was dead. I woke up with a start, and the fear was still there. And death continues to prowl silently in the room. I switch on the lights, turn them off; if Robert sees the ray of light under my door, he'll worry. It's useless; tonight he can't help me. When I wanted to talk to him about himself, he evaded my questions. He knows he's in danger; I'm afraid for him. Up to now I've always had the fullest confidence in him; I've never tried to measure him. For me the measure of all things was Robert. I've lived with him as I've lived with myself, no distance separating us. But, suddenly, I've lost all confidence – in everything. No fixed stars, no milestones. Robert is a man, a fallible, vulnerable man of sixty whom the past no longer protects and the future menaces. I lean back against the pillow, my eyes wide open. To see him better I've got to step backwards, far enough back to blot out the view of those twenty years of unquestioning love I'd given him.

It's not easy. There was a time I did see him from a distance, but I was too young. I looked at him from too far off. Friends had pointed him out to me at the Sorbonne; they spoke of him a great deal, with a mixture of admiration and disapproval. It was whispered that he drank and frequented brothels. If that had been true, I think it would have attracted rather than repelled me; I was still rebelling against my pious childhood. In my mind,

sin was a touching manifestation of the absence of God, and if someone had told me that Dubreuilh raped little girls I'd have taken him for a saint of sorts. But his vices were minor and his too-well-established fame irritated me. When I began taking his courses, I had already made up my mind that the 'great man' was a charlatan. Of course, he was different from all the other professors. He would come rushing into the room like a gust of wind; he was always four or five minutes late. He would survey us for a moment with his large, crafty eyes, and then he would begin speaking in either a very amiable or a very aggressive voice. There was something provocative in his surly face, his violent voice, his bursts of laughter which sometimes seemed to us a little insane. He wore very white shirts, his hands were always carefully manicured, and he was impeccably shaven; it was impossible, therefore, to attribute to negligence his zipper jackets, his pullovers, his clumsy shoes. He preferred comfort to decency with such an obvious lack of restraint that I thought it affected. I had read his novels and didn't like them at all; I expected them to bring to me some inspiring message, and all they ever spoke to me of were indifferent people, frivolous sentiments, and a lot of other things that didn't seem to me the least bit essential. As for his courses, they were interesting all right, but he never really said anything worthy of a genius. And he was always so cocksure of being right that I had an irresistible desire to contradict him. Oh, I was convinced, too, that the truth was to the left; ever since my childhood I had sniffed an

odour of stupidity and lies in bourgeois thinking, a very foul-smelling odour. And then I had learned from the Gospel that all men are equal, are brothers; that's one thing I continue to believe in with an unshakable faith. But spiritually, after I had been for so long crammed full of absolutes, the void left in the heavens made a mockery of all morality I had been taught. But Dubreuilh believed there could be salvation here on earth. I let him know where I stood in my first essay. 'Revolution, fine,' I said, 'but what then?' When he gave me back my paper a week later as we were leaving the classroom, he ridiculed my efforts. According to him, my absolute was the abstract dream of a petty bourgeoise incapable of facing reality. Of course I couldn't hold my own against him, and he won every round. But that didn't prove anything, and I told him as much. We resumed our discussion the following week and this time he tried to convince me, rather than overwhelm me. I had to admit that in private discussion he didn't at all seem to feel that he was a great man. He began chatting with me, rather often after classes, sometimes he walked home with me occasionally taking a longer route than was necessary. And then we began going out together in the afternoons, the evenings. We stopped talking about morality and politics and other lofty subjects. He told me about the people he knew and the things he did, and most of all he would take me for walks, show me streets, squares, quays, canals, cemeteries, suburbs, warehouses, vacant sites, little cafés, and a hundred corners of Paris that were completely new to me. And I began

to realize that I had never really seen things I believed I had always known; with him everything took on a thousand meanings – faces, voices, people's clothing, a tree poster, a neon sign, no matter what. I reread all his novels. And I soon realized I had completely misunderstood them the first time. Dubreuilh gave the impression of writing capriciously, for his own pleasure, completely without motivation. And yet on closing the book, you felt yourself overwhelmed with anger, disgust, revolt; you wanted things to change. To read certain passages from his works, you would take him for a pure aesthete; he has a feeling for words, and he's interested in things for themselves, in rain and clear skies, in the games of love and chance, in everything. Only he doesn't stop there; suddenly you find yourself thrown in among people, and all their problems become your concern. That's why I'm so determined for him to continue writing; I know through my own experience what he can bring to his readers. There's no gap between his political ideas and his poetic emotions. Because he himself loves life so much, he wants all men to be able to share it abundantly. And because he loves people, everything that's part of their lives interests him deeply.

I reread his books, listened to him, questioned him; I was so taken up with this new life of mine that I didn't even think of asking myself why, exactly, he enjoyed being with me. I was already so involved that I had no time to discover what was happening inside my own heart. When one night he took me in his arms in the middle of the Jardins du Carrousel, I was

offended. 'I will only kiss a man I love,' I said coldly. 'But you do love me!' he answered calmly. And when he said it, I knew it was true. I hadn't been aware of it; it had all happened too fast. With Robert, everything happened so fast! In fact, that was precisely the quality in him that had captivated me at first. Other people were so slow, life was so slow. He burned up time and pushed everything out of his way. From the moment I knew I loved him, I followed him eagerly from surprise to surprise. I learned that one could live without furniture and without schedules, skip lunches, not go to bed at night, sleep in the afternoon, make love in a wood as well as in bed. It seemed a simple and joyous thing to me to become a woman in his arms; when the pleasure was frightening, his smile would reassure me. A single shadow lay over my heart – term was nearly over and the thought of being separated from him terrified me. Robert obviously realized that. Was that why he suggested we get married? The idea had never even crossed my mind; at nineteen, it seems as natural to be loved by the man with whom you're in love as by doting parents or all-powerful God.

'But I really did love you!' Robert told me much later. Coming from him, what precisely did those words mean? Would he have loved me a year earlier when he was still taken up body and soul in political battles? And the year I came to know him, couldn't he have chosen someone else as consolation for his inactivity? That's the kind of question that serves no purpose whatsoever. Let's drop it. One thing was definitely certain: he was determined to make me happy, and he did not fail. Up to then I hadn't been

unhappy, but neither had I been happy. I was always in good health and occasionally I had moments which I enjoyed. But most of the time I was plainly and simply disconsolate. Foolishness, lies, injustice, suffering; all around me a deep, black chaos. And how absurd it all was! Those days which repeated themselves from week to week, from century to century, without ever getting anywhere. Living was simply a matter of waiting some forty or sixty years for death to come, trudging along through emptiness. That was why I studied so avidly: only books and ideas were able to hold their own; they alone seemed real to me.

Thanks to Robert, ideas were brought down to earth and the earth became coherent, like a book, a book that begins badly but will finish well. Humanity was going somewhere; history had meaning, and so did my own existence. Oppression and misery contained within themselves the promise of their disappearance; evil had already been conquered, shame swept away. The sky closed above my head and the old fears left me. Robert hadn't freed me with theories; he simply showed me that to live was sufficient unto life. He didn't give a damn about death, and his activities weren't merely diversions; he liked what he liked, wanted what he wanted, and ran from nothing. Quite simply, all I wanted was to be like him. If I had questioned life, it was mostly because I was bored at home. And now I was no longer bored. From chaos, Robert had drawn a full, orderly world, cleansed by the future he was helping to produce. And that world was mine. I had to make my own place in it. Being Robert's wife

wasn't enough; before marrying him I had never pictured myself making a career of being a wife. On the other hand, I never for a moment dreamed of taking an active part in politics. In that domain, theories can interest me deeply and I harbour a few strong feelings, but practical politics aren't for me. I have to admit that I lack patience; the revolution is on the march, but it's marching so slowly, with such tiny, uncertain steps! For Robert, if one solution is better than another, that's the correct one; a lesser evil he considers a good. He's right, of course, but no doubt I haven't completely buried my old dreams of the absolute. It does not satisfy me. And then the future seems so very far off; I find it hard to become interested in men who aren't born yet. I would much rather help those who are alive at this very moment. That's why my profession attracted me. Oh, I never believed that you could, from the outside, supply people with a prefabricated salvation. But sometimes only trifles separate them from happiness, and I felt I could at least sweep away those trifles. Robert encouraged me. In that respect he differs from orthodox Communists; he believes that psychoanalysis can play a useful role in bourgeois society and that it might still be of use even in a classless society. And the possibility of rethinking classical psychoanalysis in terms of Marxist ideology struck him as a fascinating idea. The fact of the matter is that my work did interest me, and very deeply. My days were as full as the earth around me. Every morning I awakened more joyously than the day before and every evening I found myself enriched with a

thousand new discoveries. It's an incredible stroke of luck, when you're only twenty years old, to be given the world by the hand you love. And it's equally lucky to find your exact place in that world. Robert also accomplished another feat; he guarded me against isolation without depriving me of privacy. We shared everything in common; and yet I had my own friendships, my own pleasures, my work, my worries. If I wanted to, I could spent the night nestled against a tender shoulder. Or, like tonight, I could remain alone and chaste in my room. I look at the four walls and the rays of light under the door; how many times have I known the sweetness of falling asleep while he was working within earshot. It's been years since we lost our desire for each other, but we were too closely bound in other ways to attach any great importance to the union of our bodies. Therefore we had, so to speak, lost nothing. It seems almost like a pre-war night tonight. Even this worrying that's been keeping me awake isn't new; the future of the world has often seemed very black. What is it, then, that's different? Why has death come prowling again in my room? It continues to prowl. Why?

What stupid obstinacy! I'm ashamed. During these past four years, in spite of all that's happened, I somehow managed to persuade myself that everything would be the same after the war as it was before. In fact, only a little while ago I was saying to Paula, 'It's just like it used to be, isn't it?' This is what I am trying to say to myself: the way it is now is exactly the way it used to be. But no, I'm lying to myself; it's not and it never again will be

the same. Up to now, I always knew in my heart that we would somehow pull out of the gravest crises. Certainly Robert *had* to pull out of them; his destiny guaranteed that of the world and vice versa. But with the horrifying past behind us, how can anyone have any faith in the future? Diego is dead, too many others have died; shame has returned to the earth, the word 'happiness' has lost all meaning. All around me, nothing but chaos again. Maybe the world *will* pull out of it. But when? Two or three centuries are much too long; our own days are numbered. If Robert's life ends in defeat, in doubt, in despair, nothing will ever make up for it.

I hear a slight movement in his study; he's reading, thinking, planning. Will he succeed? And if not, what then? No need to think of the worst; until now, no one has ever eaten us up. We just go on existing, following the whim of a story that isn't ours at all. And Robert has been reduced to the role of a passive witness. What will he do with himself? I know how much the revolution means to him; it's his absolute. The experiences of his youth left an indelible mark upon him; during all those years he spent growing up among soot-coloured houses and lives, socialism was his only hope. And it wasn't because of generosity or logic that he believed in it, but because of necessity. For him, becoming a man meant only one thing: becoming a militant partisan, like his father. It took quite a lot to make him withdraw from politics – the infuriating disillusionment of '14, his rupture with Cachin two years after Tours, his inability to awaken the old revolutionary flame in the Socialist Party. At

the first opportunity, he leaped eagerly into the political arena again, and now he's more excited about it than ever. To reassure myself I tell myself that he has all manner of resources at his command. After our marriage, during the years he spent away from active politics, he wrote a great deal and was happy. But was he? I chose to believe it, and until tonight I never dared pry into what really went on inside him. I no longer feel very certain about our past. If he wanted a child so soon, it was probably because I alone wasn't enough to justify his existence. Or perhaps he was trying to take revenge against that future which he could no longer control. Yes, that desire of his to become a father seems rather significant now that I look back upon it. And the sadness of our pilgrimage to Bruay is significant, too. We walked through the streets of his childhood and he showed me the school where his father had taught, the sombre building in which, at the age of nine, he had heard Jaurès. He told me about his first encounters with daily routine and disappointment with pointless work; he was speaking very fast, he sounded very uninterested, and then suddenly he said heatedly, 'Nothing has changed. But I write novels!' I wanted to believe it was only a fleeting emotion; Robert was much too lighthearted for me to imagine that he had any serious regrets. But after the Congress of Amsterdam, during that whole period when he was busily organizing vigilance committees, I saw him as he acted when he was really happy, and I had to admit the truth to myself: before then, he had been straining at the leash. If now he finds himself condemned once

more to impotence, to solitude, everything will seem useless to him, even writing. Especially writing. Between '25 and '32, when he was holding himself in check, he wrote, yes. But it was a lot different then. He still had close ties with the Communists and some of the Socialists; he nourished the hope of a united workers' front and of a final victory. I know by heart that phrase of Jaurès he used to repeat at every opportunity: 'The man of tomorrow will be the most complex, the richest in life, that history has ever known.' He was convinced his books would help to build the future and that the man of tomorrow would read them. That being the case, he wrote. But faced with a sealed future, writing becomes meaningless. If his contemporaries stop listening to him, if posterity no longer understands him, there's nothing left but to be silent.

And what then? What will become of him? It's awful to think of a living creature turning into foam, but there's an even worse fate: that of a paralysed man who can't move his tongue. It's far better to be dead. Will I find myself some day hoping for Robert's death? No. That's unthinkable. He's had hard blows before and he's always got over them. He'll get over them again. I don't know how, but he'll surely think of something. It's not entirely impossible, for example, that one day he'll become a member of the Communist Party. Now, of course, he wouldn't dream of doing it; his criticisms of their policies are too violent. But suppose the party line changes, suppose there comes a day when, excepting for the Communists, there is no coherence left.

If that ever happens I wonder if Robert won't end up by joining them rather than remaining inactive. I don't like that idea. It would be much harder for him than for anyone else to take orders with which he didn't agree; he's always had his own definite opinions on what tactics to use. And it would be useless for him to attempt to be cynical; I know he'll always remain faithful to his old principles. The idealism of others makes him smile; he has his own, and there are certain Communist methods he would never accept. No, that's no solution. There are far too many things that keep them apart; his humanism isn't the same as theirs. Not only would he be unable to write anything sincere, but he would be forced to reject his whole past.

'Too bad,' he'll tell me. Just a little while ago he said, 'One book more or less isn't very important.' But does he really believe that? As for me, I value books greatly, too much perhaps. When I was an adolescent, I preferred books to the world of reality, and something of that has remained with me – a slight taste for eternity. Yes, that's one of the reasons why I take Robert's writings so much to heart. If they perish, both of us will once more become perishable; the future will be nothing but the grave. Robert doesn't see things that way, but neither is he the perfect militant completely unconcerned with himself. He definitely hopes to leave a name behind him, a name that will mean a great deal to a great many people. And after all, writing is the thing he loves most in the world; it's his joy, his necessity; it's he, himself. Renouncing writing would be suicide for him.

Well, all he would have to do is resign himself to writing to order. Others do it. Others, but not Robert. If I had to, I could imagine him working actively for a cause halfheartedly. But writing is something else again; if he were no longer able to express himself freely, the pen would fall from his hand.

Now I see the impasse. Robert believes completely in certain ideas, and before the war we were positive that one day they would be realized. His whole life has been devoted to enriching them and preparing for their birth. But suppose they're never born? Suppose the revolution takes a different tack, turns against the humanism Robert has always defended. What can he do? If he helps build a future hostile to all the values in which he believes, his struggle becomes absurd. But if he stubbornly insists on maintaining values that will never come down to earth, he becomes one of those old dreamers whom, above all, he has always wanted not to emulate. No, between those alternatives, no choice is possible. In either case, it would mean defeat, impotence; and for Robert that would be a living death. That's why he's thrown himself so energetically into the fight. He tells me the present situation offers an opportunity he's been waiting for all his life. All right. But it also carries with it a graver danger than any he has ever experienced, and he knows it. Yes, I'm sure he's already told himself everything I've been thinking. He's told himself that his future might be nothing but the grave, that he'll be buried without leaving any more trace of himself than Rosa and Diego. And it's even worse: perhaps the men of tomorrow

will look upon him as a dunderhead, a fool, a charlatan, a drone, a complete failure. It may even be that one day he'll be tempted to look upon *himself* through their mean, cruel eyes. In that case, he'll live out the rest of his life in disillusionment. Robert disillusioned! That would be an even more intolerable horror than death itself. I can accept my death and his, but never his disillusionment. No. To think of waking up tomorrow, and the next day, and all the days that follow, with that monstrous menace on the horizon! I won't stand for it. No. But I can say no, no, no; I can say it a hundred times, and it won't change a thing. I'll wake up facing that menace tomorrow and all the days after that. When you're faced with an inescapable fact, you can at least choose to die. But when it's nothing more than a baseless fear, you have to go on living with it.

CHAPTER TWO

The next morning the radio confirmed the German collapse. 'It's really the beginning of peace,' Henri repeated to himself, sitting down at his desk. 'At last I can start writing again!' He would, he assured himself, write every day from now on. But what exactly would he write? He didn't know and he was perfectly content not to know; always before he had known only too well. Now he would attempt to talk to the reader without premeditation, as one writes to a friend. And perhaps he would at last succeed in saying all those things for which he had never found room enough in his too carefully constructed books. There are so many things one would like to preserve with words but which are forever lost. He raised his head and looked through the window at the cold sky. What a pity to think that this winter morning would be lost; everything seemed so precious: the white, virginal paper, the smell of alcohol and stale cigarette ends, the Arab music drifting up from the café next door. Notre Dame was as cold as the sky, a tramp with a huge collar of bluish chicken feathers was dancing in the middle of the street, and two girls in their Sunday clothes were watching him and laughing. It was Christmas, it was the German collapse, and life was beginning again. Yes, all those mornings, all those evenings, that he had let slip through his fingers in the last four years, he was determined to make up for them during the next thirty. You can't

say everything, that's true enough. But nevertheless you can try to get across the real flavour of your life. Every life has a flavour, a flavour all its own, and if you can't describe it, there's no point in writing. 'I've got to tell about what I liked, what I like, what I am,' he said to himself as he finished sketching a cluster of flowers on a scrap of paper. Who was he? What manner of man would he discover after that long absence? It's difficult, working from within, for a person to define himself, to set limits on himself. He wasn't a political fanatic, nor a literary aesthete, nor a dedicated man in any sense. Rather, he felt quite ordinary, and the feeling didn't upset him in the least. A man like everyone else, who spoke sincerely of himself, would speak in the name of everyone, for everyone. Complete sincerity: that was the only distinctive thing he felt he had to aim for, the only restriction he would have to impose upon himself. He added another flower to the cluster. But it isn't easy to be sincere. First of all, he had no intention of making an open confession. And secondly, whosoever says novel, says lie. Well, he would think about that later. For the moment, he had above all else to keep himself from becoming burdened with too many problems. Say anything, begin anywhere – beneath the moon in the gardens of El Oued. The paper was bare; he had to take advantage of it.

'Did you start your light novel?' Paula asked.

'I don't know.'

'What do you mean, you don't know? Don't you know what you're writing?'

'I'm planning to surprise myself,' he said with a laugh.

Paula shrugged her shoulders. As a matter of fact, what he said was quite true; he really didn't want to know. Without any semblance of order, any basic plan, he jotted down odds and ends of his life, and it amused and pleased him, and he could ask for nothing more.

The evening he went to meet Nadine, he left his writing regretfully. He had told Paula he was going out with Scriassine; during the last year he had learned to be more discreet. To have said 'I'm going out with Nadine' would have brought on so many questions, so many misinterpretations, that he chose not to say it. But it was really absurd to hide the fact that he was meeting that awkward girl whom he had always looked upon as a sort of niece. It was even more absurd to have made the appointment in the first place. He pushed open the door to the Bar Rouge and walked over to her table. She was sitting between Lachaume and Vincent.

'No fights tonight?'

'No,' Vincent said peevishly.

Young men and women crowded into that red cellar not primarily to be among friends, but rather to confront adversaries. Every conceivable shade of political opinion was represented there, and Henri often came there to spend a few pleasant moments talking with his friends. He would have liked to sit down now and chat casually with Lachaume and Vincent while he watched the crowd in the room. But Nadine got up at once.

'Are you taking me to dinner?'

'That's what I'm here for.'

Outside, it was dark; the sidewalk was covered with dirty slush. What in the world, he wondered, would he be able to do with Nadine?

'Where would you like to go?' he asked. 'To the Italian place?'

'To the Italian place.'

She wasn't difficult to please. She let him choose the table and ordered the same things as he – peperoni and osso bucco. She approved of everything he said with a delighted air which somehow seemed rather suspect to Henri. The truth was that she wasn't listening to him; she was eating greedily and quietly, smiling into her plate. He let the conversation lapse and Nadine appeared not to notice it. Having swallowed the last mouthful, she wiped her lips with a broad gesture.

'And now where do you plan to take me?'

'You don't like jazz and you don't like dancing?'

'No.'

'Well, we can try the Tropic of Cancer.'

'Can we have any fun there?'

'Why? Do you know some place we can have some fun? The Tropic isn't a bad place for a quiet talk.'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'Public benches are all right, too, for talking.' Her face lit up. 'As a matter of fart, there are some places I do like – the ones where you see those naked women.'

'Really? That sort of thing amuses you?'

'Oh, yes. Of course, the Turkish baths are better, but the cabarets aren't bad.'

'You wouldn't by any chance be just a little bit perverted, would you?' Henri asked, laughing.

'It's possible,' she said dryly. 'Have you anything better to suggest?'

It was impossible to imagine anything more incongruous than going to see naked women with this tall, awkward girl who was neither a virgin nor yet a woman. But Henri had taken it upon himself to entertain her and he had no idea of how to go about it. They went to Chez Astarte and sat down at a table in front of a champagne bucket. The room was still empty; at the bar, the house girls were chattering to each other. Nadine studied them carefully.

'If I were a man,' she said, 'I'd take a different woman home with me every night.'

'If you had a different woman every night, they'd all seem the same after a while.'

'You're wrong. Take that little brunette over there, and the redhead with those pretty falsies, for example. You wouldn't find the same thing at all under their dresses.' She rested her chin in the palm of her hand and looked steadily at Henri. 'Aren't you interested in women?'

'Not in that way.'

'How then?'

'Well, I like looking at them when they're pretty, dancing

with them when they're grateful, or talking to them when they're intelligent.'

'For talk men are better,' Nadine said. She looked at him suspiciously. 'Look,' she said, 'why did you ask me to go out with you? I'm not pretty, I dance badly, and I'm a poor conversationalist.'

Henri smiled. 'Don't you remember? You were reproaching me for not asking you?'

'And I suppose every time someone reproaches you for not doing something, you immediately do it?'

'All right,' Henri asked, 'why did you accept my invitation?'

She gave him such a naïve and inviting look that he was suddenly upset. Was it true, as Paula claimed, that she couldn't see a man without offering herself to him?

'One must never refuse anything,' she said sententiously.

For a moment she silently stirred her champagne. Then they started to talk idly again. But from time to time Nadine would abruptly stop talking to stare insistently at Henri, a look of astonished reproof on her face. 'One thing is sure,' he told himself. 'I can't very well make a pass at her.' She only half-appealed to him; he knew her too well; she was too easy; and besides, it would have embarrassed him because of the Dubreuilhs. He tried to fill the silences, but twice she yawned deliberately in his face. He, too, found that time passed slowly. A few couples were dancing, mostly Americans and their girls, and one or two pairs of lovers from the provinces. He decided to leave

as soon as the dancers had done their number and he felt relieved when they finally came on. There were six of them, in sequin-studded panties and brassieres, wearing top hats on which the French tricolour or the American stars and stripes were painted. They danced neither well nor badly, they were homely but not excessively so. It was an uninteresting show, a show that never got off the ground. What was it then that made Nadine look so delighted? When the girls took off their brassieres, uncovering their wax-firmed breasts, she cast a sly glance at Henri and asked, 'Which one do you like best?'

'They're all the same.'

Nadine silently examined the women with an expert, rather blase look. After they had backed out of the room, waving their panties in one hand and holding their red-white-and-blue hats over their genitals with the other, Nadine asked, 'Do you think it's more important to have a pretty face or a good figure?'

'That depends.'

'On what?'

'On the woman, on your taste.'

'Well, how do you rate me?'

'I'll tell you in three or four years,' he said, looking her over carefully. 'You're still unfinished.'

'You're never finished until you're dead,' she said angrily. Her eyes wandered around the room and came to rest on the blonde dancer, who was now wearing a tight black dress and sitting at the bar. 'You know, she really does look sad. Why don't you ask

her to dance?'

'That certainly won't cheer her up much.'

'All her friends have men. She looks like a leftover. Ask her; what can it cost you?' she said with a sudden burst of vehemence. Then her voice softened, and pleadingly she added, 'Just once.'

'If it means that much to you,' he said.

The blonde followed him unenthusiastically on to the dance floor. She was a silly, ordinary-looking thing; he couldn't see why Nadine took such an interest in her. To tell the truth, Nadine's whims were beginning to get on his nerves. When he returned to the table, he noticed she had filled two champagne glasses and was looking at them meditatively.

'You're nice,' she said, looking at him tenderly. Suddenly she smiled and asked, 'Do you get funny when you're drunk?'

'When I'm drunk I always think I'm very funny.'

'And other people, what do they think?'

'When I'm drunk, I don't worry very much about what other people think.'

She pointed to the bottle. 'Let's see you get drunk.'

'Champagne isn't what'll do it.'

'How many glasses can you drink without getting drunk?'

'Quite a few.'

'More than three?'

'Of course.'

She looked at him doubtfully. 'That's something I'd like to see! Do you mean to say you could gulp these two glasses down and

it wouldn't do anything to you?'

'Not a thing.'

'Let's see you try.'

'Why?'

'People are always bragging; sometimes you have to call their bluff.'

'After that, I suppose you'll ask me to stand on my head,' Henri said.

'After that, you can go home and go to bed. Drink up; one after the other.'

He swallowed the contents of one of the glasses and felt a sudden shock in the pit of his stomach.

'Now the second,' Nadine said, handing him the other glass.

He drank it down.

He woke up stretched out on a bed, naked, alongside a naked woman who was holding him by the hair and shaking his head.

'Who are you?' he mumbled.

'Nadine. Wake up, it's late.'

He opened his eyes; the lights were on. He was in a strange room, a hotel room. Yes, he remembered the desk clerk, the stairway. Before that, he had been drinking champagne. His head ached.

'What happened? I don't understand.'

'That champagne you drank was spiked with brandy,' Nadine replied, laughing.

'You spiked my champagne with brandy?'

'I did. It's a little trick I often play on the Americans when I have to get them drunk. Anyhow,' she said, still smiling, 'it was the only way to have you.'

He carefully touched his head. 'I don't remember a thing.'

'Oh, there was nothing much to it.'

She got out of bed, took a comb from her purse, and, standing nude before a full-length mirror, began combing her hair. How youthful her body was! Had he really held that lithe, slender form, with its softly rounded shoulders and small breasts, against him? Suddenly she realized that he was studying her. 'Don't look at me like that!' she said. She grabbed her slip and hastily put it on.

'You're very pretty!'

'Don't be silly!' she said haughtily.

'Why are you getting dressed? Come over here.'

She shook her head and Henri, suddenly worried, asked, 'Did I do something I shouldn't have? I was drunk, you know.'

She walked over to the bed and kissed him on the cheek. 'You were very nice,' she told him. 'But I don't like starting all over again,' she added, walking away. 'Not the same day, anyhow.'

It was annoying not being able to remember anything. He watched her putting on her socks and suddenly he felt uneasy, lying there naked between the sheets. 'I'm getting up. Turn round.'

'You want me to turn round?'

'Please.'

She stood in a corner, her nose to the wall and her hands

behind her back, like a schoolgirl being punished. In a moment, she asked mockingly, 'Time enough?'

'Ready,' he answered, buckling his belt.

Nadine looked at him critically. 'You are complicated!'

'Me?'

'You make quite a fuss about getting into bed and about getting out of it.'

'What a head you've given me!' Henri said.

They left the hotel, walked towards the Gare Montparnasse, and went into a little café which was just opening up for the morning. They sat down at a table and ordered two ersatz coffees.

'I'd like to know why you were so set on sleeping with me,' he said lightly.

'I wanted to get to know you.'

'Is that always the way you get to know people?'

'When you sleep with someone, it breaks the ice. It's better being together now, isn't it?'

'The ice is certainly broken,' Henri said, laughing. 'But why is it so important for you to know me?'

'I want you to like me.'

'But I do like you.'

She gave him a look that was both malicious and embarrassed. 'I want you to like me enough to take me to Portugal with you.'

'Oh, so that's it!' He put his hand on her arm. 'I've already told you it's impossible.'

'Because of Paula? But since she's not going with you anyhow,

there's no reason why I can't.'

'No, you just can't. It would make her very unhappy.'

'Don't tell her.'

'That would be too big a lie.' He smiled and added, 'Besides she'd know about it anyhow.'

'So just to spare her a little pain, you'd deprive me of something I want more than anything in the world.'

'Do you really want to go that much?'

'A country where there's sun and plenty to eat? I'd sell my soul to go.'

'You were hungry during the war?'

'Hungry? And bear in mind that when it came to scrounging for food, no one could beat Mother. She'd ride her bike fifty miles out into the country just to bring us back a couple of pounds of mushrooms or a chunk of meat. But that still didn't keep us from being hungry. I literally went mad over the first American who plunked his rations in my arms.'

'Is that what made you like Americans so much?'

'That, and at first they used to amuse me.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'Now, they're too well organized; it's not fun any more. Paris has become sinister again.' She gave Henri an imploring look. 'Take me with you.'

He would have enjoyed giving her that pleasure; nothing could be more gratifying than to make someone truly happy. But how could he ever convince Paula to accept a thing like that?

'You've had affairs before,' Nadine said, 'and Paula put up with

them.'

'Who told you that?'

Nadine smiled slyly. 'When a woman talks about her love affairs to another woman, it gets about pretty fast.'

Yes, Henri had admitted to a few infidelities, for which Paula had magnanimously forgiven him. But the difficulty now was that an explanation would inexorably lead him either to an entanglement of lies – and he wanted no more lies – or to abruptly demanding his freedom. And he had no stomach for that.

'But going away together for a whole month,' he murmured, 'is something else again.'

'But we'll leave each other as soon as we get back. I don't want to take you away from Paula,' Nadine said with an insolent laugh. 'All I want to do is get away from here for a while.'

Henri hesitated. To wander through strange streets and sit in outdoor cafés with a woman who laughed in your face, to find her warm, young body in a hotel room at night, yes, it was tempting. And since he had already decided to break off with Paula, what did he gain by waiting? Time would never patch things up; just the opposite.

'Listen,' he said, 'I can't promise you anything. Just remember, this isn't a promise. But I'm going to try talking to Paula, and if it seems possible to take you, well … I will.'

II

I looked at the little sketch, and I was discouraged. Two months earlier I had said to the child, 'Draw a house,' and he had drawn a cottage with a roof, a chimney, smoke; but not a window, not a door, and surrounding the house was a tall black fence with pointed bars. 'Now, draw a family,' and he had drawn a man holding a little boy by the hand. And today again he had sketched a house without a door, surrounded by pointed black bars. We were getting nowhere. Was it a particularly difficult case, or was it I who didn't know how to handle it? I put the drawing into his file. Didn't I know how? Or didn't I want to? Perhaps the child's resistance merely reflected the resistance I felt in myself. It horrified me to have to drive that stranger, who had died two years earlier at Dachau, from his son's heart. 'If that's the way it is, I ought to give up the case,' I said to myself, standing silently beside my desk. I had two full hours ahead of me which I could have used to sort and file my notes, but I couldn't make up my mind to get down to it. It's true I've always been the kind to ask myself a lot of questions. Why does healing so often mean mutilating? What value does personal adjustment have in an unjust society? But nevertheless, it has always fascinated me to devise solutions for each new case. My objective isn't to give my patients a false feeling of inner peace; if I seek to deliver them from their personal nightmares, it's only to

make them better able to face the real problems of life. And each time I succeeded, I felt I had accomplished something useful. The task is huge, it requires everyone's co-operation. That's what I thought yesterday. But it's all based on the premise that every intelligent being has a part to play in a history that is steadily leading the world towards happiness. Today I no longer believe in that beautiful harmony. The future escapes us; it will shape itself without us. Well then, if we have to be content with the present, what difference does it make whether little Ferdinand once more becomes carefree and happy like other children? 'I shouldn't be thinking such things,' I told myself. 'If I go on like this, it won't be long before I'll have to close up my office.' I went into the bathroom and brought back a bowl of water and an armful of old newspapers. In the fireplace, balls of paper were burning dully; I knelt down, moistened the printed sheets, and began crumpling them up. This sort of task was less distasteful to me than it used to be; with Nadine's help and an occasional hand from the concierge's wife, I kept the apartment in fairly good shape. At least while I was crumpling those old newspapers, I knew that I was doing something useful. The trouble was that it kept only my hands busy. I did succeed in driving little Ferdinand, as well as all thoughts of my profession, from my mind. But I gained little by it – once more the record began turning insistently in my head: *There aren't enough coffins left in Stavelot to bury all the children murdered by the SS.* We had escaped; but elsewhere it had happened. They had hastily hidden the flags, buried their

guns; the men had fled into the fields the women had barricaded themselves behind their doors. And in the streets abandoned to the rain, the sound of their raucous voices could be heard. This time they hadn't come as magnanimous conquerors; they had returned with hate and death in their hearts. And then they went off again, leaving nothing behind of the festive village but burned-out houses and heaps of little bodies.

A sudden gust of cold air made me shiver; Nadine had opened the door.

'Why didn't you ask me to help you?'

'I thought you were getting dressed.'

'I finished dressing long ago,' she said. She knelt beside me and grabbed a newspaper. 'Are you afraid I don't know how to do this? Don't worry; it's not beyond me.'

The fact is that she really wasn't very good at it; she wet the paper too much, didn't wad it enough. But nevertheless I should have asked her to help. I examined her critically. 'Let me dress you up a little,' I said.

'For whom? Lambert?'

I took a shawl and an antique brooch from my dresser and put them on her. Then I handed her a pair of pumps with leather soles, a present from a patient who believed herself cured.

Nadine hesitated. 'But you're going out tonight, too. What are you going to wear?'

'No one ever looks at my feet,' I said laughing.

She took the shoes and grumbled, 'Thanks.' I almost answered,

'You're welcome,' as one would to a stranger. My attentions, my generosity made her feel uncomfortable, for she wasn't really grateful and she reproached herself for not being so. I felt her wavering between gratitude and suspicion as she awkwardly crumpled the newspaper. And after all, she was right in distrusting me; my devotion, my generosity were the most unfair of my wiles: I was seeking to escape remorse at the expense of making her feel guilty. Remorse because Diego was dead, because Nadine didn't have any pretty dresses, because sullenness made her ugly; remorse because I didn't know how to make her obey me and because I didn't love her enough. It would have been more honest of me not to smother her with kindness. Perhaps I might have been able to comfort her if I simply took her in my arms and said, 'My poor little daughter, forgive me for not loving you more.' If I had held her in my arms, perhaps it would have protected me against those little bodies which had gone unburied.

Nadine raised her head. 'Have you spoken to Father again about that secretarial job?'

'No, not since the day before yesterday,' I answered, hastily adding: 'The magazine doesn't come out until April. There's still plenty of time.'

'But I want to know now,' Nadine said, throwing a ball of paper into the fire. 'I really don't understand why he's against it.'

'He told you; he thinks you'd be wasting your time.' A job, adult responsibilities – I personally thought it would be good for

Nadine. But Robert had more ambitious plans for her.

'And chemistry, don't you think I'm wasting time with that?' she said, shrugging her shoulders.

'No one's forcing you to study chemistry.'

Nadine had chosen chemistry for the sole purpose of upsetting us; she succeeded only in punishing herself.

'It isn't so much chemistry that bores the hell out of me,' she said. 'It's just being a student. Father doesn't seem to realize it, but I'm much older than you were when you were my age. I want to so something real.'

'I agree with you,' I replied. 'You know that. But just be patient. If your father sees you're not going to change your mind he'll end up by saying yes.'

'He may say yes, but you can bet he'll say it grudgingly,' Nadine replied sulkily.

'We'll convince him,' I said. 'Do you know what I'd do if I were you? I'd learn to type at once.'

'I can't start now,' Nadine replied. She paused, gave me a rather defiant look, and added, 'Henri is taking me to Portugal with him.'

I was taken by surprise. 'Did you decide that yesterday?' I asked in a voice which didn't hide my disapproval.

'My decision was made a long time ago,' Nadine said. Aggressively she added, 'Naturally, you disapprove, don't you? You disapprove because of Paula. Isn't that right?'

I rolled one of the moist paper balls between the palms of my

hands. 'I think you're going to make yourself very unhappy.'

'That's my business.'

'Yes,' I said. 'I suppose it is.'

I tried to force myself to hold my tongue. I knew my silence annoyed her, but she provokes me when, in that biting voice of hers, she spurns the very explanations she is anxious to hear. She wants me to force her hand, but I do not like to play her game. Nevertheless, I gave it a try. 'Henri doesn't love you,' I said. 'He's in no mood just now to fall in love.'

'But Lambert, Lambert would be a dumb enough idiot to marry me, is that it?' she said angrily.

'I've never tried to push you into marriage,' I answered. 'But the fact of the matter is that Lambert does love you.'

'That's not true,' she said, interrupting me. 'He doesn't love me. Not only has he never asked me to sleep with him, but the other night at the party, when I practically came right out and asked him, he turned me down flat.'

'That's because he wants other things from you.'

'If I don't appeal to him, that's his business. Besides, I can understand someone being difficult to please after having had a girl like Rosa. Believe me when I tell you I try to make allowances for that. Just don't keep telling me he's so completely gone on me,' Nadine said, her voice rising.

'Do whatever you like!' I said. 'You're free to do as you please. What more can you ask for?'

She cleared her throat, as she always did when she was

nervous. 'As far as Henri and myself is concerned, it's only a matter of a little adventure. As soon as we get back, we stop seeing each other.'

'Honestly, Nadine, do you believe that?'

'Yes, I do believe it,' she said with too much conviction.

'After you've spent a month with Henri you'll want to hold on to him.'

'You're wrong.' Again a look of defiance appeared in her eyes. 'If you want to know, I slept with him last night and it did absolutely nothing to me.'

I turned my eyes away; I would rather not have known about it. 'That doesn't mean anything,' I said, trying not to reveal my embarrassment. 'I'm sure that when you get back you won't want to leave him – and he'll have other ideas about it.'

'That remains to be seen,' she said.

'Ah! So you admit it; you are hoping to hold him. But you're only deceiving yourself, you know. All he wants at the moment is his freedom.'

'There's a game to be played. I enjoy it.'

'Calculating, manoeuvring, watching, waiting – is that the kind of thing you enjoy? And you don't even love him!'

'I may not love him,' she said, 'but I want him.' She threw a handful of paper balls into the fireplace. 'With him at least I'll live. Can't you understand that?'

'To live, you need no one but yourself,' I said angrily.

She looked around the room. 'Do you call this living? Frankly,

my poor mother, do you believe you ever lived? What an existence! Talking to Father half the day and treating crackpots the other half.' She stood up and brushed off her knees. 'I do foolish things sometimes,' she continued in an exasperated tone of voice, 'I don't deny it. But I'd rather end my days in a whorehouse than go through life wearing immaculate kid gloves like a good little bourgeoise. You never take off these gloves of yours, do you? You spend your time giving people advice, but what do you know about men? And I'm damned certain you never look at yourself in the mirror and never have nightmares.'

Attacking me was the tactic she always employed when she felt guilty or had doubts about herself. When she saw I didn't intend to answer, she walked towards the door, stopped, hesitated a moment, and then turned around and asked in a calmer voice, 'Will you come and have tea with us?'

'Just call me whenever you're ready.'

I stood up. I lit a cigarette. What could I do? I didn't dare do anything. When Nadine first began seeking and fleeing Diego in bed after bed, I tried to do something about it. But she had discovered unhappiness too brutally; it had left her too bewildered with revolt and despair for anyone to exercise any control over her. When I tried to talk to her, she stopped her ears, she cried, she ran away. She didn't return to the flat until the next morning. Robert, at my request, tried to reason with her. That evening, she didn't go out to meet her American captain; she stayed at home alone in her room. But the next day she

disappeared, leaving a note which said, 'I am leaving.' Robert searched for her all that night, all the next day, and all of another night, while I waited at home. The waiting was agonizing. At four o'clock in the morning a bartender in one of the Montparnasse cafés telephoned. I found Nadine, dead drunk and with a black eye, stretched out on a seat on one of the booths of the bar. 'Let her have her freedom. It will only be worse if we try to restrain her,' Robert said to me. I had no choice. If I had continued to fight her, Nadine would have begun to hate me and would purposely have defied me. But she knows I disapprove of her conduct and that I gave in against my will. She knows and she holds it against me. And maybe she's not entirely wrong. Had I loved her more, our relationship might have been different. Perhaps I would have known how to stop her from leading a life of which I disapprove. For a long while I stood there looking at the flames, repeating to myself, 'I don't love her enough.'

I hadn't wanted her; it was Robert who wanted to have a child right away. I've always held it against Nadine that she upset my life alone with Robert. I loved Robert too much and I wasn't interested enough in myself to be moved by the discovery of his features or mine on the face of that little intruder. Without feeling any particular affection, I took notice of her blue eyes, her hair, her nose. I scolded her as little as possible, but she was well aware of my reticence; to her, I've always been suspect. No little girl has ever fought more tenaciously to triumph over her rival for her father's heart. And she's never resigned herself to belonging

to the same species as I. When I told her she would soon begin menstruating and explained the meaning of it to her, she listened attentively, but with a fierce trapped look in her eyes. Then she violently threw her favourite vase to the floor, shattering it to bits. After her first period, her anger was so powerful that she didn't bleed again for another eighteen months.

Diego had created a new climate between us; at last she owned a treasure which belonged to her alone. She felt herself my equal, and a friendship was born between us. But afterwards, everything grew even worse. Just now, everything is worse.

'Mother.'

Nadine was calling me. As I walked down the corridor, I thought to myself, 'If I stay too long, she'll say I monopolise her friends; but if I leave too soon, she'll think I'm insulting them.' I opened the door. In the room were Lambert, Sézenac, Vincent, and Lachaume. There were no women; Nadine had no girl friends. They were sitting around the electric heater, drinking ersatz coffee. Nadine handed me a cup of black, bitter water.

'Chancel was killed,' she said abruptly.

I hadn't known Chancel very well, but ten days earlier I had seen him laughing with the others around the Christmas tree. Maybe Robert was right; the distance between the living and the dead really isn't very great. And yet, like myself, those future corpses who were drinking their coffee in silence appeared ashamed to be so alive. Sézenac's eyes were even more blank than usual; he looked like a Rimbaud without brains.

'How did it happen?' I asked.

'Nobody knows,' Sézenac replied. 'His brother got a note saying he died on the field of honour.'

'Do you think there's any chance he did it on purpose?'

Sézenac shrugged his shoulders. 'Maybe.'

'And maybe no one asked him for his advice,' Vincent said. 'They're far from stingy with human material, our generals. They're great and generous lords, you know.' In his sallow face, his bloodshot eyes looked like two gashes; his mouth was a thin scar. One failed to notice at first that his features were actually fine and regular.

Lachaume's face, on the other hand, was at once calm and tormented, like a craggy rock. 'It's all a question of prestige,' Lachaume said. 'If we still want to play at being a great power, we must have a respectable number of dead.'

'Besides,' Vincent said, 'disarming the members of the Resistance was a neat trick. But let's face it. If they could be quietly liquidated, that'd suit the great lords even better,' Vincent added, his scar opening into a sort of smile.

'What are you trying to insinuate?' Lambert asked severely, looking Vincent straight in the eyes. 'De Gaulle ordered de Lattre to get rid of all the Communists? If that's what you want to say, say it. At least have that much courage.'

'No need for any order,' Vincent replied. 'They understand each other well enough without exchanging words.'

Lambert shrugged his shoulders. 'You don't believe that

yourself.'

'Maybe it's true,' Nadine said aggressively.

'Don't be silly. Of course it's not true.'

'What's there to prove it isn't?' she asked.

'Ah, ha! So you've finally picked up the technique!' Lambert said. 'You make up a fact out of whole cloth, and then you ask someone to prove it's false! Obviously I can't swear to the fact that Chancel wasn't killed by a bullet in the back.'

Lauchaume smiled. 'That's not what Vincent said.'

That was the way it always went. Sézenac would hold his tongue, Vincent and Lambert would engage in a squabble, and then at the right moment Lachaume would intervene. Usually, he would chide Vincent for his leftist views and Lambert for his petit-bourgeois prejudices. Nadine would side with one camp or the other, depending upon her mood. I avoided getting entangled in their argument; it was more vehement today than usually, probably because Chancel's death had more or less unnerved them. In any case, Vincent and Lambert weren't made to get along with each other. Lambert had an aura of gentlemanliness about him, while Vincent, with his fur-collared jacket and his thin unhealthy face, looked rather like a hoodlum. There was a disturbing coldness in his eyes, but nevertheless I couldn't bring myself to believe that he had killed real men with a real revolver. Every time I saw him I thought of it, but I could never actually bring myself to believe it. As for Lauchaume, he, too, may have killed, but if he did, he hadn't told anyone and it hadn't left any

visible mark.

Lambert turned towards me. 'You can't even have a talk with friends any more,' he said. 'It's no fun living in Paris, the way it is now. Sometimes I wonder if Chancel wasn't right. I don't mean getting yourself shot up, but going off and doing some fighting.'

Nadine gave him an angry look. 'But you're hardly ever in Paris as it is!'

'I'm here enough to find it a lot too grim for my taste. And even when I'm at the front, believe me, I don't feel especially proud of what I'm doing.'

'But you did everything you could to become a war correspondent,' she said bitterly.

'I liked it better than staying back here, but it's still a half measure.'

'If you're fed up with Paris, no one's holding you here,' Nadine said, her face twisted with rage. 'Go on and play the hero.'

'It's no better and no worse than some other games I know of,' Lambert grumbled, giving her a look heavy with meaning.

Nadine eyed him up and down for a moment. 'You know, you wouldn't look bad as a stretcher case, with bandages all over you.' Sneringly, she added, 'Only don't count on me to come visiting you in the hospital. Two weeks from now I'll be in Portugal.'

'Portugal?'

'Perron is taking me along as his secretary,' she replied casually.

'Well, well! Isn't he the lucky one,' Lambert said. 'He'll have

you all to himself for a whole month!'

'I'm not as repulsive to everyone as I am to you,' Nadine retorted.

'Yes, nowadays men are easy,' Lambert muttered between his teeth. 'As easy as women.'

'You're a boor!' Nadine shouted.

Irritably, I wondered how they could let themselves be carried away by their childish manoeuvres. I felt certain they could have helped each other to live again; together they could have succeeded in conquering those memories that both united and separated them. But perhaps that was precisely why they tore each other apart: each saw his own faithlessness in the other, and they hated themselves for it. In any event, interfering would have been the worst possible blunder. I let them continue their squabble and quietly left the room. Sézenac followed me into the hall.

'May I have a word with you?' he asked.

'Go ahead.'

'There's a favour,' he said, 'a favour I'd like to ask of you.'

I remember how impressive he looked on the twenty-fifth of August, with his full beard, his rifle, his red sash – a true soldier of 1848. Now his blue eyes were dead, his face puffy; when I shook his hand, I had noticed that his palm was moist.

'I haven't been sleeping well,' he said haltingly. 'I have … I have pains. A friend of mine once gave me an opium suppository and it helped a lot. Only the pharmacists won't sell it without a

prescription …' He looked at me pleadingly.

'What kind of pains?'

'Oh, everywhere. In my head. And worst of all I have nightmares …'

'You can't cure nightmares with opium.'

His forehead, like his hands, grew moist. 'I'll be honest with you. I have a girl friend, a girl I like a lot. In fact, I'm thinking of marrying her. But I … I can't do anything with her without taking opiates.'

'Opium is a narcotic, you know. Do you use it often?' I asked.

He pretended to be shocked by my question. 'Oh, no! Only once in a while, when I spend the night with Lucie.'

'Well, that's not too bad then. You know it's very easy to become addicted to those things.'

He looked at me pleadingly, sweat beading his brow.

'Come see me tomorrow morning,' I said. 'I'll see if I can give you that prescription.'

I went back to my room. He was obviously pretty much an addict already. When had he begun drugging himself? Why? I sighed. Another one I could stretch out on the couch and try to empty. At times, they got on my nerves, all those recliners. Outside, in the world, standing on their own two feet, they did the best they could to play at being adults. But here, in my office, they again became infants with dirty behinds, and it was up to me to wash their childhood away. And yet I spoke to them in an impersonal voice, the voice of reason, of health. Their real lives

were elsewhere; mine too. It wasn't surprising that I was tired of them – and of myself.

I was tired. 'Immaculate kid gloves,' Nadine had said. 'Distant, intimidating,' were Scriassine's words. Is that how I appear to them? Is that how I am? I recalled my childhood rages, the pounding of my adolescent heart, the feverish days of that month of August. But all that was now of the past. The fact is that nothing was stirring inside me any more. I combed my hair and touched up my make-up. You can't go on living indefinitely in fear; it's too tiring. Robert had begun a new book, and he was in high spirits. I no longer awakened at night in a cold sweat. Nevertheless, I was depressed. I could see no reason for being sad. It's just that it makes me unhappy not to feel happy; I must have been badly spoiled. I took my purse and gloves and knocked at Robert's door. I hadn't the least desire to go out.

'Aren't you cold?' I asked. 'Wouldn't you like me to build a little fire?'

He pushed back his chair and smiled at me. 'I'm fine,' he said.

Naturally. Robert always felt fine. For two years, he happily sustained himself on sauerkraut and rutabagas. He was never cold; it seemed almost as if he produced his own warmth, like a yogi. When I return around midnight, he'll still be writing, wrapped in his plaid blanket. And he'll be surprised: 'What time is it, anyhow?' Up to now, he had spoken to me only vaguely of his new book, but I gathered he was satisfied with the way it was going. I sat down.

'Nadine just told me something pretty surprising,' I said. 'She's going to Portugal with Perron.'

He looked up at me quickly. 'Does it upset you?'

'Yes. Perron isn't the kind of person you pick up and drop as you please. She's going to become much too attached to him.'

Robert placed his hand on mine. 'Don't worry about Nadine. First of all, I'd be very surprised if she became attached to Perron. But in any case, it won't take her long to console herself if she does.'

'I hope she isn't going to spend her whole life consoling herself!' I said.

Robert laughed. 'There you go again! You're always shocked when you think of your daughter sleeping around, like a boy. I did exactly the same thing at her age.'

Robert refused to face the fact that Nadine wasn't a boy. 'It's different,' I said. 'The reason Nadine grabs one man after another is that she doesn't feel she's alive when she's alone. That's what worries me.'

'Listen, we know why she hates to be alone. She can still see Diego too clearly.'

I shook my head. 'It's not only because of Diego.'

'I know. You think it's partially our fault,' he said sceptically. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Don't worry,' he said, 'she'll change; she has lots of time to change.'

'Let's hope so.' I looked at Robert pleadingly. 'It's very important to her to have something to do that really interests her.

Give her that secretarial job. She spoke to me about it again just now. She wants it badly.'

'It's not very exciting,' Robert said. 'Typing envelopes and filing all day long. It's a crime to waste her intelligence on a thing like that.'

'But she'll feel she's being useful; it will give her confidence,' I said.

'She could do so much better! She could continue to study.'

'Just now what she needs is to do something. And she'd make a good secretary.' I paused a moment and then added, 'You mustn't ask too much of people.'

For me, Robert's demands had always been a stimulant, but they only succeeded in discouraging Nadine. He gave her no orders; rather, he confided in her, expected things of her, and she played along with him. She had read too many heavy books when she was too young; she had been too precociously part of adult conversations. And so, after a while, she tired of that severe routine. At first, she was disappointed in herself, and now she seemed to enjoy avenging herself by disappointing Robert.

He looked perplexed, as he always did whenever he detected a note of reproach in my voice.

'If you really believe that's what she wants … Well, you know best.'

'I do believe it,' I said.

'All right,' he said. 'Consider it done.'

He had given in too easily. That proved that Nadine had

succeeded only too well in disappointing him. When he can no longer give himself without reserve to something that means much to him, Robert wastes no time in losing all interest in it.

'Of course, a job that would make her completely independent of us would be even better,' I said.

'But that isn't what she really wants; she simply wants to play at being independent,' Robert said sharply. He no longer felt like speaking of Nadine, and I was unable to kindle his enthusiasm for a project of which he disapproved. I let it drop.

'I really can't understand Perron going on that trip,' he said in a livelier tone.

'He wants a holiday,' I replied. 'After all,' I added spiritedly, 'he has the right to enjoy himself a little. He certainly did enough …'

'He did more than I did,' Robert said. 'But that's not the question.' He looked at me intently. 'In order for the SRL to get going, we've got to have a newspaper.'

'I know,' I said. Then I added hesitantly. 'I wonder …'

'What?'

'If Henri will ever turn his paper over to you. It means so much to him.'

'It isn't a question of his turning it over to us,' Robert replied.

'But it is a question of his submitting to the orders of the SRL.'

'He's already a member. And it would certainly be to his advantage to adopt a clearly defined programme; a newspaper without a political programme just doesn't make sense.'

'But that's their idea.'

'You call that an idea?' Robert said, shrugging his shoulders. 'To perpetuate the spirit of the Resistance without taking sides! That sort of jargon is fine for some idiot like Luc. The spirit of the Resistance! It makes me think of the spirit of Locarno. But I'm not worried; Perron isn't the kind to go in for spiritualism. He'll end up by going along with us. But meanwhile we're losing valuable time.'

I was afraid Robert was due for quite a surprise. When he's deeply involved in a project, he thinks of people as mere tools. But Henri had given himself body and soul to that paper; it was his personal achievement and he wasn't going to be casual about letting anyone dictate policy to him.

'Why haven't you spoken to him about it yet?' I asked.

'All Henri has on his mind these days is that trip of his.'

Robert looked so unhappy that I suggested, 'Try to make him stay.'

For Nadine's sake, it would have made me happy to see him give up the trip. But I'd have felt sorry for Henri; he was counting on it so much.

'You know how he is,' Robert said. 'When he's stubborn, he's stubborn. I'd better wait until he gets back.' He drew the blanket over his knees. 'I'm not saying this to chase you out,' he added cheerfully, 'but usually you hate to be late …'

I got up. 'You're right; I should leave now. Are you sure you don't want to come?'

'Oh, no! I haven't the least desire to talk politics with Scriassine. Maybe he'll spare you, though.'

'Let's hope so,' I said.

During those long periods when Robert shut himself in with his work, I often went out without him. But that evening, as I hurried into the cold, into the dark, I was sorry that I had accepted Scriassine's invitation. I understood perfectly well why I hadn't declined: I knew my friends much too well and I was tired of always seeing the same faces. For four years we had lived side by side; it kept one warm. But now, our intimacy had grown cold. It smelled musty and it benefited no one. I had reacted to the appeal of something new. But what would we find to say to each other? Like Robert, I didn't feel like talking politics.

I stopped in the lobby of the Ritz and looked at myself in a mirror. What with clothes rationing, to be well dressed took a lot of doing. I had chosen not to bother myself about it at all. In my threadbare coat and wooden-soled shoes, I didn't look very exciting. My friends accepted me as I was, but Scriassine had just come from America where the women always seem to be so well groomed. He would surely notice my shoes. 'I shouldn't have let myself go like this,' I thought.

Naturally, Scriassine's smile didn't betray him. He kissed my hand, something I hate. A hand is even more naked than a face; it embarrasses me when someone looks at it too closely.

'What will you have?' he asked. 'A martini?'

'A martini will do.'

The was bar filled with American officers and well-dressed women. The heat, the smell of cigarettes, and the strong taste of the gin went to my head immediately, and I was glad to be there. Scriassine had spent four years in America, the great liberating nation, the nation in which fountains spout streams of fruit juices and ice cream. I questioned him avidly and he patiently answered all my questions. We had a second round of martinis and then we had dinner in a little restaurant where I gorged myself without restraint on rare roast beef and cream puffs. Scriassine, in turn, interrogated me; it was difficult to answer his too-precise questions. If I tried to recapture the taste of my daily existence – the smell of cabbage soup in the curfew-barricaded house, the ache in my heart whenever Robert was late in returning from a clandestine meeting – he would sharply interrupt me. He was a very good listener; he made you feel as if he were carefully weighing each of your words. But you had to speak for him, not for yourself. He wanted practical information: how did we go about making up false papers, printing *L'Espoir*, distributing it? And he also asked me to paint vast frescoes for him: What was the moral climate in which we had lived? I tried my best to satisfy him, but I'm afraid I didn't succeed very well; everything had been either worse or more bearable than he imagined. The real tragedies hadn't happened to me, and yet they haunted my life. How could I speak to him of Diego's death? The words were too sad for my mouth, too dry for Diego's memory. I wouldn't have wanted to relive those past four years for anything

in the world. And yet from a distance they seemed to take on a sombre sweetness. I could easily understand why Lambert was bored with this peace which gave us back our lives without giving us back our reasons for living. When we left the restaurant and stepped out into the pitch-black cold, I remembered how proudly we used to face the nights. Now, I longed for light warmth; I, too, wanted something else. Without provocation, Scriassine plunged into a long diatribe; I wished he would change the subject. He was furiously upbraiding de Gaulle for his trip to Moscow. 'The thing that's really serious,' he said to me accusingly, 'is that the whole country seems to approve of it. Look at Perron and Dubreuilh, honest men both, walking hand in hand with the Communists. It's heartbreaking for someone who knows.'

'But Robert isn't with the Communists,' I said, attempting to calm him down. 'He's trying to create an independent movement.'

'Yes, I know; he spoke to me about it. But he made it perfectly clear that he doesn't intend working against the Stalinists. Beside them, but not against them!' Scriassine said crushingly.

'You really wouldn't want him to be anti-Communist, would you?' I asked.

Scriassine looked at me severely. 'Did you read my book *The Red Paradise?'*

'Of course.'

'Then you must have some idea of what would happen to us if we made Stalin a present of Europe.'

'But there's no question of giving Europe to Stalin,' I said.

'That's precisely the question.'

'Nonsense! The question is how to win the struggle against reaction. And if the left begins to split up, we won't have a ghost of a chance.'

'The left!' Scriassine said ironically. 'Let's not talk politics,' he added with an abrupt gesture of finality. 'I hate talking politics with a woman.'

'I didn't start it,' I said.

'You're absolutely right,' he replied with unexpected gravity. 'Please excuse me.'

We went back to the Ritz bar and Scriassine ordered two whiskies. I liked the taste; it was something different. And as for Scriassine, he, too, had the advantage of being new to me. The whole evening had been unexpected, and it seemed to emit an ancient fragrance of youth. Long ago there had been nights that were unlike others; you would meet unknown people who would say unexpected things. And, occasionally, something would happen. So many things had happened in the last five years – to the world, to France, to Paris, to others. But not to me. Would nothing ever happen to me again?

'It's odd being here,' I said.

'Why?'

'The heat, the whisky, the noise, and those uniforms …'

Scriassine glanced around him. 'I hate this place. They requisitioned a room for me here because I'm a reporter for a

Franco-American magazine,' he explained. 'Fortunately, it won't be long before it becomes too expensive for me. And then I'll be forced to get out,' he added with a smile.

'Can't you leave without being forced?'

'No. That's why I find money such a corrupting influence.' A burst of laughter brightened his face. 'As soon as I get hold of some, I can't wait to get rid of it.'

A bald-headed little man with mild and gentle eyes stopped at our table. 'Aren't you Victor Scriassine?' he asked.

'Yes,' Scriassine answered. I caught a mistrustful look in his eyes – and at the same time a gleam of hope.

'Don't you recognize me? Manès Goldman. I've aged a lot since Vienna. I promised myself that if I ever met you again I would say thank you, thank you for your book.'

'Manès Goldman! Of course!' Scriassine said warmly. 'Are you living in France now?'

'Since '35. I spent a year in the camp at Gurs, but I got out just in time …' His voice was even more gentle than his eyes, so gentle in fact that it seemed almost dead. 'I don't want to disturb you any longer; I just want to say I'm very happy to have shaken the hand of the man who wrote *Vienna in Brown.'*

'Nice seeing you again,' Scriassine said.

The little Austrian walked quietly away and went out the glass door behind an American officer. Scriassine followed him with his eyes.

'Another defeat!' he said abruptly.

'A defeat?'

'I should have asked him to sit down, should have spoken to him. He wanted something and I don't even know his address, didn't think to give him mine,' Scriassine said, his voice choked with anger.

'If he wants to see you again, he'll surely come here.'

'He wouldn't dare. It was up to me to make the first move, to make him sit down and question him. And the thing that really hurts is that it would have been so easy! A year at Gurs! And I suppose he spent the other four hiding. He's my age, and he looks like an old man. He was hoping I could do something for him. And I just let him walk away!'

'He didn't seem disappointed. Maybe he did only want to thank you.'

'That was just an excuse,' Scriassine said, emptying his glass. 'It would have been so simple to ask him to sit down. God! when you think of all the things you could do and yet somehow never do! All the opportunities you let slip by! The idea, the inspiration just doesn't come fast enough. Instead of being open, you're closed up tight. That's the worst sin of all – the sin of omission.' He spoke as if I weren't present, in an agonizing monologue of remorse. 'And during those four years, I was in America, warm, safe, well-fed.'

'You couldn't have stayed here,' I said.

'I could have gone into hiding too.'

'I really don't see what good that would have done.'

‘When my friends were exiled to Siberia, I was in Vienna; when others were being slaughtered by the Brown Shirts in Vienna, I was in New York. What’s so damned important about staying alive? That’s the question that needs answering.’

I found myself moved by Scriassine’s voice. We, too, felt ashamed whenever we thought of the deportees. No, we had nothing to blame ourselves for; it was just that we hadn’t suffered enough.

‘The misfortunes you don’t actually share … well, it’s as if you were to blame for them,’ I said. ‘And it’s a horrible thing to feel guilty.’

Suddenly Scriassine smiled at me with a look of secret connivance. ‘That depends,’ he said.

For a moment I studied his crafty, tormented face. ‘Do you mean there are certain feelings of remorse that shield us from others?’

Scriassine studied me in turn. ‘You’re not so dumb, you know. Generally, I dislike intelligent women, maybe because they’re not intelligent enough. They always want to prove to themselves, and to everyone else, how terribly clever they are. So all they do is talk and never understand anything. What struck me the first time I saw you was that way you have of keeping quiet.’

I laughed. ‘I didn’t have much choice.’

‘All of us were doing a lot of talking – Dubreuilh, Perron and myself. You just stood there calmly and listened.’

‘Listening is my job,’ I said.

'Yes, I know, but you have a certain way with you.' He nodded his head. 'You must be an excellent psychiatrist. If I were ten years younger, I'd put myself in your hands.'

'Are you tempted to have yourself analysed?'

'It's too late now. A fully developed man who's used his defects and blemishes to piece himself together. You can ruin him but you can't cure him.'

'That depends on the sickness.'

'There's only one sickness that really amounts to anything – being yourself, just you.' An almost unbearable sincerity suddenly softened his face, and I was deeply touched by the confiding sadness in his voice.

'There are people a lot sicker than you,' I said briskly.

'In what way?'

'There are some people who make you wonder when you look at them, how they can possibly live with themselves. Unless they're complete idiots, they should horrify themselves. You don't seem like that at all.'

Scriassine's face remained grave. 'Do you ever horrify yourself?'

'No,' I said. 'But I'm not very introspective,' I added with a smile.

'That's why you're so relaxing,' Scriassine said. 'The moment I met you I found you relaxing. You gave the impression of being a well-brought-up young girl who always listens quietly while the grown-ups are talking.'

'I have an eighteen-year-old daughter, you know.'

'That doesn't mean anything. Besides, I find young girls insufferable. But a woman who looks like a young girl – that I find charming!' He examined me very closely. 'It's a funny thing. The women in the crowd you go around with are all quite free. But you – one wonders if you've ever deceived your husband.'

'Deceived! What a horrid word! Robert and I are completely free to do as we please; we hide nothing from each other.'

'But have you ever made use of that freedom?'

'Occasionally,' I said. I finished my drink, trying to conceal my embarrasment. There really weren't very many occasions; in that respect, I was quite different from Robert. Picking up a good-looking girl in a bar and spending an hour with her seemed perfectly normal to him. As for me, I could never have accepted a man for a lover if I didn't feel I could become friends with him – and my requirements for friendship are quite exacting. I had lived the last five years in chastity, with no regrets, and I believed I would go on that way forever. It seemed natural to me for my life as a woman to be ended; there were so many things that had ended, forever …

Scriassine silently studied me for a moment and then said, 'In any case, I'll bet there haven't been many men in your life.'

'That's true,' I replied.

'Why not?'

'I suppose the right ones just didn't come along.'

'If the right ones didn't come along, that's simply because you

never looked very hard.'

'Everyone knows me as Dubreuilh's wife, or as Doctor Anne Dubreuilh. Both inspire nothing but respect.'

'Well, I for one don't feel any special respect for you,' Scriassine said, smiling.

There was a brief silence and then I asked, 'Why should a woman who's free to do as she pleases sleep with everyone on earth?'

He looked at me severely. 'If a man, a man for whom you might have a little liking, asked you straight out to spend the night with him, would you do it?'

'That depends.'

'On what?'

'On him, on me, on the circumstances.'

'Let's suppose that I asked you now. What then?'

'I don't know.'

I had seen it coming ever since we broached the subject but, nevertheless I was taken by surprise.

'I am asking you. Which is it – yes or no?'

'You're going a little too fast,' I said.

'I hate a lot of beating around the bush. Paying court to a woman is degrading for both oneself and for the woman. I don't suppose you go for all that sentimental nonsense, either.'

'No, but I like to think things over before I make a decision.'

'Think it over then.'

He ordered two more whiskies. No, I had no desire to sleep

with him, or with any other man. My body had too long been steeped in a sort of selfish torpor. What perverse turn of mind could have made me want to disturb its repose? Besides, it seemed impossible. It always amazed me that Nadine could give herself so easily to total strangers. Between my solitary flesh and the solitary man seated beside me drinking his whisky, not the slightest bond existed. To think of myself naked in his naked arms was as incongruous as imagining him embracing my old mother.

'Let's wait and see how the evening turns out,' I said.

'That's ridiculous,' he replied. 'How can you expect us to talk politics or psychology with that question bothering us? You must know already what you're going to decide. Tell me now.'

His impatience seemed to assure me that, after all, I wasn't my old mother. Since he desired me, I was forced to believe I was desirable, if only for an hour. Nadine claimed she was as indifferent about getting into bed as sitting down at table. Maybe she had the right idea. She accused me of approaching life with white kid gloves. Was it true? What would happen if for once I took off my gloves? If I didn't take them off tonight, would I ever? Reason said to me, 'My life is over.' But against all reason, I still had a good many years to kill.

'All right,' I said abruptly, 'the answer is yes.'

'Ah! now there's a good answer,' he said in the encouraging voice of a doctor or professor. He wanted to take my hand, but I declined that reward.

'I'd like a cup of coffee. I'm afraid I've had a little too much to drink.'

'An American woman would ask for another whisky,' he said with a smile. 'But you're right; it'd be a damn shame if either of us were under the weather.'

He ordered two coffees which we drank in embarrassed silence. I had said yes mainly because I had come to feel a certain affection for him, because of the precarious intimacy he had created between us. But now that yes was beginning to chill my affection.

No sooner had we emptied our cups than he said, 'Let's go up to my room.'

'Right away?'

'Why not? It's obvious we have nothing more to say to each other.'

I could have wished for more time to get accustomed to my decision; I had hoped our pact would generate, little by little, a feeling of complicity. But as a matter of fact, I really didn't have anything more to say.

Suitcases were scattered everywhere about the room. There were two brass beds, one of which was covered with clothing and papers, and on a round coffee table stood several empty champagne bottles. He took me in his arms and I felt a hard yet gentle mouth pressing against my lips. Yes, it was possible, it was easy. Something was happening to me, something different. I closed my eyes and stepped into a dream as lifelike as reality

itself, a dream from which I felt I would awaken at dawn, carefree and lighthearted. And then I heard his voice: 'The little girl seems frightened.' Those words, which hardly had anything to do with me, rudely brought me out of my dream. I pushed myself free.

'Wait a moment,' I said.

I went into the bathroom and hastily freshened up, pushing aside all thoughts; it was too late now to think. He joined me in bed before there was time for any questions to arise in me. I clung tightly to him; at that moment he was my only hope.

At last he said commandingly, 'Open your eyes.'

I raised my eyelids, but they weighed heavily and closed quickly against the light which hurt them. 'Open your eyes,' he was saying. 'It's just you and I.' He was right; I didn't really want to escape, but first I had to grow accustomed to that strange presence. Becoming aware of my flesh, seeing his unfamiliar face, and under his gaze losing myself within myself – it was too much all at once. But since he insisted, I opened my eyes and I looked at him. I looked at him and was halted midway in my inner turmoil, in a region without light and without darkness, where I was neither body nor spirit. He threw off the sheet, and at the same moment it occurred to me that the room was poorly heated and that I no longer had the belly of a young girl. The mutilated flower burst suddenly into bloom, and lost its petals, while he muttered words to himself, for himself, words I tried not to hear. But I … I had lost interest. He came back close to me and for a moment the warmth of his body aroused me again.

'How could I ever feel any tenderness for this man?' I thought. There was a discouraging hostility in his eyes, but I didn't feel guilty towards him, not even by omission.

'Don't worry so much about me. Just let me …'

'You're not really cold,' he said angrily. 'You're resisting with your head. But I'll force you …'

'No,' I said. 'No …'

It would have been too difficult to explain my feeling. There was a look of hate in his eyes and I was ashamed to have let myself be taken in by the mirage of carnal pleasure. A man, I discovered, isn't a Turkish bath.

'You don't want to!' he was saying. 'You don't want to! Stubborn mule!' He struck me lightly on the chin; I was too weary to escape into anger. I began to tremble. A beating fist, thousands of fists … 'Violence is everywhere,' I thought. I trembled and tears began running down my cheeks.

Now, he was kissing my eyes, murmuring, 'I'm drinking your tears,' and a conquering tenderness appeared in his face, a childlike tenderness, and I had pity as much for him as for myself. Both of us were equally lost, equally disillusioned. I smoothed his hair; I asked, 'Why do you hate me?'

'It has to be,' he said regretfully. 'It just has to be.'

'But I don't hate you, you know. In fact I like being in your arms.'

'Do you really mean that?'

'Yes, I do.'

In a sense I did mean it; something was happening. True, it had missed the mark, was sad, ridiculous even, but it was real.

'It's been a strange night,' I said with a smile. 'I've never spent a night like this before.'

'Never? Not even with younger men? You're not lying to me, are you?'

The words had lied for me. I endorsed their lie. 'Never.'

He crushed me ardently against him. 'All right?'

I knew my pleasure found no echo in his heart, and if I impatiently awaited his it was only to be done with it. And yet I had been subdued, was willing to sigh, to moan. But not very convincingly, I imagine.

He, too, had been subdued, for he didn't insist. Almost immediately, he fell asleep against me; I also dozed off. The weight of his arm across my chest awakened me.

'You're here! Thank God!' he exclaimed, opening his eyes. 'I was having a nightmare; I always have nightmares.' He seemed to be speaking from very far off, from the darkest depths of night. 'Don't you have a place where you can hide me?'

'Hide you?'

'Yes. It would be so wonderful to just disappear. Can't we disappear for a few days?'

'I have no place. And I can't get away myself.'

'What a shame!' he said, and then asked, 'Don't you ever have nightmares?'

'Not very often.'

'I envy you! I always have someone near me at night.'

'I have to leave soon, you know,' I said.

'Not right away. Don't go. Don't leave me!' He grabbed me by the shoulders. I was a life preserver. But in what shipwreck?

'I'll wait till you fall asleep,' I said. 'Would you like to meet me again tomorrow?'

'Yes, certainly. I'll be at the café next door to your place at noon. Is that all right with you?'

'Fine. Now try to sleep quietly.'

As soon as his breathing grew heavy, I slipped out of bed. It was hard for me to tear myself from the night which clung so tenaciously to my skin. But I didn't want to arouse Nadine's suspicions. Each of us had her own way of duping the other: she told me everything; I told her nothing. As I stood before the mirror, transforming my face into a mask of decency, I realized Nadine had been one of the main reasons for my decision to say yes to Scriassine, and I couldn't help myself from holding it against her. Yet I really hadn't the least regret for what I had done. You learn so many things about a man when you're in bed with him, much more than when you have him maunder for weeks on a couch. Only I was far too vulnerable for this sort of experiment.

I was kept very busy all morning. Sézenac didn't come, but I had quite a few other patients. I had only a vague impression of Scriassine, and I needed to see him again. Our night together was resting heavily on my heart, incomplete, absurd. I hoped that in talking to him we would be able to bring it to a conclusion,

to save it perhaps. I was the first to arrive at the café, a small place, painted bright red, with highly polished tables. I had often bought cigarettes there, but I had never sat down. Couples were sitting in booths and talking quietly. A waiter appeared and I ordered a glass of ersatz port. I felt as if I were in a strange city; I no longer seemed to know what I was waiting for. Suddenly Scriassine burst into the café and walked hurriedly over to my table.

'Sorry I'm late. I had a dozen appointments this morning.'

'That makes it all the nicer of you to have come.'

He smiled at me. 'Sleep well?'

'Very well.'

He, too, ordered a glass of ersatz port and then leaned towards me. There was no longer any trace of hostility in his face. 'I'd like to ask you a question.'

'Go ahead.'

'Why did you agree so readily to go up to my room with me?'

I smiled. 'I suppose it's because I like you a little,' I replied.

'You weren't drunk?'

'Not at all.'

'And you weren't sorry afterwards?'

'No.'

He hesitated. I gathered he was anxious to obtain a detailed commentary for his most intimate catalogue. 'There's one thing I'd like to know. You said you'd never spent a night like that before. Is that true?'

'Yes and no,' I answered with a slightly embarrassed laugh.

'That's what I thought,' he said, disappointed. 'It's never really true.'

'It's true at the moment; less so the next day.'

He swallowed the sticky wine in a single gulp.

'You know what chilled me?' I said. 'There were moments when you looked so terribly hostile.'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'That couldn't be helped.'

'Why? The struggle between the sexes?'

'We're not on the same side. I mean, politically.'

For a moment I was stupefied. 'But politics has so little place in my life!'

'Indifference is also a stand,' he said sharply. 'You see, in politics if you're not completely with me you're very far from me.'

'Then you shouldn't have asked me to go up to your room,' I said reproachfully.

A sly smile wrinkled his eyes. 'If I really want a woman, it's all the same to me whether she agrees with my politics or not. I wouldn't even have any qualms about sleeping with a fascist.'

'But apparently it isn't all the same to you, since you were hostile.'

He smiled again. 'In bed, it's not bad to hate each other a little.'

'That's horrible,' I said, staring at him. 'You're quite an introvert, aren't you? You can pity people and feel remorse for them, but I doubt if you could ever really like anyone.'

'Ah! so you're the one who's doing the analysing today,' he said. 'Go on; I love being analysed.'

In his eyes I saw the same look of maniacal greed I had noticed the night before when he looked down at my naked body. I could not have tolerated it except in a child or a sick person.

'You believe loneliness can be cured by force; but in making love, there's no greater blunder.'

He got the point. 'What you're saying is that last night was a failure. Is that right?'

'More or less.'

'Would you be willing to begin all over again?'

I hesitated. 'Yes. I don't like to stop at a failure.'

His face hardened. 'That's a pretty poor reason,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'You don't make love with your head.'

That was precisely my opinion. If his words and desires had wounded me, it was because they came from his head. 'I think both of us do things too much with our heads,' I said.

'In that case, I suppose it'd be better if we didn't try again,' he said.

'Yes, I suppose so.'

Yes, a second failure would have been even more disastrous than the first, and a happy outcome was inconceivable. We had absolutely no love at all for each other. Even talk was useless; there had been nothing worth saving and the whole affair, in any case, didn't lend itself to a conclusion. We politely exchanged a few idle words and then I went home.

I hold nothing against him, and I hold hardly anything against myself. Besides, as Robert told me immediately, the whole thing was quite unimportant – nothing but a distasteful remembrance lingering in our minds and concerning no one but ourselves. But when I went up to my room, I promised myself I would never again attempt to remove my kid gloves. 'It's too late,' I murmured, looking into the mirror. 'My gloves are grafted to my flesh now; they'd have to skin me alive to get them off.' No, it wasn't only Scriassine's fault that things turned out the way they did; it was my fault too. I had slept with him out of curiosity, out of defiance, out of weariness, to prove to myself God only knows what. Well, whatever it was, I certainly proved the contrary. I thought casually that my life might have been different. I might have dressed more elegantly, gone out more often, known the little pleasures of vanity or the burning fevers of the senses. But it was too late. And then all at once I understood why my past sometimes seemed to me to be someone else's. Because now I am someone else, a woman of thirty-nine, a woman who's aware of her age!

'Thirty-nine years!' I said aloud. Before the war I was too young for the years to have weighed upon me. And then for five years, I forgot myself completely. And now I've found myself again, only to learn that I'm condemned. Old age is awaiting me; there's no escaping it. Even now I can see its beginnings in the depths of the mirror. Oh, I'm still a woman, I still bleed every month. Nothing's really changed, except that now I know. I ran

my fingers through my hair. Those white streaks are no longer a curiosity, a sign; they're the beginning. In a few years, my head will be the colour of my bones. My face still seems smooth and firm, but overnight the mask will melt, laying bare the rheumy eyes of an old woman. Each year the seasons repeat themselves; wounds are healed. But there's no way in the world to halt the infirmities of age. 'There isn't even any time left to worry about it,' I thought, turning away from my reflection. 'It's even too late for regrets. There's nothing left to do but to keep going.'

CHAPTER THREE

Nadine went to meet Henri several evenings in a row at the offices of the newspaper. One night, in fact, they even took a room in a hotel again, but it didn't amount to much. For Nadine, making love was clearly a tedious occupation and Henri, too, tired quickly of it. But he enjoyed going out with her, watching her eat, hearing her laugh, talking to her. She was blind to a great many things, but she reacted strongly to those she did see – and without ever cheating. He was convinced she would make a pleasant travelling companion, was touched by her eagerness. Each time she saw him she would ask, 'Did you talk to her about it yet?' And he would answer, 'No, not yet.' She would lower her head in such utter desolation that it made him feel guilty, made him feel as if he were depriving her of all those things she had for so long gone without: sun, plenty of food, a real trip. Since he had decided in any case to break off with Paula, why not let Nadine profit from it? Besides, it would be a lot better for Paula's sake if he explained things to her before leaving, rather than let her ruin herself with hope while he was gone. When he was away from her, he felt he was in the right; he had rarely acted falsely towards her and she was only lying to herself when she pretended to believe in the resurrection of a dead and buried past. But when he was with her, it often occurred to him that he, too, might be at fault. 'Am I a bastard for not loving her any more?' he would

ask himself, watching her come and go in the apartment. 'Or was I wrong ever to love her in the first place?'

He had been at the Dôme with Julien and Louis and seated at the next table, making a great show of reading *The Accident*, was a woman of extraordinary beauty, dressed from head to foot in mauve. She had placed her long violet gloves on the table and, as Henri arose to leave, he remarked, 'What beautiful gloves!'

'Do you like them? Take them, they're yours.'

'And just what, may I ask, would I do with them?'

'You can keep them as a souvenir of our first meeting.'

They exchanged a soft, lingering look. A few hours later he was holding her naked body in his arms and saying, 'You're too beautiful, much too beautiful.' No, he really couldn't blame himself. How could he have helped but be captivated by Paula's beauty, by her voice, by the mystery of her words, by the distant wisdom in her smile? She was slightly older than he, knew many things of which he was ignorant and which seemed at that time much more important to him than the bigger things. What he admired in her above all was her complete disdain for worldly goods; she soared in some supernatural region, and he despaired of ever joining her there. He was amazed that she permitted herself to become flesh in his arms. 'Naturally, it went to my head a little,' he admitted to himself. And she, for her part, had believed in his declarations of eternal love and in the miracle of being herself. Therein no doubt was where he had been guilty – by first exalting Paula immoderately and then too lucidly taking

her true measure. Yes, they had both made mistakes. But that wasn't the question; the question now was to break it off. He turned over words in his mind. Did she have any suspicion of what was about to come? Generally, when he remained silent for any length of time, she was quick to question him.

'Why are you moving things around?' he asked.

'Don't you think the room looks nicer this way?'

'Would you mind sitting down for just a minute?'

'Why? Am I annoying you?'

'No, not at all. But I'd like to have a talk with you.'

She let out a choked little laugh. 'How solemn you look! You aren't going to tell me you don't love me any more, are you?'

'No.'

'Then anything else does not matter.' She sat down, leaning towards him with a patient, slightly mocking expression. 'Go ahead, darling, I'm listening.'

'Loving or not loving each other isn't the only thing in the world,' he said.

'To me, it's all that matters.'

'But not to me; I'm sure you know that. There are other things that count, too.'

'Yes, I know – your work, travelling. I've never tried to dissuade you from them.'

'There's another thing that's important to me, and I've told you this often – my freedom.'

She smiled again. 'Now don't tell me I haven't given you

enough freedom!'

'As much as living together permits, I suppose. But for me, freedom means first of all solitude. Do you remember when I first came here to stay? We agreed then that it would only be till the end of the war.'

'I didn't think I was a burden on you,' she said, no longer smiling.

'No one could be less of a burden than you. But I do think it was better when we lived apart.'

Paula smiled. 'You used to come here every night. You used to say you couldn't sleep without me.'

True, he had told her that, but only during the first year, not after. He didn't, however, contest the point. 'All right,' he said, 'but at least I used to work in my room at the hotel …'

'That room was just one of your youthful whims,' she replied in an indulgent voice. 'No promiscuity, no living together – you must admit your code was rather abstract. I really can't believe you still take it seriously.'

'But it's not at all abstract. When two people live together, you can't avoid building up tensions on the one hand and becoming negligent on the other. I realize I'm often disagreeable and negligent, and I know it hurts you. It would be much better for us not to see each other except when we really felt like it.'

'But I always feel like seeing you,' she said reprovingly.

'When I'm tired, or out of sorts, or when I'm working, I prefer being alone,' Henri said coldly.

Again Paula smiled. 'You're going to be alone for a whole month. When you get back, we'll see whether or not you've changed your mind.'

'No,' he said firmly, 'it won't change.'

Suddenly, Paula's smile vanished and a look of fear appeared on her face. 'Promise me one thing,' she murmured.

'What?'

'That you'll never live with another woman.'

'What an idiotic notion! Don't be a fool! Of course I promise.'

'Then I suppose you can go back to your cherished old habits,' she said with resignation.

He studied her curiously. 'Why did you make me promise that?'

Again a look of panic appeared in Paula's eyes. She was silent for a moment. 'Oh, I know that no other woman could ever take my place in your life,' she finally said. There was a false calmness in her voice. 'But I cling to symbols, you know.' She started to get up, as if she dreaded hearing any more. He stopped her.

'Wait,' he said. 'I want to be completely frank with you. I'll never live with another woman. Never. But I have an urge to do things, meet new people, have a few little affairs. I think it's because of these four years of austerity we've just gone through.'

'But you are having an affair now, aren't you?' Paula said calmly. 'With Nadine.'

'How do you know?'

'You don't lie very well.'

At times she was so completely blind – and at times so clear-sighted! He was disconcerted. 'I was an idiot not to talk to you about it,' he said embarrassed. 'I was afraid of hurting you. But there's absolutely no reason for you to feel hurt; practically nothing has happened, and it won't last long, in any case.'

'Don't let it upset you. I'm not one to be jealous of a child, especially Nadine!' She walked over to Henri and sat down on the arm of his chair. 'On Christmas Eve I told you a man like you isn't subject to the same laws as other men. I still believe that. There's a commonplace form of faithfulness that I'll never demand of you. Have a good time with Nadine, and anyone else you like.' She ruffled Henri's hair. 'You see how much I respect your freedom!'

'Yes,' he said. He was both relieved and disappointed; his too-easy victory led him nowhere. He felt he had to carry it at least to its conclusion. 'As a matter of fact, Nadine doesn't have a shadow of feeling for me. All she wants is for me to take her along. But it's completely understood that we'll stop seeing each other just as soon as we get back.'

'Take her with you?'

'Yes, she's going to Portugal with me.'

'No!' Paula exclaimed. Suddenly her serene mask shattered into a thousand pieces and Henri saw before him a face of flesh and bones, with trembling lips and eyes glistening with tears. 'You said you couldn't take me!'

'You didn't seem anxious to go, so I didn't try very hard.'

'I wasn't anxious! I'd have given an arm to go with you! Only I thought you wanted to be alone. I'm perfectly willing to sacrifice myself to your beloved solitude,' she cried out in revolt, 'but not to Nadine! No!'

'It doesn't make much difference whether I take Nadine or whether I go alone, since you say you're not jealous of her,' he said bitingly.

'It makes all the difference in the world!' she replied, her voice breaking with emotion. 'Alone, I would still be with you, in a way; we would still be together. The first trip since the war! You haven't any right to take someone else.'

'Listen,' he said, 'if you see any sort of symbolism in this trip, you're completely wrong. Nadine simply wants to see something of the world. She's just an unhappy kid who's never had a chance to see anything, and it would make me feel good to give her this pleasure. And that's all there is to it.'

'If that is really all there is to it,' Paula said slowly, 'then don't take her.' She looked at Henri pleadingly. 'I ask it of you in the name of our love.'

They looked at each other silently for a moment. Paula's whole face was a longing plea. But suddenly Henri grew stubborn. He felt as if he were facing an armed torturer rather than a woman at her wits' end. 'You have just told me that you respected my freedom,' he said.

'Yes,' she replied fiercely. 'But if you wanted to destroy yourself I'd try to stop you. And I'm not going to let you betray

our love.'

'In other words, I'm free to do as you please,' he said ironically.

'How can you be so unfair!' she said, sobbing. 'I'd take anything from you, anything! But I know inside me I mustn't take this. No one but I should be going with you.'

'That's your opinion,' he said.

'But it's obvious!'

'Not to me.'

'Because you're blind, because you want to be blind. Listen,' she said, forcing her voice to be calm, 'you're really interested in that girl, and you see how much you're hurting me. Please don't take her.'

Henri was silent for a moment. There wasn't very much he could say in answer to that argument, and he resented it as much as if Paula had used physical force to stop him.

'All right,' he said finally, 'I won't take her!' He got up and walked towards the stairway. 'Only don't talk to me any more about freedom!'

Paula followed him and put her hand on his shoulder. 'Does your freedom have to make me suffer?'

He shook off her hand. 'If you suffer when I do what I want to, then I'll have to choose between you and my freedom.'

He took a step away from Paula, and she cried out to him anxiously. There was panic in her eyes. 'Henri,' she pleaded, 'what do you mean by that?'

'Just what I said.'

'You're not going to destroy our love on purpose, are you?'

He turned and faced her. 'All right!' he said. 'Since you insist on it, let's have it out once and for all!' He was irritated enough by now to want to get to the very heart of the matter. 'There's a basic misunderstanding between us. We don't have the same conception of love …'

'There's no misunderstanding,' Paula said quickly. 'I know what you're going to say – my love is my whole life and you want it to be only a part of yours. I know, and I agree.'

'Yes, but with that as a start, there are other questions that have to be answered,' Henri said.

'Oh, no,' Paula said. 'It's all so stupid,' she added in an agitated voice. 'You're not going to question our love just because I've asked you not to take Nadine!'

'I'm not taking her. That part is settled. But there's something entirely different involved.'

'Listen,' Paula said abruptly, 'let's get it over with. If you absolutely must take her with you to prove you're free, then take her with you. I don't want you to think of me as a tyrant.'

'I certainly will not take her if you're going to eat your heart out the whole time I'm away.'

'I'd eat my heart out even more if you chose to destroy our love out of spite.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'You're capable of doing it too. Your least little whims are so important to you!'

She looked at him imploringly, hopefully waiting for him to say, 'I hold no grudge against you.' She could wait a long time

for him to say it. She sighed. 'You love me,' she said, 'but you're never willing to sacrifice anything for our love. It always has to be me who gives everything.'

'Paula,' he said amicably, 'if I make that trip with Nadine, I repeat to you again that when we get back I'll stop seeing her, and nothing will be changed between you and me.'

Paula remained silent. 'I'm blackmailing her, that's just what it amounts to,' Henri thought. 'It's rather disgraceful.' And the ugliest part of it was that Paula was aware of it, and would play at being the generous one, knowing all the time that she was accepting a rather sordid bargain. But what of it! You want what you want. And what he wanted was to take Nadine.

'Do as you please,' Paula said with a sigh. 'I suppose I give too much importance to symbols. Really, it makes hardly any difference whether the girl goes with you, or not.'

'It makes no difference whatsoever,' Henri said emphatically.

During the days that followed, Paula didn't mention the matter again. Except that with each of her gestures, with her every silence, she was saying, 'I'm defenceless, and you're taking advantage of it.' It was true she had no weapons to fight back with, not even the most ineffectual. But her defencelessness was itself a trap; it left Henri no choice but to become either the hangman or the hanged. He had no desire to play the hanged, but the trouble was that neither was he a hangman.

The night he met Nadine on one of the platforms of the Gare d'Austerlitz, he had a gnawing, uneasy feeling inside him.

'You're not early,' she grumbled.

'I'm not late, either.'

'Let's hurry and get on. If the train should leave …'

'It won't leave ahead of schedule.'

'You can never tell.'

They boarded the train and chose an empty compartment. With a perplexed look on her face, Nadine stood motionless for a long moment between the two seats. Then she sat down next to the window, her back to the locomotive. After a moment, she opened her suitcase and began preparing for the night with the meticulous care of an old maid. She slipped on a bathrobe and slippers, wrapped a blanket around her legs, and propped a pillow under her head. From a small basket that served her as a purse, she took a stick of chewing gum. Then she remembered that Henri was present and smiled at him engagingly.

'Did she moan very much when she saw you were dead set on taking me?'

Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'Naturally, she wasn't overjoyed.'

'What did she say?'

'It's none of your business,' he said dryly.

'But I'd really like to know.'

'And I really don't want to tell you about it.'

She took a garnet-coloured piece of knitting from her basket and began clicking the needles together while chewing her gum. 'She's laying it on too thick,' Henri thought peevishly. Perhaps

she was annoying him on purpose because she suspected his remorse and felt that he was still, in spirit, in the red apartment. Actually Paula had kissed him good-bye without tears. 'Have a nice trip,' she had said. But at this very moment, he knew she would be weeping. 'I'll write to her as soon as I get there,' he promised himself.

The train got under way and sped through the sad dusk of the Parisian suburbs. Henri opened a detective story and glanced quickly at the sullen face opposite him. At the moment, he could do nothing about Paula's unhappiness, but there was no point in spoiling Nadine's pleasure, too. He made an effort and said cheerfully, 'Tomorrow at this time we'll be passing through Spain.'

'Yes.'

'They're not expecting me so soon in Lisbon. We'll have two whole days all to ourselves.'

Nadine did not answer. For a moment or so, she continued to knit diligently, and then she stretched herself out on the seat, stuffed a ball of wax in each ear, tied a kerchief around her eyes and turned her back on Henri. 'And I was hoping Nadine's smiles would make up for Paula's tears!' he said to himself. He closed the book and turned out the lights. The blue paint that had covered the train windows during the war had been scraped off, but the fields outside were completely black under the starless sky. Inside the compartment, it was cold. Why, he wondered, was he in this train, opposite that almost total stranger who was

breathing heavily in her sleep? Suddenly, it seemed impossible that the past would really be waiting for him in Lisbon.

'She could at least be a little more agreeable!' he said to himself angrily the next morning as the train made its way towards the border. When they had changed trains at Hendaye, where a light breeze and the warm sun played against their skins, Nadine hadn't so much as smiled; instead, she yawned unrestrainedly while their passports were being checked. Now she was walking in front of him with her long boyish strides as he struggled with their two heavy suitcases, growing hotter by the minute under the unaccustomed sun. He looked with distaste at her strong, rather hairy legs; her socks underlined their ungracious bareness. Behind them, a barrier closed; for the first time in six years he was walking on soil that wasn't French. Another barrier rose before them and he heard Nadine cry out unbelievingly: 'Oh!' It was an impassioned sound, a sound he had tried in vain to wring from her with his caresses.

'Oh! Look!'

Alongside the road next to a burned-out house was a stand covered with oranges, bananas, chocolate. Nadine rushed over to it, grabbed two oranges and handed one to Henri. At sight of this carefree joy, so completely cut off from France by only a little over a mile, he felt that hard black thing inside his chest, that thing which for four years had taken the place of his heart, suddenly become soft wax. He had looked unflinchingly at pictures of Dutch children starving to death; now, at the sight

of that sudden burst of joy, he felt like sitting down at the edge of the road, his head in his hands, and never moving again.

Nadine's good humour came back. She gorged herself on fruits and candies all across the Basque countryside and the Castilian desert, looked smilingly at the clear Spanish skies. They spent one more night stretched out on the dusty seats. In the morning they followed the course of a pale blue stream which wound its way among countless olive groves. Gradually the stream turned into a river and finally a lake. And then the train stopped. They were in Lisbon.

'All those taxis!' Nadine exclaimed.

A line of taxis was waiting in the driveway of the station. Henri checked the suitcases in the baggage room, got into a cab with Nadine, and said to the chauffeur, 'Drive us around.' Nadine gripped his arm and cried out in terror as they plummeted down steep streets at a speed that seemed dizzying to them; they had forgotten what it was like to ride in a car. Henri laughed along with Nadine and held her arm tightly. He turned his head rapidly from side to side, joyful and yet incredulous. The past was there to meet him; he recognized it. A southern city, a fresh, hot city with its ancient clanking streetcars, and on the horizon the promise of salty winds and the sea beating against high walls. Yes, he recognized it, and yet it astonished him more than ever had Marseilles, Athens, Naples, Barcelona. Because now everything new, everything unknown, was a thing to be marvelled at. It was beautiful, that capital, with its quiet heart, its

unruly hills, its houses with pastel-coloured icing, its huge white ships.

'Let us off somewhere in the centre of town,' Henri said. The taxi stopped at a large square surrounded by cinemas and cafés. Seated at tables in front of the cafés were men in dark suits. No women sat there. The women were busily moving along the shop-lined street which led down to the estuary. Suddenly Henri and Nadine stopped dead simultaneously.

'Will you please look at that!'

Leather! real thick, supple leather! You could almost smell it through the shop window. Cowhide suitcases, pigskin gloves, tawny-coloured shoes you could walk in without squeaking, without getting your feet wet. Real silk, real wool, flannel suits, poplin shirts! It suddenly occurred to Henri that he looked rather seedy in his suit of ersatz cloth and his cracked shoes with their upturned tips. And alongside the women in their furs and their silk stockings and hand-made pumps, Nadine looked like a rag picker.

'Tomorrow we're going to buy things,' he said. 'A lot of things!'

'It just doesn't seem real!' Nadine exclaimed. 'I wonder what everyone in Paris would say if they saw all this!'

'Exactly what we're saying,' Henri replied, laughing.

They stopped before a pastry shop, and this time it wasn't a look of greed, but rather one of shock which appeared on Nadine's face. Henri, too, stood there for a moment, frozen in

unbelief. Then, 'Let's go in,' he said, nudging Nadine.

Except for an old man and a little boy, there were only women seated around the tables, women with oily hair, weighed down with furs, jewels, and fat, religiously performing their daily gorging. Two little girls with black braided hair, wearing blue sashes across their chests and a lot of religious medallions around their necks, were sitting quietly at a table casually sipping thick hot chocolate overflowing with whipped cream.

'Do you want one?' Henri asked.

Nadine nodded. A few minutes later, a waitress placed a cup of chocolate before her, but when Nadine brought it to her lips the blood drained from her face. 'I can't,' she said. 'My stomach just isn't used to it any more,' she added apologetically. But it wasn't her stomach that had rebelled; she had suddenly thought of something – or someone. He did not question her.

Crisp, fresh cretonne curtains hung in their hotel room; in the bathroom there was hot water, real soap, and soft, fluffy terry-cloth robes. All of Nadine's gayness came back to her. She insisted upon rubbing Henri with a rough bath-glove, and when his skin was red and burning from head to foot she laughingly tumbled him on to the bed. And she made love with such high spirits that it seemed as if she actually enjoyed it. The next morning they went to the shopping district, and her eyes shone as she fingered the rich silks and wools with her rough hands.

'Were there ever such beautiful shops in Paris?'

'Much more beautiful. Don't you remember?'

'I never went to the expensive shops. I was too young.' She looked hopefully at Henri. 'Do you think we'll have them again some day?'

'Some day, maybe.'

'But how are they so rich here? I thought Portugal was a poor country.'

'It's a poor country, with some very rich people.'

For themselves and for their friends in Paris, they bought materials, stockings, underclothes, shoes, sweaters. They lunched in a basement restaurant the walls of which were covered with colourful posters of mounted picadors defying furious bulls. 'Meat or fish – even they have their shortages!' Nadine said laughingly, as they ate steaks the colour of cinders. Afterwards, in their supple, thick-soled, blatant yellow shoes, they wandered along cobblestoned streets which rose towards the working-class quarters. At one street corner barefoot children were solemnly watching a faded puppet show. The sidewalks became narrow, the fronts of the houses scaly.

A shadow darkened Nadine's face. 'It's disgusting, this street. Are there many like this?'

'There are.'

'It doesn't seem to upset you.'

He was in no mood for indignation. In fact, it even gave him a twinge of pleasure to see again the multi-coloured wash drying at sun-drenched windows above the streets' shadowy crevasses. They walked down a passageway in silence. Suddenly,

Nadine stopped in the middle of the greasy, stone stairway. 'It's disgusting!' she repeated. 'Let's get out of it.'

'Let's go on just a little farther,' Henri said.

In Marseilles, Naples, Piraeus, in Chinatowns of many cities, he had spent hours wandering through these same squalid streets. Of course, then as now, he wished that all this misery could be done away with. But the wish remained an abstract thing. He had never felt like running away, and the overpowering human odour of these streets went to his head. From the top of the hill to the bottom, the same swarming multitudes, the same blue sky burning above the roof tops. It seemed to Henri that from one moment to the next he would rediscover his old joy in all its intensity. That was what he sought from street to street. But it wouldn't come back. Barefooted women – everyone here went barefooted – were squatting before their doors frying sardines over charcoal fires, and the stench of stale fish mingled in the air with the smell of hot oil. In cellar apartments opening on to the street, not a bed, not a piece of furniture, not a picture; nothing but straw mats, children covered with rashes, and from time to time a goat. Outside, no happy voices, no laughter; only sombre dead eyes. Was misery more hopeless here than in the other cities? Or instead of becoming hardened to misfortune, does one grow more sensitive to it? The blue of the sky seemed cruel above the unhealthy shadows; he began to share Nadine's silent dismay. They passed a haggard-looking woman dressed in black rags who was scurrying through the street with a child

clinging to her bare breast, and Henri said abruptly, 'You're right; let's get out.'

But the next day, at a cocktail party given at the French Consulate, Henri found that it was useless to have tried to flee from that wretched hill. The table was laden with sandwiches and rich cakes, the women were wearing dresses in colours he had long ago forgotten, every face was smiling, all were speaking French, and the Hill of Grace, for a time, seemed far off, in a completely foreign country whose misfortunes were no concern of his. He was laughing politely with the others when old Mendoz das Viernas came and led him off to a corner of the drawing-room. He was wearing a stiff collar and a black tie; before Salazar's dictatorship, he had been a cabinet minister. He looked at Henri suspiciously.

'What is your impression of Lisbon?' he asked.

'It's a very beautiful city,' Henri answered. He saw das Viernas' face darken and he hastily added with a smile, 'I must say, though, I haven't seen very much of it.'

'Usually, the French who come here somehow manage to see nothing at all,' das Viernas said bitterly. 'Your Valéry, for example. He admired the sea, the gardens, but for the rest – a blind man.' The old man paused a moment. 'And you? Do you also intend to blindfold yourself?'

'On the contrary!' Henri said. 'I intend to keep my eyes as wide open as I can.'

'Ah! From what they have told me of you, that is what I had

hoped,' das Viernas said, his voice gentler now. 'We shall make an appointment for tomorrow and I shall then show you Lisbon. A beautiful façade, isn't it? But you will see what is behind it!'

'I've already taken a walk on the Hill of Grace,' Henri said.

'But you did not go into the houses! I want you to see for yourself what the people eat, how they live. You would not believe me if I told you.' Das Viernas shrugged his shoulders. 'All that writing about the melancholy of the Portuguese and how mysterious it is. Actually it's ridiculously simple: of seven million Portuguese, there are only seventy thousand who have enough to eat.'

It was impossible to get out of it. Henri spent the following morning visiting a series of wretched hovels. At the end of the afternoon, the former cabinet minister gathered his friends for the sole purpose of having them meet him. It was impossible to refuse. All of them were wearing dark suits, stiff collars, and bowlers; they spoke ceremoniously but every now and then a look of hatred crossed their sensitive faces. They were mostly former cabinet members, former journalists, former professors who had been crushed because of their obstinate refusal to rally to the new régime. All of them were poor and trapped, many had relatives in France who had been deported. Those who stubbornly continued to take what action they could knew that the Island of Hell awaited them. A doctor who treated poverty-stricken people without remuneration, who tried to open a clinic or introduce a little hygiene into the hospitals, was immediately suspect.

Whosoever dared organize an evening course, whosoever made a generous gesture, or simply a charitable one, was branded enemy of both Church and State. And yet they doggedly persisted. They wanted to believe that the destruction of Nazism would somehow bring to an end this hypocritical fascism, and they dreamed constantly of overthrowing Salazar and creating a National Front like the one which had been formed in France. But they knew they were alone: the English capitalists had large interests in Portugal and the Americans were negotiating with the government for the purchase of air bases in the Azores. 'France is our only hope,' they repeated over and over. 'Tell the people of France the truth,' they begged. 'They do not know; if they knew they would come to our rescue.'

They imposed daily meetings on Henri, overwhelmed him with facts, figures, statistics, took him for walks through the starving villages surrounding Lisbon. It wasn't exactly the kind of holiday he had dreamed of, but he had no choice. He promised that he would wage a campaign in the press in order to get the facts to the people. Political tyranny, economic exploitation, police terror, the systematic brutalization of the masses, the clergy's shameful complicity – he would tell everything. 'If Carmona knew that France was willing to support us, he would join our ranks,' das Viernas said. Years ago he had known Bidault, and he was thinking of suggesting to him a kind of secret treaty: in exchange for France's backing, the future Portuguese government would be able to offer advantageous

trade concessions in connection with the African colonies. It would have been difficult to explain to him, without being brutal, how completely fantastic his project was!

'I'll see Tournelle, his administrative assistant,' Henri promised on the eve of his departure for Algarve. 'He was a friend of mine in the Resistance.'

'I shall map out a precise path and entrust it to you when you return,' das Viernas said.

Henri was glad to get out of Lisbon. For greater convenience in making his round of lectures, the French Consulate loaned him a car and told him to keep it as long as he wanted. At last he would have a real holiday! Unfortunately, his new-found friends were counting on his spending his last week in Portugal conspiring with them. While he was away, they were going to assemble exhaustive documentation and also arrange for meetings with certain Communists from the Zamora dockyards. Turning them down was unthinkable.

'That means we have exactly two weeks and no more to see the country,' Nadine said sulkily.

They dined that night at a roadside inn on the opposite bank of the Tagus. A waitress served them slices of fried codfish and a bottle of cloudy pink wine. Through the window they could see the lights of Lisbon rising tier upon tier between the water and the sky.

'With a car, you can cover an awful lot of ground in two weeks!' Henri said. 'Do you realize what a stroke of luck that

was?'

'Exactly. And it's a shame we can't take more advantage of it.'

'Those men are all counting on me; I'd really be a louse to disappoint them, wouldn't I?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'There's nothing you can do for them.'

'I can speak for them. That's my job. If I can't at least do that, there's no point in my being a newspaperman.'

'Maybe there isn't.'

'Don't start thinking already about going back,' he said soothingly. 'Just think of the wonderful trip ahead of us. Look at those little lights along the water; they're pretty, aren't they?'

'What's so pretty about them?' Nadine asked. It was just the sort of irritating question she enjoyed asking. 'No, seriously,' she added, 'what makes you think they're pretty?'

Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'They're pretty, that's all.'

She pressed her forehead agains the window. 'They might be pretty if you didn't know what's behind them. But once you know, it's … it's just another fraud,' she concluded bitterly. 'I hate that filthy city.'

It was a fraud, no doubt of it. And yet he was unable to keep from seeing a certain beauty in those lights. No longer did he fool himself about the hot stench of poverty, the colourfulness of rags and tatters, but those little flames twinkling along the edge of the dark waters moved him in spite of everything. Perhaps it was because they made him recall a time when he was unaware of

the reality hiding behind appearances, or perhaps it was nothing but the memory of an illusion that made him like them. He looked at Nadine – eighteen years old and not a single illusion to remember! He at least had a past. 'And a present, and a future,' he said to himself. 'Fortunately, there are still some things left in the world to like.'

And there were, fortunately. What a joy to have a wheel in your hands again! And those roads stretching out before you as far as the eye can reach! The first day out, after all those years of not having driven, Henri felt unsure of himself. The car seemed endowed with a life of its own, and so much the more so since it was heavy, had bad springs, was noisy and rather erratic. And yet it soon began obeying him as spontaneously as his own hand.

'It's really got speed! It's terrific!' Nadine exclaimed.

'You've driven in cars before, haven't you?'

'In Paris, in jeeps. But I never went this fast.'

That, too, was a lie – the old illusion of freedom and power. But she gave into it without a qualm. She lowered all the windows and greedily drank in the wind and dust. If Henri had listened to her they would never have got out of the car. The thing she seemed to enjoy most was driving as fast as they could towards the horizon. She hardly took any interest at all in the scenery. And yet how beautiful it was! Hillsides covered with golden mimosas; endless groves of round-topped orange trees which brought to mind calm, primitive paradises; the twisted, frenzied rocks of Battaglia, the majestic pair of stairways which rose crisscrossing

to a white-and-black church, the streets of Beja through which echoed the ancient cries of a lovesick nun. In the south, with its African atmosphere, little donkeys moved in endless circles to force a trickle of water from the arid ground. At distant intervals, half-hidden among blue century plants rising from the red earth, they came across the false freshness of smooth, milky white houses. They began driving back towards the north through country in which stones and rocks seemed to have stolen their intense colours from the most brilliant flowers – reds, ochres, violets. And then, on the gentle hills of Minho, the colours once more became flowers. Yes, a beautiful setting, a setting that flashed by so rapidly that there was no time to think of what lurked behind it. Along these granite shores as on the burning roads of Algarve, the peasants they saw all went barefooted. But they did not see many of them.

The holiday ended at red Oporto, where even the filth was blood-coloured. On the walls of hovels darker and danker than those of Lisbon and teeming with naked children, notices had been pasted up, reading: 'Unhealthy! It is forbidden to live in this house.' Little girls of four or five, clad in torn sacks, were rummaging about in garbage pails. For lunch, Henri and Nadine sought refuge in a dark corner of a restaurant, but all through the meal they had the uneasy feeling that, outside, faces were glued to the windows. 'I hate cities!' Nadine said furiously. She stayed in her room the whole day, and the following day on the road she hardly unclenched her teeth enough to speak. Henri made no

attempt to cheer her up.

The day they were to return to Lisbon, they stopped to eat in a little port town three hours from the city. They left the car in front of the inn and climbed one of the hills overlooking the sea. At the summit stood a white windmill with a roof shingled in green tile. Small, narrow-necked, terra-cotta jars were attached to its vanes, and the wind sang through them. Henri and Nadine ran down the hill past leafy olive trees, past blossoming almond trees, and the childish music followed them. They dropped down on the sandy beach of the cove. Boats with rust-coloured sails were moving lazily on the pale sea.

'Let's stay here a while; it's pleasant,' Henri said.

'All right,' Nadine replied sullenly. 'I'm dying of hunger,' she added.

'Naturally. You didn't eat a thing.'

'I ask for soft-boiled eggs and they bring me a bowl of lukewarm water and raw eggs.'

'Well, the cod was good, and so were the beans.'

'Another drop of oil and I'd have been sick,' she said, spitting angrily. 'There's even oil in my saliva.'

Suddenly and calmly she pulled off her blouse.

'What are you doing?'

'Can't you see?'

She was wearing no brassiere. Lying on her back, she offered up to the sun the nakedness of her firm, small breasts.

'Nadine! No! Suppose someone should come …'

'No one'll come.'

'How do you know?'

'Anyhow, I don't give a damn. I just want to feel the sun on my body.' Her breasts exposed to the wind and sun, her hair spread out on the sand, she looked up at the sky and said reproachfully, 'It's our last day; we've got to take advantage of it.'

Henri said nothing.

'Must we really go back to Lisbon tonight?' she asked in a whining voice.

'You know very well they're expecting us.'

'We haven't even seen the mountains yet. And everyone says they're beautiful. With a whole week left, we could see a lot of them.'

'Nevertheless, as I've already told you a dozen times, I've got to see those people.'

'Your old gentlemen in stiff collars? They might look pretty good in the showcases of the Musée de l'Homme. But as revolutionaries … don't make me laugh.'

'Well, they affect me differently,' Henri said. 'And they do take big risks.'

'They talk a lot,' Nadine said, sifting the sand between her fingers. 'Words, nothing but a lot of words.'

'It's always so easy to feel superior to people who are trying to accomplish something,' he said, slightly annoyed.

'What I have against them is that they're really not trying to accomplish anything at all,' she replied irritably. 'Instead of

gabbling so much, I'd blow Salazar's brains out.'

'That wouldn't help much.'

'He'd be dead, and that would help. Like Vincent says, at least death doesn't forgive.' She looked meditatively at the sea. 'If you're willing to be killed with him, you could certainly get rid of him.'

'Don't you try it!' Henri said with a smile. He placed his hand on Nadine's sand-encrusted arm. 'That'd be quite a spot you'd put me in.'

'It would be quite an exit,' Nadine said.

'Are you in such a hurry to make yours?' he asked.

She yawned. 'Do you enjoy living?'

'I'm not bored,' he said cheerfully.

She raised herself on one elbow and studied him curiously. 'Tell me. Scribbling from morning to night the way you do, does that really fill your life?'

'Yes,' he said. 'When I'm writing my life is full. In fact, I'm damned anxious to get back to it.'

'What made you want to become a writer?'

'Oh, that goes a long way back,' Henri replied. Yes, it went very far back into the past, but he couldn't decide how reliable his memories of the beginning were. 'When I was a young boy,' he said, 'a book seemed like a magic thing to me.'

'But I like books, too,' Nadine said spiritedly. 'Only there are so many of them already! What good will it do to add one more?'

'We all have different things to say. Every writer has his own

life, his own way of seeing things, his own way of writing about them.'

'And it doesn't upset you to realize that things have been written that are far above anything you'll ever pound out?' Nadine asked in a vaguely irritated voice.

'At first I didn't think that was true,' Henri replied, smiling. 'You're very arrogant when you haven't done anything. And then, once you get into it, you're too interested in what you're writing to waste time comparing.'

'Naturally,' she said sullenly. 'You can always justify yourself.' She let herself fall back on the sand and stretched out lazily, at full length.

He didn't know how to answer her. It's hard to explain the joys of writing to someone who doesn't enjoy it. Besides, was he capable of explaining it even to himself? He didn't for a moment imagine he would be read forever and yet while he was writing, he felt as if he were secretly settled in eternity. Whatever ideas he was able to shape into words on paper seemed to him to be preserved, fully rescued from oblivion. But how much truth was there in that feeling? How much of that also was only an illusion? That was one of the things he should have figured out during his vacation, but as a matter of fact he had figured out nothing at all. One thing was certain: he felt an almost agonizing pity for all who did not even attempt to express themselves – Paula, Anne, Nadine. Suddenly he remembered that this was the day on which his book was to be published. It had been a long time since he

had last faced the public and it frightened him a bit to think that at that very moment people were reading his novel and talking about it.

'Everything all right?' he asked, bending over Nadine and smiling at her gently.

'Yes, it's nice here,' she said a little peevishly.

'It is, isn't it?'

He lay back on the warm sand and laced his fingers in Nadine's. Between the listless, sun-faded sea and the stark blue of the sky, happiness hung lazily in the air; a single smile from Nadine and he might have been able to grasp some of that happiness. She was almost pretty when she smiled, but now her lightly freckled face remained impassive.

'Poor Nadine!' he said.

She bolted upright. 'Why poor?'

Certainly, she was an object of pity, but he wasn't quite sure why. 'Because you're disappointed in the trip.'

'Oh, I didn't really expect too much out of it, you know.'

'But you have to admit we had some pleasant moments, anyhow.'

'And there could still be more,' she said, the cold blue of her eyes growing warmer. 'Why don't you just forget those old dreamers? They're not what we came here for. Let's keep on the move; let's enjoy ourselves while we can, while we still have flesh on our bones.'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'It's not so easy to enjoy oneself.'

'Well, let's try, anyhow. Let's drive through the mountains! Wouldn't that be wonderful? You like driving so much. But those meetings and investigations, all they ever do is bore you.'

'Yes, that's true.'

'Well, why do you always have to be doing things that bore you? That's no way to live.'

'Try to understand. Can I tell those poor old men that no one's interested in their misfortunes, that Portugal is too small, that no one gives a damn what happens to her?' Henri leaned over Nadine and smiled gently. 'Can I?'

'You could ring them up and tell them you're sick, and then we could head for Evora.'

'It would break their hearts,' Henri replied. 'No, I just can't.'

'Say instead that you don't want to,' Nadine retorted bitterly.

'All right,' he answered impatiently. 'I don't want to.'

'You're even worse than my mother,' she grumbled, turning her face to the sand.

Henri fell back and stretched out alongside Nadine. 'Let's enjoy ourselves!' Years ago, he had known how to enjoy himself; yes, he would unhesitatingly have sacrificed the dreams of those old conspirators for the pleasures he had known then. He closed his eyes. He was lying on another beach beside a golden-skinned woman clad in a flowered sarong – Paula, the loveliest of all women. Palm trees were swaying lazily above their heads, and through the reeds he was watching three plump, laughing Jewish women inching their way into the sea, encumbered by their

dresses, veils, and jewels. Sometimes at night they would sit together on the beach and watch Arab women, wrapped in their long garments, venturing into the water. And afterwards, in a tavern in an ancient Roman basement, they would sip syrupy coffee. Or they would sit in the market place and Henri would smoke a narghile while chatting with Amur Harsin. And then they would come back to their room and tumble happily on the bed. But what Henri remembered most nostalgically now were those mornings spent on the terrace of the hotel beneath the blue sky, amid the exciting fragrance of flowers. In the freshness of the newborn day, in the intense heat of noon, he would write; he would write, and under his feet the cement was burning hot. And then, dizzy from the sun and from words, he would go down to the shaded patio and drink a tall, cool anisette. The sky, the pink laurel bushes, Djerba's violent waters, the gay talk of idle nights, and especially the freshness and excitement of the mornings – these were things he had come here to recapture. Why hadn't he recaptured that burning, sweet taste his life had once had? He had wanted so much to take this trip; for days he had thought of nothing else, for days he had dreamed of lying on the sand under the sun. And now he was here, stretched out on a sandy beach, beneath a hot sun. Only something was missing, missing from inside himself. Happiness, pleasure – he was no longer quite sure what those old, familiar words really meant. We have only five senses, and they become satiated so quickly. Even now his eyes were growing weary of looking out on that endless blue which

never ceased being blue. He felt like ripping apart that smooth, satiny surface, felt like tearing Nadine's tender skin.

'It's getting cool,' he said.

'Yes,' she replied. Suddenly she pressed her whole body tight against him, and through his shirt he could feel her naked young breasts against his chest. 'Warm me,' she said.

He gently pushed her away. 'Get dressed. Let's get back to the village.'

'Afraid someone will see us?' Nadine's eyes were gleaming, her cheeks were slightly flushed. But he knew her mouth would still be cold. 'What do you think they'd do to us? Do you think they'd stone us?' she asked, as if the prospect appealed to her.

'Get up. It's time to start back now.'

She pressed the whole weight of her body against him; he was barely able to resist the desire that was sweeping through him, numbing his arms and legs. He liked her young breasts, her limpid skin; if only she would let herself be gently lulled by pleasure instead of romping about in bed with determined shamelessness … She looked at him, her eyes half closed, and her hand crept down his linen trousers.

'Let me … won't you let me?'

Her mouth and hands were adroit, but he hated that look of triumphant assurance he saw in her eyes every time he gave in to her. 'No,' he said. 'No, not here. Not like this.'

He freed himself and stood up. Nadine's blouse was lying on the sand; he threw it over her shoulders.

'Why not?' she asked resentfully. 'Maybe it would be a bit more fun out here in the open,' she added languidly.

He dusted the sand off his clothes. 'I wonder if you'll ever grow up to be a woman,' he murmured in a falsely indulgent voice.

'I'll bet there isn't one woman in a hundred who enjoys getting laid. Most of them are just putting on an act, trying to be sophisticated.'

'Let's go; let's not argue,' he said, taking her arm. 'Come on, we'll buy you some cakes and chocolate to eat in the car.'

'You're treating me like a child,' she said.

'No, I know you're not a child. I understand you a lot better than you think.'

She looked at him suspiciously, and then a little smile formed on her lips. 'You know, I don't always hate you,' she said.

He squeezed her arm a little harder, and they walked silently together towards the village. The light of day was growing soft; boats were returning to the port and oxen were pulling them towards the beach. The villagers, standing or sitting together in small groups, watched silently. The men's shirts and the women's full skirts were brightly checkered, but the joyousness of those vivid colours was congealed in dismal immobility. Their stony faces were framed by black kerchiefs; their eyes, staring blankly at the horizon, were drained of hope. Not a gesture, nor a word; it was as if a curse had withered all their tongues.

'They make me want to scream,' Nadine said.

'I doubt if they'd even hear you.'

'What are they waiting for?'

'Nothing. And they know they're waiting for nothing.'

In the main square, life sputtered feebly. The widows of fishermen who had drowned at sea were sitting at the edge of the sidewalk, begging; children were bawling noisily. At first Henri and Nadine had detested those rich women with their thick furs, whose majestic reply to all beggars was a curt, 'Have patience!' But now, they, too, fled like thieves when the hands were held out to them; there were just too many.

'Buy yourself something,' Henri said, stopping before a pastry shop.

She went in. Two children with shaven heads were pressing their noses against the window pane. When she came out again, her arms laden with paper bags, the children began squalling. She stopped.

'What are they saying?'

Henri hesitated. 'They say you're lucky to be able to eat when you're hungry.'

'Oh!'

With a furious gesture, she threw the swollen bags in their arms.

'No, I'll give them some money instead,' Henri said.

She pulled him away. 'Forget it; I've lost my appetite. Those filthy urchins!'

'But you said you were hungry.'

'I told you I lost my appetite.'

They got into the car and drove for a while in silence. Then, 'We should have gone to some other country,' Nadine muttered in a choked-up voice.

'Where?'

'I don't know. But you must know.'

'As a matter of fact, I don't know,' he replied.

'Well, there must be some country in the world where people live decently,' she said.

Suddenly, Nadine burst into tears. Henri looked at her incredulously; Paula's tears were as natural as rain, but to see Nadine weeping was as disturbing as if he had stumbled on Dubreuilh sobbing. He put his arm around her shoulders and drew her close to him.

'Don't cry,' he said, stroking her rough hair. 'Don't cry.' Why had he been unable to make her smile? Why was his heart so heavy?

Nadine wiped her eyes and noisily blew her nose. 'Were you happy when you were young?' she asked.

'Yes, I was happy.'

'You see.'

'Some day you'll be happy, too,' he said.

He should have held her tightly, should have told her: 'I'll make you happy, Nadine.' At that instant, he felt like saying it – a momentary desire to pledge her his whole life. But he said nothing. 'The past doesn't repeat itself; the past won't repeat itself,' he thought.

'Vincent!' Nadine cried out, racing towards the exit.

Clad in his war correspondent's uniform, Vincent was waving his hand and smiling broadly. Nadine slipped on her crêpe-soled shoes and caught herself by grabbing Vincent's arm.

'Greetings!' she said.

'Greetings to the travellers!' Vincent said cheerfully. He looked Nadine over and whistled admiringly. 'That's quite a get-up!'

'A real lady, huh!' Nadine said, spinning around. She looked elegant and almost feminine in her fur coat, her nylon stockings, her soft leather shoes.

'Here, let me take that,' Vincent offered, relieving Henri of a large duffle bag he was dragging behind him. 'What've you got in here? A body?'

'One hundred pounds of food!' Henri replied. 'Nadine's going to restock the family cupboard. The problem now is how to get it over to Quai Voltaire.'

'No problem,' Vincent said triumphantly.

'You stole a jeep?' Nadine asked.

'I stole nothing,' he replied. He crossed the driveway and stopped in front of a small black car. 'She's all right, isn't she?'

'She's ours?' Henri asked.

'Ours,' Vincent said. 'Luc finally managed to wangle a deal. What do you think of her?'

'Very small,' Nadine said.

'Well, it's going to be damned useful to us,' Henri said,

opening the door. They piled the baggage in the back as best they could.

'Will you take me driving?' Nadine asked.

'Are you nuts?' Vincent said. 'This car's a working tool.' He sat down at the wheel, and the car started off with a painful sputtering. 'With all your cargo in here, it's a little crowded,' he conceded.

'Are you sure you know how to drive?' Nadine asked.

'If you'd seen me the other night zipping along over mined roads in a jeep without headlights, you wouldn't insult me so gratuitously.' Vincent turned to Henri. 'I'll drop Nadine and take you to the paper,' he said.

'Fine. How's *L'Espoir* been doing? I didn't get to see a single copy in that blasted country. Are we still using the postage-stamp format?'

'We are. They just authorized two new dailies, but for us they can't seem to find enough paper. But Luc'll fill you in a lot better than I can; I've just got back from the front.'

'Circulation hasn't fallen off, has it?'

'I don't believe so.'

Henri was anxious to get back to the paper. Only Paula must surely have telephoned the station, must know that the train was on time. She would be sitting there waiting, her eyes riveted to the clock, listening attentively to every sound.

After they had left Nadine in the lift surrounded by her baggage, Henri said, 'On second thoughts, I think I'll go home

first.'

'But the boys are waiting for you,' Vincent protested.

'Tell them I'll be over in an hour.'

'All right. I'll leave the Rolls to you,' Vincent said. He stopped the car in front of the house. 'Should I take the bags out?' he asked.

'Just that small one, thanks.'

Unhappily, Henri pushed open the downstairs door, which banged noisily against a garbage pail; the concierge's dog began barking. Before he even had a chance to knock, Paula had flung open the door to the flat.

'It's you! It's really you!' For a moment she remained motionless in his arms, and then she stepped back. 'You look wonderful. You're all sunburned! Was the trip back tiring?' She smiled, but a little muscle in the corner of her mouth was quivering spasmodically.

'Not at all,' he replied, setting the suitcase down on the couch. 'Here are some things for you.'

'How sweet of you!'

'Open it.'

She opened the suitcase. Silk stockings, doeskin sandals and a handbag to match, lengths of material, scarfs, gloves. He had chosen every article with anxious care and he was a little disappointed when, moved and yet vaguely indulgent, she only looked down at them, without touching them, without even bending over to examine them closely.

'How really sweet of you!' she repeated. And then, suddenly turning towards him, she exclaimed. 'Your suitcases! Where are they?'

'Downstairs in the car. Did you hear that *L'Espoir* got a car? Vincent picked me up in it,' he said animatedly.

'I'll call the concierge and get him to bring them up,' Paula said.

'Don't bother,' Henri said, adding very quickly, 'How did you spend the month? The weather wasn't too bad, was it? Did you get out a little?'

'A little,' she replied evasively, her face cold and expressionless.

'Who did you see? What did you do? Tell me all about it.'

'Oh, nothing very interesting happened,' she replied. 'Let's not talk about me.' Quickly, but in a listless voice, she added, 'Your book is a sensation, you know.'

'I haven't heard a thing yet. Do they really like it?'

'Oh, the critics really didn't understand anything, of course. But even so, they scented a masterpiece in it.'

'It's good to hear that,' he said with a reserved smile. He would have liked to ask her a few questions, but he found Paula's manner of speaking insufferable. He changed the subject. 'Did you see the Dubreuilhs? How are they?'

'I saw Anne for a moment one day; she's up to her ears in work.'

She answered his questions reluctantly, tight-lipped. And he,

he was burning with impatience to get back to his life!

'Did you keep the back issues of *L'Espoir?'* he asked.

'I didn't read them.'

'No?'

'There was nothing of yours in them. And I had other things to think about.' She sought his eyes and suddenly her face came to life. 'I've been doing a lot of thinking this past month and I've come to understand a great many things. I'm sorry about that scene I made before you left. I'm sincerely sorry.'

'Oh, let's not talk about that!' he said. 'First of all, you didn't make a scene.'

'Yes,' she insisted, 'I did. And I repeat, I'm truly sorry. I've known for a long time that a woman can't be everything to a man like you. Not even all the women in the world. But I never really accepted it; I'm prepared now to love you with complete generosity, to love you for what you are and not for what I want. You have your mission and that has to come above all else.'

'What mission?'

She forced a smile. 'I've come to realize that often I must have been a burden to you; I can understand your wanting a little solitude. Well, you need not worry any more. I promise you your solitude, your freedom.' She looked very intensely at Henri. 'You're free, my love, and I want you to know this and believe it. Besides, you've just finished proving it, haven't you?'

'Yes,' he said, adding feebly, 'but as I explained to you …'

'I remember,' she said. 'But with the change that's taken place

in me, I can assure you you no longer have any reason to move to a hotel. Listen, you want independence, adventures; but you want me, too, don't you?'

'Of course.'

'Then stay here. I swear you won't have any reason to regret it. You'll see for yourself how much I've changed and how little I'll get in your way from now on.' She stood up and reached for the telephone. 'The concierge's nephew will bring your things up.'

Henri rose and walked towards the stairway leading to the bedroom. 'Later,' he said to himself. He couldn't after all, begin torturing her again the moment he came back. 'I'm going to clean up a little,' he said. 'They're waiting for me at the office. I just stopped off to give you a kiss.'

'I understand perfectly,' she replied tenderly.

'She's going to bend over backwards to prove to me I'm free,' he thought unhappily as he got into the little black car. 'But it won't last. I won't stay there indefinitely,' he said to himself bitterly. 'I'll start taking care of that little matter tomorrow.' But for the moment, he no longer wanted to think about Paula; all he wanted was to luxuriate in his happiness at being back in Paris. The streets were grey and the people had been cold and hungry that winter; but here, at least, everyone wore shoes. And then, you could speak to them, speak for them. In Portugal, the thing that was so depressing was the feeling of being a completely impotent witness to a totally foreign disaster.

Getting out of the car, he looked affectionately at the façade

of the building. How had things gone at the paper while he was away? Was it true his novel was a success? He climbed the stairs quickly and when he reached the top he was greeted with cheers. A streamer hanging across the hallway read 'Welcome Home!' Standing with their backs to the walls, his colleagues formed a military arch, but in place of swords, they held their fountain pens. They began singing an unintelligible couplet in which 'Salazar' rhymed with 'gal and car'. Only Lambert was missing. Why?

'Everyone to the bar!' Luc cried out, giving Henri a hearty slap on the back. 'How did it go?'

'What a sunburn!'

'Look at those clodhoppers.'

'Are you going to do an article on Portugal?'

'Hey! Look at that shirt!'

They fingered his suit, his tie; they shouted and joked and asked question after question while the bartender filled and refilled their glasses. Henri in turn questioned them. Circulation had dropped off a little, but the paper would soon be going back to a larger format, which would help make up the loss; there had been some trouble with the censor – nothing very serious; everyone had nothing but praise for his book, and he had received a tremendous amount of mail; on his desk, he would find every issue of *L'Espoir* for the month he had been away. Preston, the Yank, was trying to arrange for a larger allotment of paper, enabling them to put out a Sunday magazine supplement. And

there were a great many other things to discuss. But all this noise, the voices, the laughter, the problems, added to three nights of fitful sleeping, made him dizzy – dizzy and happy. What a silly idea to have gone to Portugal in search of a past that was dead and buried, when the present was so joyfully alive!

'All I can say is I'm damned happy to be back!' he exclaimed, his face beaming.

'And we're not exactly unhappy to have you back, you know,' Luc said. 'In fact we were even beginning to need you. I warn you, though, you're going to have a hell of a lot of work to catch up on.'

'Well, I hope so!'

The typewriters were clicking away. They separated in the hallway after a few more jokes and bursts of laughter. How young they seemed after coming from a country in which everyone was ageless! Henri opened the door to his office and sat down in his chair with the satisfaction of an old bureaucrat. He spread out the latest issues of *L'Espoir* before him. The usual by-lines, the same careful layout – not a fraction of an inch of space wasted. He jumped back one month and began leafing through the issues, one after another. They had got along wonderfully without him, and that, of course, was the surest proof of his success. *L'Espoir* wasn't merely a wartime adventure; it was a solid enterprise. Vincent's articles on Holland were excellent, and Lambert's on the concentration camps even more so. No question about it, they had hit precisely the right note – no nonsense, no lies, no

humbug. Because of its scrupulous honesty, *L'Espoir* appealed to the intellectuals, and it attracted the masses because it was so alive. There was only one weak point: Sézenac's articles were rather thin.

'Can I come in?' Lambert asked, standing in the doorway and smiling timidly.

'Of course! Where've you been hiding? You could at least have come to the station, you lazy bum.'

'I didn't think there'd be enough room for four,' Lambert explained. 'And their little party …' he added with a grimace. 'Am I disturbing you?'

'Not at all. Pull up a chair.'

'Was it a good trip?' Lambert asked. 'I guess you've been asked that question twenty times already,' he added with a shrug of his shoulders.

'Good and bad. A beautiful setting, and seven million people starving to death.'

'They certainly have excellent cloth,' Lambert remarked, examining Henri approvingly. He smiled. 'Is that the style there, orange shoes?'

'Orange or lemon. But it's good leather. There's plenty of everything for the rich; that's the lousiest part of it. I'll tell you all about it later, but first fill me in on what's been happening here. I've just finished reading some of your articles; they're damned good, you know.'

'I felt as if I were back in school writing a composition:

Describe your impressions while visiting a concentration camp,' he said ironically. 'I think there were more than twenty of us there writing on the same subject.' Suddenly his face brightened. 'Do you want to know something that's really good? Your book. I started it after driving a whole night and day without sleep, and believe me I was really beat. But I read it straight through, couldn't go to sleep until I finished it.'

'You make me happy,' Henri said.

Compliments always embarrassed him. Yet what Lambert said gave him real pleasure. It was precisely the way he had dreamed of being read – straight through in a single night by an impatient young man. That alone made writing worthwhile. Especially that.

'I thought maybe you'd like to see the reviews,' Lambert said, tossing a thick yellow envelope on the desk. 'You'll find my two cents' worth in there, too.'

'You're damned right I'd like to see them. Thanks,' Henri said.

Lambert looked at him questioningly. 'Did you do any writing there?'

'An article on how I found things.'

'And now you'll be starting another novel?'

'I'll get to it as soon as I have the time.'

'Find the time!' Lambert said. 'While you were away, I was thinking …' he began, his face colouring. 'You have to defend yourself.'

'Against whom?' Henri asked with a smile.

Lambert hesitated again. 'It seems that Dubreuilh has been waiting impatiently for you to get back. Don't let yourself get involved in his schemes …'

'I'm already more or less involved in them,' Henri said.

'Well, if I were you, I'd get myself disinvolved fast!'

'No,' Henri replied, smiling. 'It just isn't possible nowadays to stay apolitical.'

Lambert's face grew sombre. 'I suppose that means you disapprove of me, doesn't it?'

'Not at all. What I mean is that it's impossible for me. We're not the same age, you know.'

'What's age got to do with it?' Lambert asked.

'You'll find out. You change, you begin to understand a lot of things when you get older.' Henri smiled and added, 'But I promise you I'll find time enough to continue writing.'

'You have to,' Lambert said.

'I just remembered something, my sermonizing friend! What happened to those short stories you were telling me about?'

'They aren't worth a damn,' Lambert replied.

'Let me have them. And then we'll have dinner together some evening and talk about them.'

'Right,' Lambert said. He got up. 'I don't suppose you'll want to see her, but little Marie-Ange Bizet is dead set on interviewing you. She's been waiting for two hours. What'll I tell her?'

'That I never give interviews and that I'm up to my ears in work.'

Lambert closed the door behind him and Henri emptied the contents of the yellow envelope on his desk. On a bulging folder, his secretary had written: 'Correspondence – Novel.' He hesitated a moment. He had written the novel during the war without ever having given any thought to what the future might hold for him; he hadn't even been sure that the future would hold anything at all for him. And now the book had been published, people had already read it. All at once, Henri found himself judged, discussed, classified, as he himself had so often judged and discussed others. He spread out the clippings and began going through them one at a time. 'A sensation', Paula had said, and he had thought she was exaggerating. But, as a matter of fact, the critics also used some pretty impressive words. Lambert, of course, was prejudiced; Lachaume, too. All those young critics who had just come into their own had a natural predisposition for the writers of the Resistance. But it was the admiring letters sent by both friends and strangers that confirmed the verdict of the press. Really, without getting a swelled head about it, it was certainly enough to make any man happy. His pages, written with deep feeling, had actually stirred people! Henri stretched happily. In a way, it was miraculous – what had just happened. Two years earlier, thick curtains had veiled blue-painted windows; he had been completely shut off from the black city, from the whole earth; his pen would pause hesitantly over the paper. Now those unformed sounds in his throat had become a living voice in the world; the secret stirrings in his heart had

been transformed into truths for other hearts. 'I should have tried explaining it to Nadine,' he said to himself. 'If others don't count, it's meaningless to write. But if they do count, it's wonderful to gain their friendship and their confidence with words; it's magnificent to hear your own thoughts echoed in them.' He raised his eyes; someone was opening the door.

'I've been waiting for you for two hours,' said a plaintive voice. 'You could at least give me fifteen minutes.' Marie-Ange planted herself solidly in front of his desk. 'It's for *Lendemain*. A big front-page spread, with pictures.'

'Look, I never give interviews.'

'Exactly. That's why mine will be worth its weight in gold.'

Henri shook his head, and Marie-Ange said indignantly, 'You wouldn't ruin my whole career just because of a principle?'

He smiled. Fifteen minutes meant so very much to her, and it would cost him so very little! To tell the truth, he even felt like talking about himself. Among the people who liked his book, there were certainly some who wanted to know the author better. And he felt like telling them about himself, telling them so that their approval would really be directed at him.

'You win,' he said. 'What do you want me to tell you?'

'First of all, where do you come from?'

'My father was a pharmacist in Tulle.'

'And?'

Henri hesitated. It isn't easy to begin talking about yourself out of a clear sky.

'Go ahead,' Marie-Ange prodded. 'Tell me a few things about your childhood.'

Like everyone else, he had memories enough, only they didn't seem very important to him. Except for that dinner, in the Henri II dining-room, when he finally delivered himself of his fear.

'All right, here's one for you,' he said. 'Actually, it's nothing, but for me it was the beginning of a great many things.'

Her pencil poised above her note-book, Marie-Ange gave him an encouraging look.

'The major subject of conversation between my parents,' he began, 'was the disasters that were menacing the world – the red peril, the yellow peril, barbarism, decadence, revolution, bolshevism. And I imagined them all as horrible monsters who were going to swallow up all humanity. Well, at dinner one evening, my father was doing his usual prophesying – the revolution was imminent, civilization was foundering. And my mother was nodding agreement, a look of terror on her face. And then suddenly I thought, "But no matter what happens, the winners will still be men." Maybe those aren't exactly words I used, but that's the gist of it.' Henri smiled. 'The effect was miraculous. No more monsters. It was all here on earth, among human creatures, among ourselves.'

'And then?' Marie-Ange asked.

'So, ever since then I've been hunting down monsters,' he replied.

Marie-Ange looked perplexed. 'But your story?' she asked.

'How does it end?'

'What story?'

'The one you just began,' she replied impatiently.

'It's finished; there is no other ending,' Henri answered.

'Oh,' Marie-Ange said, disappointed. 'I was hoping for something picturesque,' she added plaintively.

'There was nothing picturesque about my childhood,' Henri said. 'The pharmacy bored me to death and living out in the country was annoying. Fortunately, I had an uncle in Paris who managed to get me a job with *Vendredi.'*

He hesitated. There were a great many things he could say about his first years in Paris, but he didn't know which ones to choose.

'Vendredi was a leftist paper?' Marie-Ange said. 'You had leftist ideas even then?'

'Let's say I loathed all rightist ideas.'

'Why?'

Henri thought for a moment. 'I was very ambitious when I was twenty, and that's precisely why I was a democrat. I wanted to be the best – but the best among equals. If the race is fixed from the start, there's no point betting.'

Marie-Ange scribbled in her note-book. She didn't look too intelligent, and Henri tried to think of simple words with which to express himself. 'Between a chimpanzee and the lowliest of men,' he thought to himself, 'there's an enormously greater difference than between that man and an Einstein! A consciousness that

gives evidence that it exists is one of the absolutes.' He was about to open his mouth, but Marie-Ange spoke first.

'Tell me about your start.'

'What start?'

'Your start in literature.'

'I've always scribbled a bit.'

'How old were you when *The Accident* was published?'

'Twenty-five.'

'Dubreuilh was the one who gave you your start, wasn't he?'

'Yes, he helped me a lot.'

'How did you get to know him?'

'They sent me over to interview him once, and he made me do the talking. He asked me to come back and see him again, and I did …'

'Give me more details,' Marie-Ange said plaintively. 'You're not very good at explaining things.' She looked at him. 'What do you talk about when you're together?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Everything and nothing, like everyone else.'

'Did he encourage you to write?'

'Yes. And when I finished *The Accident*, he got Mauvanes to read it, and Mauvanes accepted it at once.'

'Was it successful?'

'Call it a *succes d'estime*. You know, it's funny …'

'Yes, tell me something funny!' she said eagerly.

Henri hesitated. 'It's funny how you begin by having big

dreams of glory. And then, with the first little success, you're completely happy.'

Marie-Ange sighed. 'I already have the titles and dates of your other books. Were you in the service?'

'In the infantry. Ordinary private. I never wanted to be an officer. Wounded the ninth of May at Mont Dieu near Vouziers; evacuated to Montélimar; back in Paris in September.'

'What exactly did you do in the Resistance?'

'Luc and I founded *L'Espoir* in 1941.'

'You did other things, too, didn't you?'

'Nothing very interesting. Skip it.'

'Right. Exactly when did you write your last book?'

'Between '41 and '42.'

'Have you started a new one?'

'No, but I'm going to.'

'What'll it be? A novel?'

'A novel. But it's still very vague.'

'I've heard some talk about a magazine.'

'That's right. Dubreuilh and I are going to put out a monthly called *Vigilance*. It'll be published by Mauvanes.'

'What's this political party Dubreuilh's founding?'

'It'd take much too long to explain.'

'In a few words, then.'

'Ask him.'

'You can't get near him.' Marie-Ange sighed. 'You're funny, you know. If I were famous, I'd be getting myself interviewed

all the time.'

'Then you'd have no time left to do anything and you'd stop being famous. Now, you're going to be a nice little girl and let me get back to my work.'

'But I still have a lot of questions. What did you think of Portugal?'

Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'It stinks.'

'What stinks?'

'Everything.'

'Make that a little clearer. I can't just say to my readers: It stinks.'

'Well, tell them that Salazar's paternalism is nothing but an unspeakable dictatorship, and that the Americans ought to get rid of him in a hurry,' Henri said rapidly. 'Unfortunately, it won't happen tomorrow; he's going to sell them air bases in the Azores.'

Marie-Ange frowned, and Henri added, 'If that upsets you, don't use it. I'm going to break it soon in *L'Espoir*, anyhow.'

'Of course I'll use it!' Marie-Ange said emphatically. She studied Henri seriously. 'What inner motives made you take that trip?'

'Listen, you don't have to ask idiotic questions to be a success as a newspaperwoman. And I repeat again that that's enough. Be a nice girl and leave quietly.'

'I'd have liked a few anecdotes.'

'I don't have any.'

Marie-Ange minced out. Henri felt a sense of disappointment;

Marie-Ange hadn't asked the right questions, and he had said none of the things he had had to say. But after all, just what did he have to say? 'I'd like my readers to know who I am, but the trouble is I'm not quite sure myself.' At any rate, in a few days he would get back to his book and he would try to define himself systematically.

He began going through his correspondence again, and he was staggered by the number of telegrams and clippings there were to be read, the letters to answer, the people to see! Luc had warned him; he had his work cut out for him. The following days he spent shut away in his office; he went home to Paula's only to sleep. He had just barely enough time to prepare his article and the printers grabbed it from him page by page. But after his too-long holiday, he was happy to get back to this excess of activity.

Without enthusiasm, he recognized Scriassine's voice on the telephone. 'Listen here, you quitter, you've been back four days now, and nobody's seen you. Come over to the Isba right away. Rue Balzac.'

'I'm sorry but I've got work to do.'

'Stop feeling sorry and come over. We're all waiting to drink a champagne toast to you.'

'Who's we?' Henri asked cheerfully.

'I, among others,' said Dubreuilh's voice. 'And Anne, and Julien. I've got a thousand things to tell you. What in hell are you doing over there anyhow? Can't you crawl out of your hole for an hour or two?'

'I was planning to come over to see you tomorrow,' Henri said.

'Well, come over to the Isba now.'

'All right! All right! I'm on my way.'

Henri hung up the telephone and smiled; he was really looking forward to seeing Dubreuilh again. He picked up the telephone and called Paula. 'It's me. The Dubreuilhs and Scriassine are waiting for us at the Isba … Yes, the Isba … I don't know any more about it than you. I'll come and pick you up in the car.'

A half hour later they went down a stairway flanked on either side by magnificently dressed Cossacks. Paula was wearing a new evening dress and he realized that green did not, as a matter of fact, become her.

'What a peculiar place!' she murmured.

'With Scriassine, you can expect just about anything.'

Outside, the night had been so empty, so quiet, that the Isba's lush luxury was disturbing; it made one think of a perverse antechamber to a torture dungeon. The quilted walls were blood-red, the folds of the draperies dripped blood, and the gypsy musicians' shirts were made of crimson satin.

'There you are! Did you slip by them?' Anne asked.

'They look safe and sound to me,' Julien said.

'We were just attacked by a mob of reporters,' Dubreuilh explained.

'Armed with cameras,' Anne added.

'Dubreuilh was wonderful,' Julien exclaimed, stammering with enthusiasm. 'He said … Well, I forget exactly what he said,

but anyhow it was damned well put. A couple of questions more, and he'd have sailed right into them.'

They were all speaking at once, except for Scriassine, who was smiling and wearing a slightly superior look.

'I really did think Robert was going to start swinging,' Anne said.

'He said: "We're not a bunch of trained monkeys,"' Julien quoted, beaming broadly.

'I've always considered my face my own personal property,' Dubreuilh remarked with dignity.

'The trouble is,' Anne said, 'that for people like you nudity begins with the face. Just showing your nose and eyes is exhibitionism.'

'They don't take pictures of exhibitionists,' Dubreuilh replied.

'That's a shame,' said Julien.

'Drink up,' Henri said, handing Paula a glass of vodka. 'Drink up; we're way behind.' He emptied his glass, and asked, 'But how did they know you were here?'

'Yes,' Julien said, looking at the others in surprise. 'How did they know?'

'I imagine the *maître d'hôtel* telephoned,' Scriassine said.

'But he doesn't know us,' Anne said.

'He knows me,' Scriassine said. He bit his lower lip, looking like a woman caught in the act. 'I wanted him to give you the kind of attention you deserve, so I told him who you were.'

'Well, it looks as if you succeeded,' Henri said. Scriassine's

childish vanity never failed to astonish him.

Dubreuilh burst out laughing. 'So it was he who betrayed us! Now I've heard everything!' He turned abruptly towards Henri. 'Well, what about that trip? Instead of playing, it would seem as if you spent your entire time attending conferences and conducting investigations.'

'Oh, I managed to get in a lot of sightseeing, too,' Henri said.

'Your articles make one want to do one's sightseeing somewhere else. It's a sad country!'

'It was sad, but it was beautiful too,' Henri said cheerfully. 'It's primarily sad for the Portuguese.'

'I don't know whether you do it on purpose,' Dubreuilh said, 'but when you say that the sea is blue, blue somehow becomes a sinister colour.'

'And at times it was. But not always,' Henri smiled. 'You know how it is when you write.'

'Yes,' said Julien, 'you have to lie to avoid telling the truth.'

'Anyhow, I'm happy to be back,' Henri said.

'But you didn't seem to be in much of a hurry to see your friends again.'

'You're wrong; I was,' Henri replied. 'Every morning I've been telling myself that I'd drop over to see you. And then, all of a sudden it was after midnight.'

'Well, keep a sharper eye on your watch tomorrow,' Dubreuilh said grumpily. 'There's a pack of things I have to bring you up to date on.' He smiled. 'I think we're getting off to a good start.'

'You're beginning to recruit? Has Samazelle decided to go along?' Henri asked.

'He doesn't agree on all points, but I'm sure we'll be able to compromise,' Dubreuilh answered.

'No serious talk tonight!' Scriassine said, motioning to the monocled *maître d'hôtel*. 'Two bottles of Mumm's, brut.'

'Is that absolutely necessary?' Henri asked.

'Yes. Strict orders!' Scriassine followed the *maître d'hôtel* with his eyes. 'He's really come down a notch or two since '39. Used to be a colonel.'

'Do you come to this joint often?' Henri asked.

'Whenever I feel like breaking my heart, I come here and listen to the music.'

'But there are so many less expensive ways of doing it,' Julien said. 'Besides, all hearts were broken long ago,' he concluded vaguely.

'Well, my heart breaks only to jazz,' Henri said. 'All your gypsies do to me is ruin my feet.'

'Oh!' Anne exclaimed.

'Jazz,' Scriassine said musingly. 'I wrote several definitive pages on jazz in *The Son of Abel.'*

'Do you really believe it's possible to write something definitive?' Paula said haughtily.

'I won't discuss it; you'll be reading the book soon,' Scriassine said. 'The French edition will be out any day now.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'Five thousand copies! It's ridiculous! They ought

to make exceptions for worthwhile books. How many did they allow you?'

'The same. Five thousand,' Henri replied.

'Absurd! After all, what you've written is *the* book on the Occupation. A book like that should have a printing of at least a hundred thousand copies.'

'Fight it out with the Minister of Information,' Henri said. Scriassine's overbearing enthusiasm irritated him. Among friends, one avoids speaking of one's books; it embarrasses everyone and amuses no one.

'We're bringing out a magazine next month,' Dubreuilh said. 'Well, let me tell you, getting paper was one hell of a job!'

'That's because the Minister doesn't know his business,' Scriassine said. 'Paper? I'll find him all he wants!'

Once he began attacking a technical problem in his didactic voice, Scriassine was inexhaustible. While he was complacently flooding France with paper, Anne said quietly to Henri, 'You know, I don't think there's been a book in the last twenty years that's affected me as much as yours. It's a book … Well, exactly the kind of book you'd want to read after these last four years. Some parts moved me so much that I had to put it aside and take a walk in the street to calm myself down.' Suddenly she blushed. 'You feel idiotic when you say things like that, but it's just as idiotic not to say them. Anyhow, it can't do any harm.'

'In fact, it even gives pleasure,' Henri said.

'You moved a great many people,' Anne continued. 'All those

who don't want to forget,' she added with passion.

He smiled at her gratefully. Tonight she was wearing a Scotch-plaid dress which made her look years younger, and she had applied her make-up with care. In one way, she looked much younger than Nadine. Nadine never blushed.

Scriassine raised his voice. 'That magazine could be a very powerful instrument of culture and action, but only on condition that it expresses more than the opinions of a tight little coterie. I maintain that a man like Louis Volange ought to be a member of your team.'

'Out of the question,' Dubreuilh stated flatly.

'An intellectual's lapse isn't that serious,' Scriassine said. 'Name me the intellectual who has never made a mistake.' Gravely he added, 'Should a man be made to bear the weight of his mistakes all his life?'

'To have been a Party member in Russia in 1930 wasn't a mistake,' Dubreuilh said.

'If you have no right to make a mistake, it was a crime.'

'It's not a question of right,' Dubreuilh replied.

'How dare you set yourselves up as judges?' Scriassine said, without listening to him. 'Do you know Volange's reasons, his explanations? Are you sure that all the people you accept on your team are better men than he?'

'We don't judge,' Henri said. 'We choose sides. There's a big difference.'

Volange had been clever enough not to compromise himself

too seriously, but Henri had sworn that he would never shake hands with him again. When he read the articles Louis wrote in the Free French Zone, he hadn't been the least bit surprised by what they said. From the moment they left college, their friendship had gradually become an almost open enmity.

With a blasé air, Scriassine shrugged his shoulders and motioned to the *maître d'hôtel*. 'Another bottle!' Again, he stealthily studied the old *émigré*. 'A striking head, isn't it? The bags under the eyes, the droop of the mouth, all the symptoms of decay. Before the war you could still find a trace of arrogance on his face. But the weakness, the dissoluteness of their caste gnaws at them. And their treachery …' He stared in fascination at the man.

'Scriassine's serf!' Henri thought. He, too, had fled his country, and there they called him a traitor. That probably was the reason for his immense vanity: since he had no homeland, no one to stand up for him but himself, he needed always to reassure himself that somewhere in the world his name meant something.

'Anne!' Paula exclaimed. 'How horrible!'

Anne was emptying her glass of vodka into her champagne glass. 'It livens it up,' she explained. 'Why don't you try it? It's good.'

Paula shook her head.

'Why aren't you drinking?' Anne asked. 'Things are gayer when you drink.'

'Drinking makes me drunk,' Paula answered.

Julien began to laugh. 'You make me think of that girl – a charming young thing I met on the Rue Montparnasse in front of a little hotel – who said to me, "As far as I'm concerned, living kills me."'

'She didn't say that,' said Anne.

'She could have said it.'

'Anyhow, she was right,' Anne said in a drunk's sententious voice. 'To live is to die a little.'

'For God's sake, shut up!' Scriassine half shouted. 'If you don't want to listen, at least let me listen!' The orchestra had begun an enthusiastic attack on *Dark Eyes*.

'Let him break his heart,' Anne said.

'In the breaking surf a broken heart …' Julien murmured.

'Will you *please* shut up!'

Everyone fell silent. Scriassine's eyes were fixed on the violinist's dancing fingers; a dazed look on his face, he was listening to a memory of time long past. He thought it manful to impose his whims on others, but they gave in to him as they would to a neurotic woman. Their very docility should have made him suspicious, as it did. Henri smiled as he watched Dubreuilh tapping his fingers on the table; his courtesy seemed infinite – if you didn't put it too long to the test. You then learned soon enough that it had its limits. Henri felt like having a quiet talk with him, but he was not impatient. He didn't care for champagne, or gypsy music, or all this false luxury; nevertheless, simply to be sitting in a public place at two o'clock in the morning

was cause for celebration. 'We're home again,' he said to himself. 'Anne, Paula, Julien, Scriassine, Dubreuilh – my friends!' The word crackled in his heart with all the joyfulness of a Christmas sparkler.

While Scriassine was furiously applauding, Julien led Paula on to the dance floor. Dubreuilh turned towards Henri. 'All those old codgers you met in Portugal, are they really hoping for a revolution?'

'They hope. Unfortunately Salazar won't fall before Franco goes, and the Americans don't seem to be in a hurry.'

Scriassine shrugged his shoulders. 'I can understand their not being anxious to create Communist bases in the Mediterranean.'

'Do you mean to say that out of fear of Communism you'd go so far as to endorse Franco?' Henri asked incredulously.

'I'm afraid you don't understand the situation,' Scriassine replied.

'Don't worry,' Dubreuilh said cheerfully. 'We understand it very well.' Scriassine opened his mouth, but Dubreuilh cut him off with a laugh. 'Yes, you're farseeing all right, but you're still no Nostradamus. Your crystal ball is no clearer than ours when it comes to predicting things that'll happen fifty years from now. One thing is sure right now though, and that is that the Stalinist menace is purely an American invention.'

Scriassine looked at Dubreuilh suspiciously. 'You talk exactly like a Communist.'

'Do you think a Communist would ever say aloud what I just

said?' Dubreuilh asked. 'When you attack America, they accuse you of playing into the hands of the fifth column.'

'The line'll change soon enough,' Scriassine replied. 'You're just anticipating it by a few weeks, that's all.' He knitted his brow. 'I've often been asked in what ways you differ from the Communists. And I have to admit I'm always at a loss for an answer.'

Dubreuilh laughed. 'Well, don't answer then.'

'Hey!' Henri said. 'I thought serious talk was out of order tonight.'

With an irritated shrug of his shoulders, Scriassine indicated that it was frivolity that was now out of order. 'Is that a way of getting out of it?' he asked, looking at Dubreuilh accusingly.

'Now look,' Dubreuilh answered. 'I'm no Communist, and you know it.'

'I'm not so sure of that.' Scriassine's face underwent a sudden transformation; he gave Dubreuilh his most charming smile. 'Really, I'd like to learn more about your point of view.'

'I believe the Communists are backing the wrong horse just now,' Dubreuilh said. 'I know why they're supporting Yalta; they want to give Russia enough time to get on her feet again. But as a result, the world is going to find itself divided into two camps with every reason to pounce on each other.'

'Is that the only thing you have against them? An error of judgment?' Scriassine asked severely.

'What I have against them is not being able to see farther

than the end of their noses,' Dubreuilh shrugged his shoulders. 'Reconstruction is all very well and good, but not when it's done without considering the means. They go on accepting American aid, but one of these days they're going to be sorry. One thing will lead to another, and eventually France will find herself completely under America's thumb.'

Scriassine emptied his glass and banged it down on the table. 'Now that's what I call an optimistic prediction!' In a serious voice, he continued rapidly, 'I don't like America and I don't believe in the Atlantic community. But I sincerely hope America predominates, because the important question in this day and age is one of abundance. And only America can give it to us.'

'Abundance?' Dubreuilh said. 'For whom? And at what price? That would be a pretty picture, to be colonized by America!' he added indignantly.

'Would you rather Russia annexed us?' Scriassine asked. He stopped Dubreuilh with a sharp gesture. 'I know. You're dreaming of a united, autonomous, socialist Europe. But if Europe refuses the protection of the United States, she'll inevitably fall into the hands of Stalin.'

Dubreuilh shrugged his shoulders. 'Russia has no intention of annexing anything at all.'

'In any case, that Europe you dream so much about will never come about,' Scriassine said.

'That's what you say!' Dubreuilh protested. 'Anyhow,' he continued heatedly, 'here in France we have a clear-cut objective

– to achieve a real popular front government. And for that, we need a non-Communist left that's able to hold its own.' He turned towards Henri. 'We mustn't lose any more time. At the moment people feel that the future is wide open. Let's not wait until they become discouraged.'

Scriassine downed a glass of vodka and lost himself in contemplating the *maître d'hôtel*. He had given up talking sense to fools.

'You say you've got off to a good start?' Henri asked Dubreuilh.

'We've started, but now we have to continue. I'd like you to see Samazelle as soon as possible. There's going to be a committee meeting on Saturday and I'm counting on your being there.'

'Let me have a little time to catch my breath,' Henri said, giving Dubreuilh a slightly worried look. It wasn't going to be easy defending himself against that nice, imperative smile.

'I purposely delayed the meeting so that you could be there,' Dubreuilh said reprovingly.

'You shouldn't have,' Henri replied. 'I assure you you're overestimating my qualifications.'

'And you your lack of them,' Dubreuilh said. He looked at Henri severely. 'You've got a pretty good picture these last four days of what's been happening; things have been moving along at a damned rapid pace. You must have realized by now that neutrality is no longer possible.'

'But I've never been neutral!' Henri protested. 'I've always

agreed to go along with the SRL.'

'Is that right? Well, let's see now … Your name and a few appearances – that's all you ever promised me.'

'Don't forget I have a newspaper on my hands,' Henri replied.

'Precisely. It's the paper I have in mind more than anything else. It can't remain neutral any more.'

'But it never was!' Henri said, surprised.

'How can I get it through your thick skull?' Dubreuilh said, shrugging his shoulders. 'Being on the side of the Resistance doesn't constitute a political programme nowadays.'

'No, I don't have a programme,' Henri admitted. 'But whenever the occasion demands it, *L'Espoir* does choose sides.'

'No, it doesn't, not any more so than all the other papers. You argue about trifles, but when it comes to the big things, all of you somehow manage to agree on covering up the truth.' There was anger in Dubreuilh's voice. 'From *Figaro* to *L'Humanité*, you're all nothing but a bunch of humbugs. You say yes to de Gaulle, yes to Yalta, yes to everything; you act as if you believe there's still a Resistance and that we're heading steadily towards socialism. Your friend Luc has really been going to town with that hogwash in his recent editorials. All we're doing, really, is marking time; in fact, we're even beginning to retreat. And not a one of you has the guts to tell the truth!'

'I always thought you agreed with *L'Espoir,'* Henri said. He was stunned; his heart began beating rapidly. During the past four days, he had meshed with that paper as one meshes with one's

own life. And then all of a sudden *L'Espoir* was being indicted. And by Dubreuilh!

'Agree with what?' Dubreuilh asked. *'L'Espoir* has no line. You're constantly complaining that nothing's been nationalized. And what do you do about it? Nothing. Now what would be interesting would be to tell who's putting on the brakes, and why.'

'I don't want to take a stand for or against any particular class,' Henri said. 'Reforms will come about when public opinion demands them, and what I'm trying to do is arouse opinion. I can't very well do that if I'm going to set half my readers against me, can I?'

'You can't possibly believe that the class struggle is outmoded, can you?' Dubreuilh asked suspiciously.

'No.'

'Then don't come telling me about public opinion,' Dubreuilh said. 'On one side, you have the proletariat which wants reforms, and on the other, the bourgeoisie which doesn't. The middle classes are treading water because they don't know where their true interests lie any more. But don't get the idea you can influence them; it's the situation that will do the deciding.'

Henri hesitated. No, the class struggle wasn't outmoded. All right. But did that automatically doom any appeal to people's good intentions, to their common sense? 'Their interests are quite complex,' he replied. 'I'm not at all convinced you can't influence them.'

Dubreuilh was about to say something, but Henri cut him

off. 'Another thing,' he said spiritedly. 'The workers who read *L'Espoir* read it because it gives them a change from *L'Humanité*; it gives them a breath of fresh air. If I take a class stand, I'll either repeat what the Communist papers are saying, or I'll take issue with them. And either way, the workers will drop me.' In a conciliatory voice, he added, 'I reach a lot more people than you do, you know. That means I have to have a much broader platform.'

'Yes, you do reach a lot of people,' Dubreuilh said. 'But you yourself just gave the reason why. If your paper pleases everybody, it's because it disturbs nobody. It attacks nothing, defends nothing, evades every problem. It simply makes for pleasant reading, like a local sheet.'

Dubreuilh's outburst was followed by a brief silence. Paula had returned to the table and was sitting next to Anne; she seemed outraged, and even Anne was quite embarrassed. Julien had disappeared. Scriassine, awakened from his meditations, looked back and forth from Henri to Dubreuilh, as if he were watching a tennis match. But it was a strictly one-sided match; Henri had been overwhelmed by the sudden violence of the attack.

'What are you getting at?' he asked.

'Stop shilly-shallying,' Dubreuilh answered. 'Take the bit in your teeth and define your position in relation to the Communist Party.'

Henri looked at Dubreuilh suspiciously. It often happened that Dubreuilh would heatedly involve himself in the affairs of others,

and, just as often, you came to realize that he had in fact made them his own affairs. 'In short, what you're proposing is that I accept the SRL's entire programme.'

'Yes,' Dubreuilh replied.

'But you don't really expect *L'Espoir* to become the official organ of the movement, do you?'

'It would be perfectly natural,' Dubreuilh said. *'L'Espoir's* weakness stems from the fact that it doesn't represent anything. Besides, without a newspaper the movement has almost no chance of getting anywhere. Since our goals are the same …'

'Our goals, but not our methods,' Henri interrupted. Regretfully, he thought, 'So that's why Dubreuilh was so impatient to see me!' The good spirits with which he began the evening had, in the course of the last few minutes, completely deserted him. 'Isn't it ever possible to spend an evening among friends without talking politics?' he asked himself. There was nothing in their conversation so terribly urgent that Dubreuilh couldn't have put it off for another day or two. He had become as much a crank as Scriassine.

'Precisely. And take my word for it, it would be to your advantage to change your methods,' Dubreuilh said.

Henri shook his head. 'I'll show you letters I receive every day, letters from intellectuals especially – teachers, students. What they all like about *L'Espoir* is its fairness. If I tack on a programme, I lose their trust.'

'Of course. Intellectuals are delighted when you encourage

them to be neither fish, flesh, nor fowl,' Dubreuilh replied. 'Their trust? Who needs it?'

'Give me two or three years and I'll lead them by the hand to the SRL.'

'If you really believe that, then all I can say is you're a starry-eyed idealist!' Dubreuilh said.

'Possibly,' Henri replied with a slight show of annoyance. 'But in '41 they branded me an idealist too.' Firmly, he added, 'I have my own ideas about what a newspaper should be.'

Dubreuilh gestured evasively We'll talk about it again. But believe me, six months from now either *L'Espoir* aligns itself with our politics or it's all washed up.'

'All right, we'll talk about it again in six months,' Henri said.

Suddenly, he felt tired and at a loss. Dubreuilh's proposition had taken him by surprise, but he was absolutely resolved to do nothing about it. He felt a desperate need to be alone in order to clear his mind. 'I have to be getting home,' he said.

Paula remained silent on the way home, but they were no sooner in the apartment than she began her attack. 'Are you going to give him the paper?'

'Of course not,' Henri said.

'Are you really sure?' she asked. 'Dubreuilh wants it, and he is stubborn.'

'I'm pretty stubborn myself.'

'But you always end up by giving in to him,' Paula said, her voice suddenly exploding. 'Why did you ever agree to join the

SRL? As if you didn't have enough to do already! You've been back for four days now, and we haven't had five minutes together. And you haven't written a line of your novel!'

'I'll get back to it tomorrow. Things are beginning to settle down at the paper.'

'That's no reason to burden yourself with new loads,' Paula said, her voice rising. 'Dubreuilh did you a favour ten years ago; he can't expect you to repay him for it for the rest of your life.'

'But I'm not working with him simply to repay a favour, Paula. The thing interests me.'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'Don't give me that!'

'I mean it,' he said.

'Do you believe all that talk about a new war?' she asked with a worried look.

'No,' Henri replied. 'There may be a few firebrands in America, but they don't like war over there. One thing you can be sure of – there's going to be a radical change in the world for better or for worse. What we've got to do is to try to make it a change for the better.'

'The world is always changing. But before the war you let it change without getting yourself involved,' Paula said.

Henri started up the stairway. 'It isn't before the war any more,' he replied, yawning.

'But why can't we go back to living like we did then?'

'Circumstances are different – and so am I.' He yawned again. 'I'm tired.'

Yes, he was tired, but when he lay down in bed beside Paula he couldn't sleep. The champagne, the vodka, Dubreuilh, all conspired to keep him awake. No, he wouldn't give him *L'Espoir*. That was so clear to him that it needed no justifying. Nevertheless, he wished he could find a few good reasons for his stand. Was he really an idealist? And exactly what did that mean? Naturally, and to a certain extent, he believed in people's freedom, in their basic good will, in the power of ideas. *You can't possibly believe that the class struggle is outmoded, can you*? No, he couldn't believe it, but what, after all, did that mean? He turned over on his back. He felt like lighting a cigarette, but he was afraid of awakening Paula, who would have been only too happy to distract him in his sleeplessness. He didn't move. 'My God!' he said to himself with a sharp feeling of anxiety. 'How ignorant we really are!' He read a great deal, but he had little real knowledge excepting in the field of literature. And even in literature … Until now it hadn't bothered him – no need for any specialized knowledge to fight in the Resistance or to found a clandestine newspaper. He had believed that that was the way it would continue to be. Obviously he had been wrong. What is an opinion? What is an idea? What power do words have? On whom? And under what circumstances? If you publish a newspaper, you have to be able to answer those questions. And what with one thing leading to another, you eventually question everything. 'You have to decide in ignorance,' Henri said to himself. 'Even Dubreuilh often acts blindly – Dubreuilh, with all

his learning.' Henri sighed; he was unable to resign himself to this defeat. There are degrees of ignorance, and the simple fact was that he was particularly ill-equipped for the political life. 'Well, I'll just have to start working at it,' he said to himself. But if he really wanted to extend his knowledge, it would require years of study. Economics, history, philosophy – he would never be done with it! What a job! And all that just to come to terms with Marxism! Writing would be completely out of the question, and he wanted to write. Well? Whatever happened, one thing was sure: he wasn't going to let *L'Espoir* fail simply because he wasn't an expert on all the fine points of historical materialism. He closed his eyes. There was something unfair in this whole thing. He felt obliged, like everyone else, to take an active interest in politics. That being the case, it shouldn't require a specialized apprenticeship; if politics was a field reserved for technicians, then they shouldn't be asking him to get mixed up in it.

'What I need is time!' Henri thought as he awakened the next morning. 'The only problem is finding enough time.' The living-room door opened and closed again. Paula had already gone out; now, back again, she was tiptoeing about the room. He threw back the covers. 'If I lived alone, I'd save hours.' No more idle conversations, no more formal meals. While drinking his coffee in the little Cafe Biard on the corner, he would read the morning papers, would work right up to the moment when he would have to leave for the office; a sandwich would do for lunch, and his day's work over, he would have a quick dinner and read late into

the night. That way, he would be able to keep everything going at once – *L'Espoir*, his novel, his reading. 'I'll speak to Paula this morning,' he told himself firmly.

'Did you sleep well?' Paula asked cheerfully.

'Very well.'

She was arranging flowers in a vase on one of the tables and humming cheerfully to herself. Ever since Henri's return, she made a point of being always cheerful, ostentatiously cheerful. 'I made you some real coffee. And we still have a little fresh butter left.'

He sat down and spread a piece of toast with butter. 'Did you eat?'

'I'm not hungry.'

'You're never hungry.'

'Oh, don't worry about me. I eat; in fact I eat quite well.'

He bit into the toast. What could he do if she didn't want to eat? After all, he couldn't very well force-feed her. 'You were up very early this morning,' he said.

'Yes, I couldn't sleep.' She placed a thick album with gilt-edged pages on the table. 'I've been putting in the pictures you took in Portugal.' She opened the album and pointed to the stairway of Braga. Nadine, smiling, was sitting on one of the steps. 'You see, I'm not trying to escape the truth,' she said.

'Yes, I know.'

No, she wasn't escaping the truth but, much more disconcerting, she saw through it. She turned back several pages.

'Even in these old snapshots of you as a child you had that same distrustful sort of smile. How little you've changed!' Before, he had enjoyed helping her collect and arrange his souvenirs; today it all seemed so futile. He was annoyed by Paula's stubborn determination to exhume and embalm him.

'Here you are when I first met you!'

'I don't look very bright, do I?' he said, pushing away the album.

'You were young; you were very demanding,' she said. She stood in front of Henri and, in a sudden burst of anger, asked, 'Why did you give an interview to *Lendemain*?'

'Oh! Is the new issue out?'

'Yes, I just bought a copy.' She went to get the magazine at the other end of the living-room, brought it back, and threw it on the table. 'I thought we'd decided you'd never grant any interviews.'

'If you stick to all the decisions you make …'

'But this was an important one. You used to say that when you start smiling at reporters, you're ripe for the Académie Française.'

'I used to say a lot of things.'

'It really pained me when I saw pictures of you spread all over the cover,' she said.

'But you're always so delighted when you see my name in print.'

'First of all, I'm not delighted. And secondly, that's quite different.'

Paula was not one to stop at a contradiction, but this particular one irritated Henri. She wanted him to be the 'most glorious of all men', and yet she affected a disdain for glory. She insisted upon dreaming of herself as long ago he had dreamed of her – proud, sublime. But all the while, of course, she was living on earth, like everyone else. 'It's not a very good life she has,' he thought with a twinge of pity. 'It's only natural for her to need some sort of compensation.'

'I wanted to help the kid out,' he said in a conciliatory voice. 'She's just getting started and doesn't know her way around yet.'

Paula smiled at him tenderly. 'And you don't know how to say no.'

There was no double meaning hidden behind her smile. He smiled. 'You're right. I don't know how to say no.'

He placed the weekly on the table. On the front page, his picture smiled back at him. 'Interview with Henri Perron.' He wasn't the slightest bit interested in what Marie-Ange thought of him. Yet reading those printed words, he felt a little of the naïve faith of a peasant reading the Bible. It was as if he had succeeded at last in discovering himself through words he himself had fathered. 'In the shadows of the pharmacy in Tulle, the magic of red and blue jars … But the quiet child hated the medicinal smells, the restricted life, the shabby streets of his birthplace … As he grew up the call of the big city became more and more pressing … He swore to raise himself above the bleak greyness of mediocrity; in a secret corner of his heart, he even hoped

some day to rise higher than all others … A providential meeting with Robert Dubreuilh … Dazzled, disconcerted, torn between admiration and defiance, Henri Perron trades his adolescent dreams for the true ambitions of a man; he begins to work furiously … At twenty-five, a small book is enough to bring glory into his life. Brown hair, commanding eyes, a serious mouth, direct, open, and yet secret …' He tossed the paper aside. Marie-Ange was no idiot; she knew him pretty well. And yet to titillate the working girls, she had made him into a small-time opportunist.

'You're right,' he said. 'There's no sense in talking to reporters. All a life means to them is a career; work is nothing but the path to success. And what they mean by success is making a big splash and piling up a lot of money. You just can't get them to think any other way.'

Paula smiled indulgently. 'Did you notice the nice things she said about your book? Only she's like all the others – they admire but don't understand.'

'As a matter of fact, they don't admire as much as all that, you know. It's the first novel published since the liberation; they're practically forced to praise it.'

In the long run, the symphony of eulogies became annoying. It amply demonstrated the timeliness of his novel, but in no way said anything about its merits. Henri finally even came to the conclusion that the book owed its success to misunderstandings. Lambert believed he had meant to exalt individualism through

collective action, and Lachaume, on the other hand, believed it preached the sacrifice of the individual to collectivism. Everyone emphasized the book's moral character. And yet Henri had set the story in the Resistance almost by pure chance. He had thought of a man and of a situation, of a certain relationship between man's past life and the crisis through which he was passing, and of a great many other things which none of the critics mentioned. Was it his fault or the readers'? The public, Henri was forced to conclude, had liked a completely different book from the one he believed he was offering them.

'What are you planning to do today?' he asked affectionately.

'Nothing special.'

'But what?'

Paula considered. 'Well, I think I'll ring up my dressmaker and get her to take a look at those beautiful materials you brought back.'

'And after that?'

'Oh, I always manage to find something to do,' she said gaily.

'By that you mean you have nothing at all to do,' Henri said. He looked at Paula severely. 'I've been doing a lot of thinking about you during the last month. I think it's a crime for you to spend your days vegetating inside these four walls.'

'You call this vegetating!' Paula said. She smiled gently, the way she used to long ago, and there was all the wisdom of the world in that smile. 'When you love someone, you're not vegetating.'

'But loving isn't a vocation.'

She interrupted him. 'You're wrong. For me, it is a vocation.'

'I've been thinking over what I said to you on Christmas Eve,' he said, 'and I'm sure I was right. You've got to take up singing again.'

'For years I've been living exactly the same way I do now,' Paula said. 'Why are you suddenly so concerned?'

'During the war it was possible to be satisfied to just kill time. But the war is over now. Listen to me,' he said authoritatively, 'you're going to tell old man Grépin that you want to go back to work. I'll help you choose your songs; I'll even try to write a few for you, and I'll ask the boys if they'd care to try their hand at it, too. Come to think of it, that would be right up Julien's alley! I'm sure he'd be able to write a few charming ballads for you, and Brugere could put them to music. Just wait and see the repertoire we'll put together! Whenever you're ready, Sabriro'll give you an audition, and I guarantee he'll get you star booking at the 45 Club. After that, you're made!'

He realized he had spoken too volubly, with too much enthusiasm. Paula gave him a look of startled reproach. 'And then what?' she said. 'Will I mean any more to you if you see my name on posters?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Don't be foolish! Of course not. But it's better to be doing something than to do nothing. I try to write, and you ought to sing because you've got a real gift for it.'

'I'm alive and I love you. To me, that's not nothing.'

'You're playing with words,' he said impatiently. 'Why don't you want to give it a try? Have you become so lazy? Or are you afraid? Or what?'

'Listen,' she said in a voice suddenly grown hard, 'even if all those vanities – success, fame – still meant something to me, I wouldn't start out on a second-rate career at the ripe age of thirty-seven. When I sacrificed that tour in Brazil for you, it was a final retirement. I have no regrets. Let's just forget the whole thing.'

Henri opened his mouth to protest. Without consulting him, she had only too willingly decided to make that sacrifice, and now she seemed to be holding him responsible for it! He held his tongue and gave Paula a perplexed look. He had never been able to decide whether she really scorned fame or whether she was afraid of not being able to attain it.

'Your voice is as beautiful as ever,' he said. 'And so are you.'

'Not quite,' she replied impatiently, shrugging her shoulders. 'I know exactly how it would turn out. To make you happy, a handful of intellectuals would proclaim my genius for a few months. And then – good-bye. I might have been a Damia or a Piaf, but I missed my chance. Well, it's too bad! Let's drop it.'

She could never become a great star now, no doubt about that. But it would take only some small success to make her lower her sights. In any event, her life would certainly be less wretched if only she took an active interest in something. 'And it would be ideal for me!' he said to himself. He knew only too well that the problem concerned his own life even more than Paula's.

'Even if you can't take the world by storm, it would still be worth it,' he said. 'You have your voice, your special talent. Don't you think it would be interesting to try to get all you can out of it? I'm certain you'd find life a lot more satisfying.'

'But I find it satisfying enough as it is,' she replied, a look of exaltation brightening her face. 'You don't seem to understand what my love for you means to me.'

'I do understand! But,' he continued cuttingly, 'you won't do, for love of me, what I ask you to do.'

'If you had good reasons for asking, I'd do it,' she said gravely.

'Actually, of course, you prefer your reasons to mine.'

'Yes,' she said calmly. 'Because they're better. You've been giving me a purely superficial point of view, worldly reasons that aren't really your own.'

'Well, as for your point of view, I honestly don't see what it is!' he said peevishly. He stood up; it was useless to continue the discussion. He would try instead to confront her with a *fait accompli* – bring her songs, make appointments for her. 'All right, let's drop it. But I'm telling you, you're wrong.'

She hesitated a moment, smiled, and then asked, 'Are you going to go to work now?'

'Yes.'

'On your novel?'

'Yes.'

'Good,' she said.

He climbed the stairs. He was anxious to get back to his

writing, and he was happy at the thought that his novel, at least, wasn't going to be the slightest bit edifying. He still had no exact idea of what he was going to do; the only assignment he had set himself was to enjoy himself fully in being sincere. He spread his notes in front of him – almost a hundred pages. It was good to have put them away for a month; now he would be able to reread them with a fresh eye. He plunged into them joyfully, happy to rediscover memories and impressions formed into careful and smooth-flowing sentences. But after a while he began to worry. What was he going to do with all this stuff? These scribblings had neither head nor tail, even though they did have something in common – a certain feeling, a climate, the climate of the pre-war era. And that suddenly bothered him. He had thought vaguely, 'I shall try to give the flavour of my life.' As if such a thing were a perfume, labelled, trade-mark-registered, always the same, year after year. But the things he had to say about travelling, for example, were all in terms of a young man of twenty-five, the young man he had been in 1935; they had nothing at all to do with what he had experienced in Portugal. The story of his affair with Paula was equally dated; neither Lambert, not Vincent, nor any of the boys he knew would have any similar reactions today. And besides, with five years of living under the German occupation behind her, a young woman of twenty-seven would be very different from Paula. There was one solution: deliberately to place the book around 1935. But he had no desire to write a 'period' novel recreating a world that no longer was.

On the contrary, what he had hoped for in jotting down those lines was to throw himself life and whole on to paper. Well then, he would have to write the story in the present, transposing the characters and events. 'Transpose – what an annoying word! what a stupid word!' he said to himself. 'It's preposterous, the liberties one takes with the characters in a novel. They're transported from one century to the next, pulled out of one country and pushed into another, the present of one person is glued to the past of a second. And all of it is larded with personal fantasies. If you look closely enough, every character in a novel is a monster, and all art consists in preventing the reader from looking too closely. All right then, let's not transpose. Let's make up characters out of whole cloth, characters who have nothing at all in common with Paula, with Louis, with myself. I've done it before. Only this time it was the truth about my own experiences that I wanted to tell …' He pushed aside the stack of notes. Yes, it was a bad idea, this setting things down haphazardly. The best way was to proceed as usual, to begin with an outline, with a precise purpose. 'But what purpose? What truth do I want to express? *My* truth. But what does that really mean?' He looked dully at the blank page. 'It's frightening, plunging into empty space with nothing to clutch at. Maybe I have nothing more to say,' he thought. But instead it seemed to him that he had never really said anything at all. He had everything to say, like everyone else, always. But everything is too much. He remembered an old couplet painted on a plate: 'We enter, we cry, and that is life; we cry, we leave,

and that is death.' What more was there to add? 'We all live on the same planet, we are born from a womb, and one day we'll serve to fatten worms. Yes, we all have the same story. Why then should I consider it mine alone and decide that it's up to me to tell it?' He yawned; he had had too little sleep, and that blank page made him feel dizzy. He was sunk in apathy. You can't write anything apathetically; you've got to climb back to the surface of life where the moments and individuals count, individually. But if he shook off that torpor all he would find was worry. *'L'Espoir* – a local sheet. Was it true? When I try to influence opinion, am I simply being an idealist? Instead of sitting here dreaming in front of this piece of paper, I'd do a lot better to start studying Marx seriously.' Yes, it had become urgent now. He had to set up a schedule and stick to it. He should really have done it long ago. His excuse to himself had been that he was caught up in the tide of events and was forced to give his attention to more pressing problems. But he had also wasted time; ever since the liberation he had been in a state of euphoria, a totally unjustified euphoria. He got up. He was incapable of concentrating on anything at all this morning; his conversation with Dubreuilh the night before had shaken him too much. Besides, he had correspondence to catch up on; he was anxious to find out from Sézenac whether Preston would be able to get them the paper they wanted; and he still hadn't gone to the Quai d'Orsay to deliver das Viernas' letter. 'I'll take care of that straight away,' he decided.

'May I see Monsieur Tournelle for a moment? My name is

Henri Perron. I have a message for him.'

The secretary handed Henri a printed form. 'Please write your name and address and the reason for your visit,' she said.

He took out his fountain pen. What possible reason could he give? Interest in a wild dream? He knew how futile the whole business was. He wrote: 'Confidential'.

'There you are,' he said.

With an indulgent air, the secretary took the form and walked towards the door. Her smile and her dignified walk made it very clear that the administrative assistant to a cabinet minister was a person much too important to barge in on without an appointment. Henri looked pityingly at the thick white envelope he was holding in his hand. He had played out the comedy, and now it was no longer possible to escape reality. Poor das Viernas would soon find himself the victim of a cruel reply, or of silence.

The secretary reappeared. 'Monsieur Tournelle will be happy to see you as soon as he has a moment. In the meantime you can leave your message with me and I'll see that he gets it at once!'

'Thank you,' Henri said, handing her the envelope. Never had it seemed more absurd to him than in the hands of that competent young woman. All right, that was it. He had done what he had been asked to do; whatever happened after that no longer concerned him. He decided to stop off at the Bar Rouge. It was a few minutes past noon and Lachaume would surely be there; Henri wanted to thank him for his review. Opening the door, he caught sight of Nadine seated with Lachaume and Vincent.

'Where have you been hiding?' she said in a sulky voice.

'I've been working.' He sat down beside her and ordered a drink.

'We were just talking about you,' Lachaume said cheerfully. 'About your interview in *Lendemain*. You did right in bringing things out in the open. I mean about allied policy in Spain.'

'Why don't you do it?' Vincent asked.

'We can't. At least not just now. But it's good someone did it.'

'That's really funny!' Vincent said.

'You just don't want to understand anything,' Lachaume said.

'I understand only too damned well.'

'No, you don't, not at all.'

Henri sipped his drink and listened idly. Lachaume never let an opportunity slip by to explain the present, the past, and the future as reviewed and revised by the Party. But this couldn't be held against him. At twenty, in the Maquis, he had discovered adventure, comradeship, and Communism. And that was excuse enough for his fanaticism. 'I like him because I did him a favour,' Henri thought ironically. He had hidden him in Paula's studio for three months, had obtained false papers for him, and in parting had made him a present of his only overcoat.

'By the way,' Henri said abruptly, 'I'd like to thank you for your review. It was really wonderful.'

'I said exactly what I thought,' Lachaume replied. 'Besides, everyone agrees with me – it's one hell of a book.'

'Yes, it's funny,' Nadine said. 'For once all the critics agree. It's

as if they were burying someone or awarding a prize for virtue.'

'You might have something there!' Henri said. 'The little viper,' he thought with amused bitterness, 'she found just the words I didn't want to say, not even to myself.' He smiled at Lachaume. 'You're dead wrong on one point, though. My man will never become a Communist.'

'What else do you expect him to become?'

Henri laughed. 'Just what I've become!' he said.

Lachaume laughed in turn. 'Precisely!' He looked Henri in the eyes. 'In less than six months, the SRL will no longer exist and you'll have realized that individualism doesn't pay. You'll join the Communist Party.'

Henri shook his head. 'But I do more for you as I am. You're delighted I brought the Spanish thing out in the open instead of your having to do it. And what good would it do if *L'Espoir* rehashed the same stuff *L'Humanité* prints? I'm doing much more useful work trying to make people think, asking questions that you don't ask, telling certain truths that you don't tell.'

'But you ought to be doing that work as a Communist,' Lachaume said.

'They wouldn't let me!'

'Of course they would. It's true there's too much factionalism in the Party just now, but that's because of circumstances. It won't last forever.' Lachaume paused a moment and then said, 'Don't repeat this, but some of my friends and I are hoping to start a magazine of our own pretty soon, a magazine with a little scope,

in which everything will be discussed with complete freedom.'

'First of all, a magazine isn't a daily,' Henri said. 'And as for being free, I'd have to see it to believe it.' He gave Lachaume a friendly look. 'Anyhow, it would be a good thing if you could have a magazine of your own. Do you think it'll go through?'

'There's a good chance of it.'

Vincent leaned forward and looked at Henri defiantly. 'If you get your sheet I hope you'll make sure that you'll explain to the comrades what a lousy stinking thing it is to open your arms wide to all those so-called "repentant" sons-of-bitches.'

'We? Accepting collaborators with open arms? Tell that to the readers of *Figaro*. It'll cheer them up a little.'

'Don't tell me you're not quietly clearing a lot of those lousy bastards.'

'Don't confuse the issue,' Lachaume said. 'When we decide to clear one of them, it means we think he can be regenerated.'

'Well, if that's the way you look at it, how do you know the guys we shot down couldn't be regenerated?'

'At the time it was out of the question; they had to be shot.'

'At the time! But I've killed them all my life!' Vincent smiled maliciously. 'Let me tell you something. They're all nothing but shits – all of them, without any exception. And what we ought to do now is get rid of all those we missed.'

'What do you mean by that?' Nadine asked.

'I mean we ought to organize,' Vincent replied, his eyes trying to catch Henri's attention.

'Organize what? Punitive expeditions?' Henri said, laughing.

'Do you know that in Marseilles they're throwing everyone who belonged to the Maquis in jail, just as if they were a bunch of common criminals?' Vincent said. 'Are we going to let them get away with it?'

'Terrorism is no solution,' Lachaume said.

'No,' Henri said. He looked at Vincent. 'I've heard talk about gangs who enjoyed playing at being judges. Now if it's a question of settling a personal account, I can understand. But guys who think they're saving France by killing a few collaborators here and there are either sick men or stupid bastards.'

'Yes, I know. The sound thing is to join the Communist Party or the SRL!' Vincent said. He shook his head. 'You won't get me.'

'I guess we'll just have to do without you!' Henri replied amiably.

He got up; Nadine followed his example. 'I'll go with you,' she said.

She seemed to enjoy trying to look like a woman; she had even made an attempt to use make-up. But her eyelashes looked like a sea urchin's spiny bristles and there were black smudges under her eyes. As soon as they got outside she asked, 'Are you having lunch with me?'

'No, I have some work to do at the paper.'

'At this time of day?'

'At all times of the day.'

'Well, let's have dinner together then.'

'No again. I plan to work very late. And afterwards, I'm going to see your father.'

'Oh! That paper! Can't you ever talk about anything else? After all, you know, it's not the centre of the world!'

'I never said it was.'

'No, but that's what you think.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'Well, when will we see each other?'

He hesitated. 'Honestly, Nadine, I haven't a minute to spare these days.'

'You do sit down at a table and eat occasionally, don't you? I really don't see why I can't sit down opposite you.' She looked Henri squarely in the face. 'Unless I give you a pain in the neck.'

'Of course you don't.'

'Well?'

'All right. Meet me at the office tomorrow between nine and ten.'

'I'll be there.'

He was quite fond of Nadine and seeing her didn't, as she put it, give him a pain in the neck. But that wasn't the point. The thing was that he had to organize his life as efficiently as possible. And there was simply no place in it for Nadine.

'Why were you so hard on Vincent?' Nadine asked. 'You really shouldn't have been.'

'I'm afraid he'll do something foolish.'

'Something foolish! Whenever anyone wants to do something, you call it foolishness. Don't you think writing books is the most

goddamned foolish thing of all? Everyone applauds you and for a while you're all puffed up. But afterwards they all stick your book in a corner and no one gives it another thought.'

'That's my profession,' he said.

'It's a funny profession!'

They continued walking in silence. When they arrived at the door to the newspaper Nadine said dryly, 'I'm going home. See you tomorrow.'

'So long.'

Hesitantly, she turned back and stood before him. 'Between nine and ten – that's rather late, isn't it? We won't have much time to do anything. Can't we begin the evening a little earlier?'

'I won't be free before then.'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'All right then, at nine-thirty. But what's the use of being famous and everything if you don't take any time out to live?'

'To live!' he thought as she turned on her heels and walked briskly away. 'To them that always means only one thing; to spend your time with them. But there's more than one way of living!'

He liked that familiar smell of stale dust and fresh ink that greeted him as he entered the building. The offices were still empty, the basement silent. But soon a whole world would rise from this stillness, a world which was his creation. 'No one will ever lay his hands on *L'Espoir,'* he repeated to himself. He sat down at his desk and stretched out his legs. There was, he told himself, no sense in getting upset. He would not give up the

paper; somehow you always manage to find time for things you want to do; and after a good night's sleep his work would move along much more smoothly.

He went through his mail quickly and looked at his watch. He had an appointment with Preston in half an hour, which left him ample time to have it out with Sezenac. 'Ask Sezenac to come to my office,' he said to his secretary. He went back to his desk and sat down. It's all well and good to have confidence in people, but there were a lot of guys who would jump at the chance of taking Sezenac's place and who deserved it more than he did. When you stubbornly decide to give one man a chance, you arbitrarily deny it to another one. And that was not right. 'Too bad!' Henri said to himself. He recalled how promising Sezenac had seemed when Chancel had first brought them together. For a year he had been the most zealous of the liaison agents; maybe he needed extraordinary circumstances to bring out his best. But now, pale, puffy, glassy-eyed, he constantly trailed in Vincent's wake and he was no longer able to write a coherent sentence.

'Ah! There you are! Sit down.'

Sézenac sat down without saying a word. Henri suddenly realized that he had been working with him a whole year and that he knew him not at all. He was more or less familiar with the lives of the others, their tastes, their ideas. But Sezenac kept things to himself.

'When are you going to turn in something better than the junk you've been giving us lately?' Henri said much more sharply than

he had intended to.

Sézenac shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

'What's wrong?' Henri asked. 'Not getting laid enough? Got yourself in a jam?'

Sézenac sat quietly, rolling a handkerchief between his hands and staring stubbornly at the floor. It was really difficult to get through to him.

'What's wrong?' Henri repeated. 'I'm willing to give you another chance.'

'No,' Sézenac said. 'Journalism just isn't my dish.'

'At first you were doing all right.'

Sézenac smiled vaguely. 'Chancel helped me a little.'

'He didn't write your articles for you, did he?'

'No,' Sézenac replied without assurance. He shook his head. 'No use in pressing the matter. It's not the kind of work I like.'

'You could have told me sooner,' Henri said with a trace of annoyance. Again there was a brief silence, and then Henri asked, 'What would you like to do?'

'Don't worry about me. I'll get along.'

'How?'

'I'm giving English lessons. And I've been promised some translations.' He stood up. 'It's really been good of you to keep me on so long.'

'If you ever feel like sending us something …'

'If I get round to it.'

'Can I do anything for you?'

'You can lend me a thousand francs,' Sézenac said.

'Here's two thousand,' Henri said. 'But that's no solution.'

Sézenac shoved his handkerchief and the money into his pocket and then, for the first time, he smiled. 'It's a temporary solution; they're the surest.' He opened the door. 'Thanks.'

'Good luck,' Henri called after him. He was disturbed. It seemed almost as if all Sézenac had been waiting for was a chance to escape. 'I'll get news of him through Vincent,' he thought in order to reassure himself. But it bothered him a little not to have been able to make him talk.

He took out his fountain pen and placed a sheet of writing paper in front of him. Preston would be along in fifteen minutes. He didn't want to think too much about the magazine before he was sure, but his head was full of plans. The weeklies that were being published since the end of the Occupation were all rather pitiful; that would make it all the more fun to put out something really good.

Henri's secretary poked her head in the door. 'Mr Preston is here.'

'Ask him to come in.'

In his civilian clothes, Preston didn't look at all like an American. The very perfection of his French, however, made him somewhat suspect. He came to the point almost immediately.

'Your friend Luc must have told you that we saw each other several times during your absence,' he said. 'Both of us deplored

the state of the French press; it's really sad. It would be a very great pleasure for me to help your paper by furnishing you with additional newsprint.'

'Yes, that would fix us up fine!' said Henri. 'Of course, we couldn't think of changing our format,' he added. 'The agreement with the other papers is still in effect. But there's nothing to stop us from bringing out a Sunday magazine supplement, and that would open up a whole new area.'

Preston smiled reassuringly. 'As far as the newsprint is concerned,' he said, 'there's no problem. You could have it tomorrow.' He slowly lit a cigarette with his black enamelled lighter. 'I have to ask you a very blunt question. *L'Espoir*'s political line is not going to change, is it?'

'No,' Henri replied. 'Why?'

'To my way of thinking, *L'Espoir* represents precisely the guide your country needs,' Preston said. 'That's why my friends and I want to help it. We admire your independent mind, your courage, your lucidity …'

He stopped speaking, but his voice hung in the air.

'Well?' said Henri.

'I followed the beginning of your series on Portugal with great interest. But this morning I was a bit surprised to read in an interview you recently gave that you intend – in regard to the Salazar régime – to criticize American policy in the Mediterranean area.'

'As a matter of fact, I do find this policy unfortunate,' Henri

said rather sharply. 'Both Franco and Salazar should have been booted out a long time ago.'

'Things aren't that simple, as you know very well,' Preston said. 'It goes without saying that we have every intention of helping the Spanish and Portuguese to regain their democratic freedoms – but at the right moment.'

'The right moment is immediately,' Henri said. 'There are people in Madrid's prisons who have been sentenced to death. Every day counts.'

'That's my opinion, too,' Preston said. 'And I'm certain that the State Department will take the same position.' He smiled. 'That's why it seems to me especially inopportune to turn French opinion against us now.'

Henri smiled in turn. 'Politicians are never in a hurry; the best thing just now, it seems to me, is to back them into a corner.'

'Don't fool yourself,' Preston said amiably. 'Your paper is well thought of in American political circles. 'But don't expect to influence Washington.'

'I don't expect to,' Henri said. 'I say what I think, that's all.' He added heatedly, 'You were just congratulating me on my independence …'

'And it's exactly that independence which you are going to jeopardize,' Preston said. He looked at Henri reproachfully. 'In opening that campaign, you play directly into the hands of those who want to picture us as imperialists.' He paused a moment and added, 'You take a humanitarian position with which I fully

agree, but one which is not politically sound. Give us a year, and the republic will be re-established in Spain – and under the most favourable conditions.'

'I have no intention of opening a campaign,' Henri said. 'All I want to do is point out certain facts.'

'But those facts will be used against us,' Preston said.

Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'That's not my business. I'm a journalist. My job is to tell the truth.'

Preston looked Henri firmly in the eyes. 'If you knew that printing certain truths would have unfortunate consequences, would you print them?'

'If I were absolutely certain that truth would be harmful, then I could see only one solution: I'd resign; I'd give up journalism.'

Preston smiled engagingly. isn't that a rather rigid ethical concept?'

'I have Communist friends who've asked me exactly the same question,' Henri replied. 'But it's not so much the truth I respect; it's my readers. I admit that under certain conditions telling the truth can be a luxury. That may well be the case in Russia,' he said, smiling. 'But in France, today, I don't recognize anyone's right to suppress the truth. Maybe it isn't so simple for a politician, but I'm not on the side of those who are doing the manoeuvring; I'm with the ones they are trying to manoeuvre. They count on me to keep them informed of what's happening as well as I can, and if I remain silent or if I lie I'd be betraying them.'

He stopped, a little embarrassed by his lengthy speech. He hadn't addressed it only to Preston; he had a vague feeling of being cornered and he was striking out haphazardly against everyone.

Preston shook his head. 'We come back to the same basic misunderstanding: you say you simply want to keep them informed, but I call that a form of action. I'm afraid you're a victim of French intellectualism. As for me, I'm a pragmatist. Do you know the works of John Dewey?'

'No.'

'That's a pity. We pragmatists aren't very well known in France. Dewey is a very great philosopher.' Preston paused a moment, and then continued, 'Mark you, we have no objections at all to being criticized. No one is more open to constructive criticism than an American. Explain to us how to keep the affection of the French and we'll listen to you with rapt attention. But France is in no position to judge our Mediterranean policies.'

'I speak in my name only,' Henri said irritably. 'Whether you're in a good position or a bad one, you still have the right to speak your mind.'

There was a brief silence, and then Preston said, 'You understand of course that if *L'Espoir* takes a position against America I can no longer continue to sympathize with it.'

'I understand,' Henri said sharply. 'And I imagine that you, for your part, can easily understand how unthinkable it would be for me to subject *L'Espoir* to your censorship.'

'But who said anything about censorship!' Preston replied in shocked surprise. 'All I want is for you to remain faithful to your guiding principle. I mean your neutrality.'

'Exactly. I have every intention of remaining faithful to it,' Henri said with a sudden flash of anger. *L'Espoir* can't be bought for a few pounds of newsprint.'

'Well, if that's the way you're going to take it …' Preston said. He got up. 'Believe me, I'm sorry,' he said.

'Well, I'm not,' Henri replied.

All day long he had felt vaguely angry. But he had certainly chosen a fine time to blow up. He had been a fool to imagine that Preston would play Santa Claus. He was, after all, an agent of the State Department and Henri had been inexcusably naïve in talking to him as a friend. He stood up and walked towards the editorial room.

'Luc, old boy, it looks like we're going to have to do without a magazine supplement,' he said, sitting down on the edge of the conference table.

'No!' Luc said. 'Why?' His face looked puffy and old, like a dwarf's. When his plans were thwarted, he seemed to be on the verge of tears.

'Because that Yank wants to keep us from opening our mouths about America. He practically offered me a deal.'

'That's hard to believe. He seemed to be such a decent chap.'

'In a way, it's flattering,' Henri said. 'We're really being courted. Do you know what Dubreuilh suggested last night? That

L'Espoir become the official organ of the SRL.'

Luc looked dismayed. 'Did you refuse?'

'Of course.'

'All those parties that are coming to life again, the factions, the movements – we have to stay clear of all those things,' Luc said pleadingly.

Luc's convictions were so strong that even when you agreed with them you were sometimes tempted to harry him a little. 'But it is true that the unity of the Resistance is nothing more than words now,' Henri said. 'And we are going to have to state our position clearly one of these days.'

'They're the ones who're sabotaging unity!' Luc said with a sudden burst of emotion. 'They call the SRL a "regrouping", but all they're doing is to create a new schism.'

'No, it's the bourgeoisie who are creating the schism. And when you try to place yourself above the class struggle, you run the risk of playing right into their hands.'

'Listen,' Luc said, 'as far as the paper's political position goes, you're the one who makes the decisions; you've got more brains than I. But hooking up with the SRL is another story. I'm absolutely opposed to that.' His face hardened. 'I've spared you the details of our troubles – financial matters and such – but I did warn you that things weren't going too well. If we get hooked up with a movement that means damned little to damned near everyone, that's not going to help things.'

'Do you think we'd lose more readers?' Henri asked.

'Obviously! And then we're done for.'

'Yes,' Henri said. 'I suppose you're right.'

Circulation had dropped appreciably, for as long as people were forced to buy minuscule tabloids the non-Parisians preferred their local papers to the Parisian dailies. But even if they could go back to the regular-sized format, he wasn't at all sure that *L'Espoir* would regain its readers. In any case, he couldn't afford the luxury of a crisis. 'I suppose I am just an idealist!' Henri thought. In arguing with Dubreuilh, he had raised the issues of confidence, influence, roles to be played. And all the while the real answer was plainly written in figures: they would go broke. It was one of those solid arguments that neither sophisms nor ethics could alter. He was anxious to use it.

Henri arrived at Dubreuilh's apartment on the Quai Voltaire at ten o'clock, but the launching of his planned attack was delayed for a while. As usual Anne produced a light supper: Portuguese sausages, ham, a rice salad, and, to celebrate Henri's return, a bottle of Meursault. They exchanged stories about their travelling experiences and shared the latest Paris gossip. To tell the truth, Henri did not feel very aggressive. He was happy to be back once more in Dubreuilh's study, among those well-worn books, most of them inscribed by their authors, among the unpurchased paintings signed with well-known names, among the exotic curios acquired over the years in many travels. As an observer from the outside Henri could truly appreciate the value of that whole discreetly privileged life, and at the same time he

felt those rooms were his real home. In the most intimate reaches of his own life, he was warm and comfortable there.

'It's really cosy here,' he said to Anne.

'Isn't it? Whenever I go out, I feel lost,' she said cheerfully.

'I must say Scriassine picked a weird place to take us,' Dubreuilh said.

'What a dive! But all in all, it turned out to be a pretty good evening,' Henri said. 'Except for the end,' he added with a smile.

'The end? No, not the end. The moment I found particularly difficult was when they played *Dark Eyes,'* Dubreuilh said with an innocent air.

Henri hesitated. Perhaps Dubreuilh had decided against bringing it up again so soon. It certainly would be a shame to spoil this moment; why not profit from his discretion? But Henri was impatient to confirm his secret victory.

'You certainly did a good job of dragging *L'Espoir* through the mud,' he said lightly.

'Not at all,' Dubreuilh replied with a smile.

'Anne is my witness! Anyhow, I'll admit that not all of what you had to say was wrong,' Henri conceded. 'And I do want to say that I've been thinking seriously about your proposition to tie *L'Espoir* in with the SRL; in fact, I even spoke to Luc about it. But it's completely out of the question.'

Dubreuilh's smile vanished. 'I hope that isn't your last word,' he said. 'Because without a paper, the SRL will never amount to anything. And don't go telling me there are other papers; none

of them really share our ideas completely. If you refuse, who'll accept?'

'I know,' Henri said. 'But let me tell you something: at the moment *L'Espoir* is in a financial crisis, like most of the other papers. I believe we'll come out of it all right, but for a good long while we're going to have a hard time making ends meet. Now the day we decide to become an organ of a political party, circulation will drop at once. And we just won't be able to take it.'

'The SRL isn't a party,' Dubreuilh said. 'It's a movement, a movement with a broad enough base so that your readers won't be shocked by the change.'

'Party or movement, practically speaking it's the same thing,' Henri replied. 'All those Communist workers and Communist sympathizers I spoke about, they'll willingly buy an informative paper along with *L'Humanité*, but they wouldn't touch another political sheet. Even if the SRL walked hand in hand with the Communist Party, it wouldn't change a thing. Stick a label on *L'Espoir*, and it immediately becomes suspect.' Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'The day we're read only by the members of the SRL, we may just as well close up shop.'

'But membership would increase enormously if we had the help of a paper.'

'In the meantime, though, we'd have to ride out a long storm,' Henri said. 'It would be more than enough to sink us. And obviously, that wouldn't help anyone.'

'No … no, that certainly wouldn't help anyone,' Dubreuilh

conceded. He remained silent for a moment, drummed on his blotter with the tips of his fingers. 'Obviously there's a certain risk,' he said.

'A risk we just can't allow ourselves to take,' Henri added.

Dubreuilh reflected again and then said with a sigh, 'What we need is money.'

'Exactly. And we haven't got any.'

'No,' Dubreuilh repeated in a subdued voice. 'We haven't got any.'

Naturally, Dubreuilh would never admit defeat that easily; he still had hopes that it would somehow work out. But the argument had carried weight, and although Henri saw him frequently during the following weeks Dubreuilh did not broach the subject again. Henri, for his part, was determined to show proof of his good will; he kept two appointments with Samazelle, attended the meetings of the committee, and promised to publish the movement's manifesto in *L'Espoir*. 'Do as you like,' Luc constantly repeated. 'As long as we stay independent.'

Yes, they would stay independent; that at least was settled. But now the question was what to do with that hard-earned independence. In September, everything had seemed so simple: a little common sense, a little good will, and that was all that was needed; they would be all right. Now, however, there was an endless stream of new problems, and each one posed a new question. Lachaume had been so effusive in his praise of Henri's series on Portugal that there was a good chance *L'Espoir* might

be taken for an instrument of the Communist Party. Should he deny that? Henri didn't want to lose the intellectuals who liked *L'Espoir* because of its impartiality, and neither did he want to antagonize his Communist readers. But in trying to please everyone, he merely condemned himself to vacuity, and thereby helped to lull people back to sleep. What to do then? As he walked over to the Scribe where Lambert was awaiting him for dinner, he kept turning the question over in his mind. Whatever he decided, he'd be letting himself be swayed by a mood rather than by any concrete evidence. Despite all his resolve, he was still back where he started from; he didn't know enough, he didn't know anything. 'It would certainly be more logical to learn first, and to talk afterwards,' he said to himself. But that's not the way things happen. First, you've got to speak, because the matter is urgent; afterwards, events prove you right or wrong. 'And that's precisely what's known as bluffing,' he said to himself unhappily. 'Yes, even I bluff my readers.' He had promised himself to speak the truth, to tell his readers things that would enlighten them, that would help them think. And now he was bluffing them. What to do? He couldn't shut down the newspaper, fire everyone, lock himself up in a room for a year with his books. The paper had to live, and to keep it alive Henri was forced to give himself to it completely, day after day. He stopped in front of the Scribe. He was glad he was dining with Lambert, but it disturbed him a little to have to speak to him about his short stories. He hoped Lambert didn't take them too seriously. He pushed through the revolving

door; once inside, it seemed to him as if he had suddenly been transported to another continent. It was warm here, the men and the women wore American uniforms, the air smelled of mild tobacco, luxurious trinkets were on display in glass show cases. Lambert, smiling and dressed in a lieutenant's uniform, came to meet him. In the dining-room, reserved for the use of war correspondents, butter and very white bread were on every table.

'You know, you can get French wine in this drugstore,' Lambert said cheerfully. 'Tonight we'll eat as well as a German prisoner-of-war.'

'Do you resent the fact that the Yanks feed their prisoners well?'

'No, not especially. But as for the average Frenchman who's living on air – it makes him sick. It's just that the whole thing stinks – the way they handle the Fritzes, including the Nazis, with such consideration, and the way they treat the concentration camp prisoners.'

'I'd like to know if it's true that they're keeping the French Red Cross from going into the camps,' Henri said.

'That's the first thing I intend to look into,' Lambert replied.

'We're not very hot on America these days,' Henri said as he filled his plate with tinned meat and noodles.

'And there's no good reason to be!' Lambert knitted his brow. 'It's just too bad it makes Lachaume so damned happy.'

'I was thinking about that as I was walking over here,' Henri said. 'You say a word against the Communist Party, and

you're playing into the hands of the reactionaries! You criticize Washington, and you're a Communist. Unless they suspect you of being a fifth columnist.'

'Fortunately, two truths balance each other out,' Lambert said.

Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'Don't count on that too much. So you remember how at the Christmas party we were saying we shouldn't allow *L'Espoir* to become regimented? Well, that's a whole lot easier said than done.'

'It's just a question of speaking as our consciences dictate!' Lambert said.

'Did you ever stop to think what that means?' Henri asked. 'Every morning I tell a hundred thousand people how they ought to think. And what do I guide myself by? The voice of my conscience!' He poured himself a glass of wine. 'It's a gigantic swindle!'

Lambert smiled. 'Show me a journalist who's more scrupulous than you,' he said affectionately. 'You personally open every telegram, you keep your eyes on everything.'

'I always try to be honest,' Henri said. 'But that's the trouble; it doesn't give me the time to really study the things I talk about.'

'Nonsense! Your readers are more than happy with what you give them,' Lambert said. 'I know a hell of a lot of students who swear by *L'Espoir.'*

'That only makes me feel more guilty!' Henri replied.

Lambert gave him a worried look. 'You're not going to start studying statistics all day long, I hope.'

'That's just what I ought to do.' There was a brief silence and then suddenly Henri decided the moment had come to unburden himself. 'I brought back your stories,' he said. He smiled at Lambert. 'It's funny, you've had lots of interesting experiences, you've lived them hard, and I've often been fascinated hearing you tell about them. Your articles are always full of meat. And yet in these stories nothing seems to happen. I've been wondering why.'

'You don't think they're any good, do you?' Lambert said. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, I warned you.'

'The trouble is you haven't put anything of yourself into them,' Henri said.

Lambert hesitated. 'The things that really affect me wouldn't be interesting to anyone else.'

Henri smiled. 'But it's all too obvious that the ones you do talk about don't affect you at all. You get the feeling that you wrote these stories as if you were writing a hundred lines for punishment.'

'I never really did believe I had any talent,' Lambert said.

The forced smile which Lambert somehow managed only confirmed Henri's feeling that these stories were actually very important to him. 'Who's talented and who isn't?' he said. 'It's hard to say what that really means. No, you simply made a mistake in picking subjects that mean so little to you. That's all. Next time try putting more of yourself into your writing.'

'I wouldn't know how,' Lambert said. He laughed. 'I'm the

perfect example of the poor little intellectual who's utterly incapable of ever being creative.'

'Don't be an ass!' Henri said. 'These stories don't prove a thing. It's natural to miss the target the first time.'

Lambert shook his head. 'I know myself. I'll never accomplish anything worth while. And an intellectual who accomplishes nothing is pretty pitiful.'

'You'll do something if you're really determined to. And besides, being an intellectual is no disgrace!'

'It's nothing much to be proud of either,' Lambert replied.

'Well, I'm one, and you seem to have a pretty high opinion of me.'

'With you, it's different,' Lambert said.

'Not at all. I'm an intellectual, period. And it annoys hell out of me when they make that word an insult.'

He sought Lambert's eyes, but Lambert was looking obstinately at his plate. 'I wonder what I'll do when the war's over,' he said.

'You don't want to stay in journalism?'

'Being a war correspondent is more or less defensible. But a "peace" correspondent – I can't see it,' Lambert said, adding spiritedly, 'Yes, it's well worth it, being the kind of journalist you are; it's a real adventure. But being an editor, even with *L'Espoir*, wouldn't mean anything to me unless I had to earn my living by it. On the other hand, living off my income would give me a bad conscience.' He hesitated and then continued, 'My mother left

me too damned much money; no matter what, I'll have a bad conscience.'

'And so does everyone else,' Henri said.

'But everything you have, you earn. There's no question about that.'

'No one ever has a perfectly clear conscience,' Henri said. 'For example, it's utterly childish for me to be eating here when I refuse to go to black-market restaurants. All of us have our little tricks. Dubreuilh pretends to look upon money as a natural element. He has a hell of a lot of it, but he does nothing to earn it, never refuses anyone a loan, and leaves it up to Anne to manage it. And as for Anne, she puts her mind at rest by not considering it as her own; she tells herself she's spending it for her husband and her daughter, making a comfortable life for them which she, by chance, happens to profit from. The thing that helps me is that I have a devil of a time balancing my budget; it gives me the feeling that I don't have anything to spare. But that's just another way of cheating, too.'

'Still there's a difference.'

Henri shook his head. 'When conditions are unfair, you can't very well live a blameless life. And that's the real reason for going into politics – to try to change conditions.'

'I sometimes wonder if I shouldn't give away that money', Lambert said. 'But what good would that do?' He hesitated. 'Besides, I have to admit that the prospect of being poor frightens me.'

'Why don't you try to use it effectively?'

'That's just it! How? What can I do with it?'

'There must be some things that interest you?'

'I wonder …' Lambert replied.

'There are things you enjoy, aren't there? Don't tell me there isn't anything in the world you enjoy!' Henri said a trifle impatiently.

'Yes, I enjoy having friends, but ever since the liberation we do nothing but argue. Women? Either they're idiots or they're unbearable. Books? I've got so many now I don't know what to do with them. And as for travelling, the world is too sad. And then, for some time now, I've not been able to distinguish good from evil,' he concluded.

'What do you mean by that?'

'A year ago, everything seemed as simple as a kid's painting book. But now you begin to realize that the Americans are beasts as racialist as the Nazis, and that they don't give a damn if people go on dying in concentration camps. And speaking of concentration camps, it seems as if they've got a few in Russia that aren't very pretty, either. Here they shoot some of the collaborators. And some of the other bastards, who were just as bad, get garlanded with flowers.'

'If you can get angry, that means you still do believe in certain things.'

'No, frankly, when you begin asking yourself questions, nothing stands up. There are a lot of values you're supposed to

take as fundamental facts. In the name of what? When you get right down to it, why freedom? Why equality? Does justice have any meaning? Why give a damn about other people? A man who wants nothing else but to enjoy life, like my father, is he so wrong?' Lambert gave Henri a worried look. 'Am I shocking you?'

'Not at all. Sometimes you have to ask yourself questions.'

'More than that, there has to be someone to answer them,' Lambert said, his voice growing heated. 'They beat us over the head with politics, but why side with one party rather than another? First of all, we need a set of principles, an approach to life.' With a trace of defiance in his eyes, Lambert looked steadily at Henri. 'That's what you ought to give us; it would be a damned sight more worthwhile than helping Dubreuilh write manifestos.'

'A set of principles necessarily includes a political attitude,' Henri said. 'And on the other hand, politics is itself a living thing.'

'I don't think so,' Lambert replied. 'In politics, all you're concerned with are abstract things that don't exist – the future, masses of people. But what is really concrete is the actual present moment, and people as separate and single individuals.'

'But each individual is affected by collective history,' Henri said.

'The trouble is that in politics you never come down from the high plateau of history to the problem of the lowly individual,' Lambert said. 'You get lost in generalities and no one gives a damn about particular cases.'

Lambert's voice as he spoke these words was so determined that Henri looked at him curiously. 'For example?' he said.

'Well, for example, take the question of guilt. Politically, abstractly, people who worked with the Germans are no-good bastards not fit to spit upon. No problem, right? But now, when you look at one of them all by himself, close up, it isn't at all the same any more.'

'You're thinking of your father?' Henri asked.

'Yes. I've been wanting to ask your advice about that for some time now. Should I really continue to turn my back on him so stubbornly?'

'But my God! The way you were talking about him last year!' Henri said, surprised.

'Because at that time, I thought he had denounced Rosa. But he convinced me he had no part in it; everybody knew she was Jewish. No, my father was involved in "economic" collaboration, which is bad enough. But after all, he's getting old, and they're going to make him stand trial, and it's almost certain he'll be convicted …'

'You've seen him again?'

'Once. And since then he's sent me several letters, letters that rather upset me, I must admit.'

'If you feel like making up with him, you're perfectly free to do so,' Henri said. 'But I always thought you got along so badly?' he added.

'When I first met you, yes.' Lambert paused a moment and

then continued with some effort. 'He raised me, you know. I believe that in his own way he liked me a lot; only you could never disobey him.'

'Before you got to know Rosa, you'd never disobeyed him?' Henri asked.

'No. That's what made him furious; it was the first time I ever went against him,' Lambert said. He shrugged his shoulders. 'I suppose it suited me to believe he denounced her; that way, there wasn't any problem. I'd have killed him with my own hands at the time.'

'But what made you suspect him?'

'Some friends of mine put the idea in my head – Vincent among others. But I talked to Vincent about it again; he has absolutely no proof, not a shred. My father swore on the grave of my mother that it was a lie. Now that I've cooled off and can look at things objectively again I'm convinced he could never have done a thing like that. Never.'

'It would have been a ghastly thing to do,' Henri said. He hesitated for a moment. Now Lambert hoped that his father was innocent, just as two years earlier, without any proof, he had hoped he was guilty. And there was probably no way of ever knowing the truth. 'Vincent likes to think of himself as a cloak-and-dagger character,' Henri said. 'Listen, if you no longer have any reason to suspect your father, if personally you don't bear him any grudge, it's not for you to act as his judge. Go and see him, do as you see fit, and don't worry about what anyone else

has to say.'

'Do you really think I can?' Lambert asked.

'Who's to stop you?'

'Don't you think it would be a sign of infantilism?'

Henri gave Lambert a surprised look. 'Infantilism?'

Lambert blushed. 'I suppose I mean cowardice.'

'Not in the least. It's not cowardly to live as you see fit.'

'Yes,' Lambert said, 'you're right. I'll write to him.' Gratefully, he added, 'I'm glad I talked to you about it.' He dipped his spoon into the small saucer of pink, shimmering gelatine. 'You could really help us so much,' he murmured. 'Not only myself, but a lot of other young people who are in the same boat.'

'Help you in what way?' Henri asked.

'You have the sense of what is real. You ought to teach us how to live for the moment.'

Henri smiled. 'Formulating a set of principles, an approach to life, doesn't exactly enter into my plans.'

His eyes shining, Lambert looked up at Henri. 'Oh, I stated that badly. I wasn't thinking of a theoretical treatise. But there are things that you consider important, there are values you believe in. You ought to show us the pleasant things on earth. And you could also make it a little more livable by writing beautiful books. It seems to me that that is what literature should do.'

Lambert delivered his little speech in a single breath. It seemed to Henri that he had prepared it in advance and that for days he had been waiting for the right moment to get it off his

chest.

'Literature isn't necessarily pleasant,' he said.

'But it is!' Lambert said. 'Even things that are sad become pleasant when they're done artistically.' He hesitated. 'Maybe pleasant isn't exactly the right word, but it'll do.' He paused again and blushed. 'I'm not trying to dictate to you what you should write. Only you mustn't forget that you are first and foremost a writer, an artist.'

'I never do forget it,' Henri said.

'I know, but …' Once more Lambert paused, seemed embarrassed. 'For example, your series on Portugal is very good, but I remember those pages you once wrote on Sicily. It makes you feel a little sad not to find anything like them in what you're writing now.'

'If you ever go to Portugal, you won't feel very much like describing pomegranates in bloom,' Henri said.

'I wish you'd feel that way again,' Lambert said urgently. 'Why not? You certainly have the right to stroll along the seaside without worrying about the price of sardines.'

'But the fact is that I couldn't,' Henri replied.

'After all,' Lambert continued vehemently, 'we fought in the Resistance to defend the individual, to defend his right to be himself and to be happy. It's time now to reap what we sowed.'

'The trouble is that there are several hundred million individuals for whom that right still doesn't exist,' Henri said, shrugging his shoulders. 'I think it's precisely because we began

to take notice of them that we can no longer stop.'

'Then everybody has to wait for the whole world to be happy before trying to be happy?' Lambert said. 'And art and literature must be put off until that golden age? It's now, right now, that we need them!'

'I don't say one has to stop writing,' Henri replied. He paused; Lambert's reproach had touched a sore spot. Yes, there were a great many other things to be said about Portugal, and it was with no little regret that he had pushed them aside. An artist, a writer – that's what he wanted to be, that's what he had to keep in mind at all times. Long ago he had made great promises to himself; now was the time to keep them. Precocious triumphs, a too-opportune book, too highly praised – he wanted something else more than that. 'As a matter of fact,' he resumed, 'I've just got started on the kind of novel you'll like. Just a story, in which I'll write what I please for my own pleasure.'

'Really?' Lambert said, his face brightening. 'Have you done very much? Is it going well?'

'Beginnings, you know, are always thankless. But it's coming along!' Henri replied.

'You don't know how happy I am to hear that!' Lambert said. 'It would be a damned shame if you let yourself be eaten up!'

'I won't let myself be eaten up,' Henri said.

'How's your light novel coming along?' Paula asked.

'It's coming,' Henri replied.

She stretched herself out on the bed behind him, and he felt

her eyes studying the back of his neck. She made him feel uneasy, but it would have been unkind of him to chase her out. After all, eyes make no noise. He tried to concentrate on the novel. During the past month, he had made several decisions and had finally resigned himself to setting the story in 1935. Perhaps it was a mistake – for days now, sentences had been withering at the tip of his pen.

'Yes, it is a mistake,' he said to himself decisively. He had wanted to write about himself. Well, he had nothing in common with the person he had been in 1935. His political indifference, his curiosity, his ambition, all that stubborn insistence on individualism – how quickly it passed, how foolish it was! It presupposed a future without obstacles, with guaranteed progress, the immediate brotherhood of man, and peace everlasting. Above all it presupposed selfishness and thoughtlessness. Oh, he would no doubt have been able to find excuses enough. But he was writing this book in order to try to tell the truth about his life, not to explain away its faults. 'It has to be written in the present,' he decided. He reread the last few pages. It was a pity to think that the past was going to be finally buried – his arrival in Paris, his first meetings with Dubreuilh, the trip to Djerba. 'I've lived them; that should be enough,' he said to himself. But if you take that position then the present is also enough, life itself is enough. And it obviously wasn't, for he had to write to feel himself completely alive. Too bad then. In any case you can't salvage everything. The question was to know what

to say about himself, about himself today. 'How far have I come? What do I want?' It was funny – if you're so set on expressing yourself, it's because you feel you're unique. And he was not even able to say in what way he thought he was! 'Who am I?' He did not ask himself that question in the past; then it had always been the others who were defined, had limits. But not he. His books and life were still ahead of him. It enabled him to dismiss all adverse criticism, and from the heights of his future works to look on everyone, even Dubreuilh, with a little condescension. But now, he had to admit to himself that he was a mature man: young people treated him as an elder, adults as one of them, and some even treated him with respect. Mature, bounded, finite, himself and no one else, nothing but himself. But who was he? In a way, his books would ultimately decide; but on the other hand, he had to know the truth about himself in order to write them. At first sight, the meaning of those months he had just lived through was quite clear, but if you looked more closely everything became hazy. Helping people to think straight, to live better lives – was his heart really set on it, or was it only a humanitarian daydream? Was he really interested in what happened to others, or only in soothing his own conscience? And literature? What meaning did it now hold for him? There's nothing more abstract than wanting to write when you have nothing urgent to say. His pen hung motionless above the paper and he thought irritably that Paula was there behind him, watching him not write.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.