

The Silence of the Sea

I

To the memory of SAINT-POL-ROUX the murdered poet¹

There was a great display of military preparations before he arrived. First came two troopers, both very fair; one thin and gangling, the other squarely built with the hands of a quarryman. They looked at my house without going in. Later an N.C.O.² arrived, and the gangling trooper went with him. They spoke to me in what they thought was French, but I didn't understand a word. However, I showed them the unoccupied rooms and they seemed satisfied.

Next morning an enormous grey army touring-car drove into my garden. The driver and a slim, fair-haired, smiling young soldier extricated two packing-cases from it, plus a large bundle wrapped up in grey cloth. They took the whole lot up to the largest room. The car went away, and a few hours later I heard hoofbeats. Three horsemen appeared. One dismounted and went off to have a look at the old stone building. When he came back all, men and horses alike, went into the barn which I use as my workroom. I saw later that they had driven the clamp from my carpenter's bench between two stones, in a hole in the wall, fastened a rope to the clamp and tied the horses to the rope.

For two days nothing more happened. I never saw a soul. The troopers went out early with their horses; in the evening they brought them back, and then they went to bed in the straw with which they had stuffed the attic.

Then, on the morning of the third day, the big touring-car returned. The smiling young man heaved a large officer's suitcase on his shoulder and carried it up to the room. Then he took his kitbag which he put in the room next door. He came downstairs

1. Pseudonym for Paul Roux (1861-1940), symbolist poet; see Vercors, *Battle of Silence*, p. 169: "The Germans had invaded his house, shot down his housekeeper before his eyes, seriously wounded his daughter Divine and set the whole house on fire; his own skull split by a rifle-butt, he had succumbed to the effects of this savagery in hospital at Brest."

2. Noncommissioned officer (for example, sergeant).

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and, speaking in good French to my niece, asked her for some sheets.

It was my niece who went to open the door when there was a knock. She had just brought me my coffee, as she did every evening (coffee helps me to sleep), and I was sitting in the back of the room in comparative darkness. The door opens straight on to the garden, and all round the house runs a red-tiled path which is very useful when it is wet. We heard footsteps and the sound of heels on the tiles. My niece looked at me and put down her cup. I kept mine in my hands.

It was night, but not very cold; all that November it was never very cold. I could see a massive figure, a flat cap, a mackintosh thrown round the shoulders like a cape.

My niece had opened the door and was waiting in silence. She had pulled the door right back to the wall and was standing up against the wall not looking at anything. For my part, I was drinking my coffee in little sips.

"If you please," said the officer in the doorway. He gave a little nod of greeting and seemed to be gauging the depth of the silence. Then he came in.

He slid the cape onto his arm, gave a military salute, and took off his cap; then he turned to my niece and, with a quiet smile, made her a very slight bow. Then he faced me and made me a deeper bow. "My name," he said, "is Werner von Ebrennac." I had time for the thought to cross my mind quickly: That's not a German name; perhaps he is descended from a Protestant émigré.³ Then he added, "I am extremely sorry."

The last word, which he drawled slightly, fell into the silence. My niece had closed the door and was still leaning against the wall looking straight in front of her. I hadn't got up. Slowly I put down my empty cup on the harmonium, then crossed my hands and waited.

The officer went on. "It had to be done, of course. I would have avoided it if I could. I am sure my orderly will do his best not to

3. "This name of Gascon Huguenot origin, which was my own invention entirely, cannot be very common in Germany. . . . If the authors of *Is Paris Burning?* are to be believed, the officer in charge of blowing up the bridges [in the capital during the German withdrawal in the summer of 1944] was called Ebrennac." See Vercors, *Battle of Silence*, p. 280; but also Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Is Paris Burning?* (New York, 1965), pp. 71-73, 77-78, 211, 220, 235, 261, where the officer in question is identified as "Captain Werner Ebernach."

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disturb you." He was standing in the middle of the room, huge and very thin; he could easily touch the beams by raising his arm. His head was hanging forward a little as if his neck didn't grow out from his shoulders, but from the top of his chest. He wasn't round-shouldered, but it looked as if he were. His narrow shoulders and hips were most striking, and his face was handsome; it was very masculine, and there were two big hollows in his cheeks. I couldn't see his eyes, which were hidden in the shadow of his brow, but they seemed light-coloured; his hair was fair and smooth, brushed straight back and giving out a silky glitter under the chandelier.

The silence was unbroken, it grew closer and closer like the morning mist; it was thick and motionless. The immobility of my niece, and for that matter my own, made it even heavier, turned it to lead. The officer himself, taken aback, stood without moving till at last I saw the beginning of a smile on his lips. His smile was serious and without a trace of irony. With his hand he made a vague gesture whose meaning I did not grasp, and fixed his eyes on my niece, still standing there stiffly, so that I had leisure to examine his strong profile, his thin and prominent nose. I saw a gold tooth shining between his half-closed lips. He turned his eyes away at last, stared at the fire on the hearth, and said, "I feel a very deep respect for people who love their country." Then he raised his head abruptly and looked at the carved angel over the window. "I could go up to my room now," he said, "but I don't know the way." My niece opened the door which gives on to the back staircase and began to climb the steps, without looking at the officer, just as if she had been alone. The officer followed her, and it was then I noticed that he was lame in one leg. I heard them cross the anteroom; the German's steps, a strong one, then a weak one, echoed down the corridor. A door opened and closed again; then my niece came back. She picked up her cup and went on drinking her coffee. I lit my pipe, and for a few minutes neither of us spoke; then I said, "Thank the Lord he looks fairly decent." My niece shrugged her shoulders. She took my velvet jacket on her lap and finished the piece of invisible mending which she had begun.

Next morning the officer came down while we were having breakfast in the kitchen. Another staircase leads to it, and I don't know if the German heard us or if he came that way by accident.

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He stopped in the doorway and said, "I have had a very good night. I should hope yours was as good as mine." He looked round the huge room with a smile. As we had very little wood and less coal, I had repainted it, we had brought in some furniture, some copper pans and old plates, so as to shut ourselves in there for the winter. All that, he took in, and we caught the gleam of the edge of his very white teeth. I saw that his eyes were not blue, as I had thought, but a golden brown. At last he crossed the room and opened the door on to the garden. He took a couple of steps and turned back to inspect our long low house with its ancient brown tiles and its covering of creepers.⁴ His smile broadened. "Your old mayor had told me I was to stay at the Château," he said, pointing with a backward flick of his hand at the pretentious building which could be seen a little higher up the hill, through the bare trees. "I shall congratulate my men on their mistake. Here it is a much more beautiful château." Then he closed the door, saluted us through the window pane, and disappeared.

That evening he came back at the same time as before. We were having our coffee. He knocked but didn't wait for my niece to open the door; he opened it himself. "I am afraid I am disturbing you," he said. "If you would rather, I will come in through the kitchen; then you can keep this door locked." He crossed the room and stopped a moment with his hand on the doorknob, looking into the various corners of the smoking-room. Then he made a slight bow. "I wish you a very good night," he said, and went out.

We never locked the door. I am not sure that our motives for this omission were very clear or unmixed. By a silent agreement, my niece and I had decided to make no changes in our life, not even in the smallest detail – as if the officer didn't exist, as if he had been a ghost. But it's possible that there was another sentiment mixed with this wish in my heart: I can't hurt anyone's feelings, even my enemy's, without suffering myself.⁵

For a long time, for more than a month in fact, the same scene took place every day. The officer knocked and came in. He spoke a few words about the weather, the temperature, or some other subject equally unimportant: all that these remarks had in common was that they did not call for an answer. He always lingered a moment on the threshold of the little door, and looked around him.

4. The Bruller family's house; see Vercors, *Battle of Silence*, pp. 151, 165.

5. For the expression of a similar sentiment by Bruller see *Battle of Silence*, pp. 120-21.

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A ghost of a smile would betray the pleasure which he seemed to get from this examination – the same examination every day, and the same pleasure. His eyes would rest on the bowed profile of my niece, invariably severe and impassive, and when at last he took his eyes off her I was sure I could read in them a kind of smiling approval. Then he would say with a bow as he left, "I wish you a very good night."

One evening everything changed abruptly. Outside, a fine snow mixed with rain was falling, terribly cold and damping. On the hearth I was burning the heavy logs which I kept especially for nights like this. In spite of myself I kept imagining the officer outside and how powdered he would be with snow when he came in. But he never came. It was much beyond his usual time, and it annoyed me to realize how my thoughts were taken up with him. My niece was knitting slowly, with a concentrated air.

At last we heard steps, but they came from inside the house. I recognized the unequal tread of the officer, and I realized that he had come in by the other door and was now on his way from his room. No doubt he hadn't wanted to appear before us unimpressive in a wet uniform, and so he had changed first.

The steps, a strong one, then a weak one, came down the staircase. The door opened, and there was the officer. He was in mufti, and was wearing a pair of thick grey flannel trousers and a steel-blue tweed coat with a warm brown check. It was large and loose-fitting and hung with easy carelessness. Beneath his coat a cream woollen pull-over fitted tightly over his spare and muscular body.

"Excuse me," he said. "I'm feeling cold. I got wet through, and my room is very chilly. I will warm myself at your fire for a few minutes." With some difficulty he crouched down by the hearth, put out his hands, and kept on turning them round. "That's fine," he said, and moved round to warm his back at the fire, still squatting and clasping one knee in his hands.

"Here it's nothing," he said. "Winter in France is a mild season. Where I come from, it's very hard. Very. The trees are all firs, close-packed forests with the snow heavy on them. Here the trees are delicate, and the snow on them is like lace. My home reminds me of a powerful thickset bull which needs all its strength to keep alive. Here everything is intelligence, and subtle poetic thought."

His voice was rather colourless, with very little resonance, and his accent was fairly slight, only noticeable on the harsher conson-

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ants. The general effect was of a kind of musical buzzing. He got up and rested his arm on the top of the high chimneypiece, leaning his forehead on the back of his hand. He was so tall that he had to stoop a little, whereas I shouldn't even have caught the top of my head there. He remained for a long time without moving or saying anything. My niece was knitting with machinelike energy, nor did she once look up at him. I was smoking, half stretched out in my big soft armchair. I imagined that nothing could disturb the weight of our silence, that the man would bid us good-night and go. But the muffled and musical buzzing began again; one couldn't say that it broke the silence, for it seemed to be born out of it.

"I have always loved France," said the officer without moving. "Always. I was only a child in the last war, and what I thought then doesn't count. But ever since I have always loved it – only it was from a distance, like the *Princesse Lointaine*."⁶ He paused before saying solemnly, "Because of my father."

He turned round with his hands in his coat-pockets and leant against the side of the chimneypiece; he kept bumping his head a little against the shelf. From time to time he slowly rubbed the back of his head against it with a natural movement, like a stag's. An armchair was there for him just at hand, but he didn't sit down. Right up to the last day he never sat down. We never gave, nor did he ever take, anything remotely like an opening for familiarity.

"Because of my father," he repeated. "He was intensely patriotic. The defeat was a great blow to him. And yet he loved France. He liked Briand,⁷ he believed in the Weimar Republic⁸ and in Briand, and he was very enthusiastic. He used to say, 'He is going to unite us like husband and wife.' He thought the sun was going to rise over Europe at last."

While he was talking he was watching my niece. He did not look at her as a man looks at a woman, but as he looks at a statue. And a statue was exactly what she was – a living one, but a statue all the same.

"But Briand was defeated. My father saw that France was still led by your heartless *grands bourgeois* – by people like your De

6. Play by Edmond Rostand (1868–1918), published in 1895.

7. Aristide Briand (1862–1932), Socialist premier and foreign minister during the 1920s, advocate of reconciliation with Germany, cowinner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926 with German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann.

8. Unofficial name for the democratic government of Germany from 1918/19 to January 1933, succeeded by the Nazi Third Reich.

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Wendels,⁹ your Henri Bordeaux,¹⁰ and your old Marshal.¹¹ He said to me, 'You must never go to France till you can do it in field-boots and a helmet.' I had to promise him that, for he was nearly dying, and when war broke out I knew the whole of Europe except France."

He smiled, and said, as if that had been a reason:

"I am a musician, you see."

A log fell in, and some embers rolled out from the hearth. The German leant over and picked up the embers with the tongs; then he went on:

"I am not a performer. I am a composer. That is my whole life, and so it's comical for me to see myself as a man of war. And yet I don't regret this war. No. I think that great things will come of it."

He straightened himself, took his hands out of his pockets and half raised them.

"Forgive me: I may have said something to hurt you. But I was saying what I think, and with sincere good feeling. I feel it because of my love of France. Great things will come of it for Germany and for France. I think, as my father did, that the sun is going to shine over Europe."

He took a couple of steps and bowed slightly. As on every evening he said, "I wish you a very good night." Then he went away.

I finished my pipe in silence, then I coughed slightly and said, "It's perhaps too unkind to refuse him even a farthing's worth of answer." My niece lifted her head. She raised her eyebrows very high, her eyes were shining with indignation.

Almost I felt myself blushing.

From that day his visits took on a new shape. Very rarely indeed did we see him in uniform; he used to change first and then knock on our door. Was it to spare us the sight of the uniform of the

9. France's leading family of iron and steel manufacturers, prominently represented in economic organizations at Vichy.

10. Writer (1870-1963) whose novels celebrated traditional values of family and religion, and who while serving as an official military historian in the First World War became a confidant of Marshal Pétain.

11. Henri Philippe Pétain (1856-1951), defender of Verdun and army commander in chief during World War I, war minister in 1934, ambassador to Franco's Spain after 1939, from the French defeat in the summer of 1940 until the liberation of France four years later Chief of State in the initially unoccupied southern zone with its capital at Vichy; after the war tried for treason and condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted by General de Gaulle to life imprisonment.

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enemy? or to make us forget it, to get us used to his personality? No doubt a bit of both. He used to knock, and then he would come in without waiting for the answer which he knew we would not give. He did it in the simplest and most natural way, and would warm himself at the fire, which was the excuse he always gave for his arrival – an excuse by which none of us was taken in, and whose useful conventionality he made no attempt to disguise.

He did not come every evening without fail; but I do not remember a single one in which he did not talk to us before he left. He used to lean over the fire, and while he was warming some part or other of himself at the blaze his droning voice would quietly make itself heard and, for the rest of the evening, there was an interminable monologue on the subjects – his country, music, France – which were obsessing his mind; for not once did he try to get an answer from us, or a sign of agreement or even a glance. He used not to speak for long – never for much longer than on the first evening. He would pronounce a few sentences, sometimes broken by silences, and sometimes linking them up with the monotonous continuity of a prayer; sometimes he leant against the chimneypiece without moving, like a caryatid; sometimes, without interrupting himself, he would go up to an object or a drawing on the wall. Then he would be silent, bow to us, and wish us a good night.

One day he said (it was in the early stages of his visits): "What is the difference between the fire in my home and this one here? Certainly the wood, the flame, and the fireplace are exactly alike. But not the light. That depends on the things on which it shines – the people in this smoking-room, the furniture, the walls, and the books on their shelves . . ."

"Why am I so fond of this room?" he went on thoughtfully. "It's not particularly beautiful – Oh, excuse me!" he laughed. "I mean to say it's not a museum piece . . . Take your furniture: it does not make one say, 'What lovely things!' No. And yet this room has a soul. All this house has a soul!"

He was standing in front of the shelves of the bookcase, and with a light touch his fingers were fondling the bindings.

"Balzac, Barrès, Baudelaire, Beaumarchais, Boileau, Buffon . . ."¹²

12. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), novelist; Maurice Barrès (1862–1923), novelist and nationalist politician; Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), poet and literary critic; Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–1799), dramatist; Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), literary critic and poet; Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707–1788), naturalist and author.

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Chateaubriand, Corneille, Descartes, Fénelon, Flaubert . . .¹³ La Fontaine, France, Gautier, Hugo . . .¹⁴ What a roll-call!" he said, shaking his head with a little laugh, "and I've only got as far as the letter 'H'! Not to Molière, nor Rabelais, nor Racine, nor Pascal, nor Stendhal, nor Voltaire, nor Montaigne,¹⁵ nor any of the others!" He went on slowly moving along the bookshelves, and from time to time he muttered an exclamation, I suppose when he came to a name which he had not expected. "With the English," he went on, "one immediately thinks of Shakespeare; with the Italians, it is Dante. Spain: Cervantes. And with us at once: Goethe."¹⁶ After that one has to stop and consider. But if someone says, 'And France?' then who comes to the tip of one's tongue? Molière? Racine? Hugo? Voltaire? Rabelais? Or which of the others? They jostle each other like the crowd at the entrance to a theatre till you don't know which to let in first."

He turned round, adding in all solemnity, "But when it comes to music, then it's our turn: Bach, Händel, Beethoven, Wagner, Mozart . . .¹⁷ Which name comes first?"

"And now we are at war with each other," he said slowly, shaking his head. He had come back to the fireplace, and he let his eyes rest smiling on my niece's profile. "But this is the last time! We won't fight each other any more. We'll get married!" His eyelids crinkled, the hollows under his cheekbones went into two

13. François René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), writer and founder of romanticism; Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), classical dramatist; René Descartes (1596-1650), scientist and philosopher; François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1651-1715), theologian and writer; Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), realist novelist.

14. Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695), poet and author of fables; Anatole France (1844-1924), novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1921; Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), novelist, poet, and art critic; Victor-Marie, vicomte Hugo (1802-1885), dramatist, poet, and novelist.

15. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière (1622-1673), playwright and actor; François Rabelais (ca. 1490-1533), comic writer and physician; Jean Racine (1639-1699), classical dramatist; Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), scientist and religious philosopher; Marie-Henri Beyle, pseud. Stendhal (1783-1842), novelist; François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778), philosopher and writer; Michel Eyquem, seigneur de Montaigne (1533-1592), essayist.

16. William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832): the foremost dramatists, poets, and novelists of England, Italy, Spain, and Germany respectively.

17. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), George Frederic Händel (1685-1759), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Richard Wagner (1813-1883), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): German-born composers and musicians.

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long furrows and he showed his white teeth. "Yes, yes," he said gaily, and a little toss of the head repeated this affirmation. "When we entered Saintes,"¹⁸ he went on after a silence, "I was happy that the population received us well. I was very happy. I thought: This is going to be easy. And then I saw that it was not that at all, that it was cowardice." He became serious again. "I despised those people, and for France's sake I was afraid. I thought: Has she *really* got like that?" He shook his head. "No, no, I have seen her since, and now I am happy at her stern expression."

His gaze fell on mine. I looked away. It hesitated for a little at various points in the room and then turned again on the unrelentingly expressionless face which it had left.

"I am happy to have found here an elderly man with some dignity, and a young lady who knows how to be silent. We have got to conquer this silence. We have got to conquer the silence of all France. I am glad of that."

Silently, and with a grave insistence which still carried the hint of a smile, he was looking at my niece, at her closed, obstinate, delicate profile. My niece felt it, and I saw her blush slightly, and a little frown form gradually between her eyebrows. Her fingers plucked the needle perhaps rather too quickly and tartly, at the risk of breaking the thread.

"Yes," went on his slow, droning voice. "It's better that way. Much better. That makes for a solid union – for unions where both sides gain in greatness . . . There is a very lovely children's story which I have read, which you have read, which everybody has read. I don't know if it has the same title in both countries. With us it's called 'Das Tier und die Schöne' – 'Beauty and the Beast.' Poor Beauty! The Beast holds her at his pleasure, captive and powerless – at every hour of the day he forces his oppressive and relentless presence on her . . . Beauty is all pride and dignity – she has hardened her heart . . . But the Beast is something better than he seems. Oh, he's not very polished, he's clumsy and brutal, he seems very uncouth beside his exquisite Beauty! But he has a heart. Yes, he has a heart which hopes to raise itself up . . . If Beauty only *would*! But it is a long time before Beauty will. However, little by little she discovers the light at the back of the eyes of her hated jailer – the light which reveals his supplication and his love. She is less

18. Town in western France on the Charente River, Department Charente-Maritime.

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conscious of his heavy hand and of the chains of her prison . . . She ceases to hate him. His constancy moves her, she gives him her hand . . . At once the Beast is transformed, the spell which has kept him in that brutish hide is broken: and now behold a handsome and chivalrous knight, sensitive and cultivated, whom every kiss from his Beauty adorns with more and more shining qualities! Their union gives them the most perfect happiness. Their children, who combine and mingle the gifts of their parents, are the loveliest the earth has borne . . .

"Weren't you fond of this story? For my part, I always loved it. I have reread it over and over again. It used to make me cry. I loved the Beast above all because I understood his misery. Even today I am moved when I speak of it."

He was silent, then he took a deep breath and bowed.

"I wish you a very good night!"

One evening when I had gone up into my room to look for my tobacco I heard someone playing the harmonium: playing the "Eighth Prelude and Fugue,"¹⁹ which my niece had been practising before the catastrophe. The score had remained open at that page, but up to the evening in question my niece had not been able to bring herself to go on with it. That she had begun again caused me both pleasure and astonishment: what deep inward need could have made her change her mind so suddenly? But it was not my niece – for she had not left her armchair or her work. Her eyes met mine and sent me a message which I could not decipher. I looked at the long back bowed over the instrument, the bent neck, the long, delicate, nervous hands whose fingers changed places over the keys as rapidly as if they had each a life of their own.

He only played the Prelude, then he got up and came back to the fire.

"There is nothing greater than that," he said in his low voice, which was hardly more than a whisper. "Great – that's not quite the word. Outside man – outside human flesh. That makes us understand, no, not understand but guess . . . No: have a presentiment . . . have a presentiment of what nature is . . . of what – stripped bare – is the divine and unknowable nature of the human soul. Yes, it's inhuman music."

19. By J.S. Bach.

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He seemed to be following out his own train of thought in a dreaming silence; he was slowly biting his lip.

"Bach . . . he could only be a German. Our country has that character; that inhuman character. I mean – by 'inhuman' – that which is on a different scale to man."

Then, after a pause:

"That kind of music – I love it, I admire it, it overwhelms me; it's like the presence of God in me . . . but it's not my own.

"For my part, I would like to compose music which is on the scale of man; that also is a road by which one can reach the truth. That's *my* road. I don't want to follow any other, and besides I couldn't. That, I know now; I know it to the full. Since when? Since I have lived here."

He turned his back on us and leant his hands on the mantelpiece. He gripped it with his fingers and held his face towards the fire through his forearms, as if through the bars of a grating. His voice became lower and even more droning.

"Now I really need France. But I ask a great deal; I ask a welcome from her. To be here as a stranger, as a traveller or a conqueror, that's nothing. France gives nothing then, for there is nothing one can take from her. Her riches, her true riches, one can't conquer; one can only drink them in at her breast. She has to offer you her breast, like a mother, in a movement of maternal feeling . . . I know that that depends on us . . . but it depends on her too. She must consent to understand our thirst, she must consent to quench it, and she must consent to unite herself with us."

He stood up, his back still turned to us, his fingers still gripping the stone. "As for me," he said a little more loudly, "I must live here for a long time. In a house like this one. As a child of a village like this village . . . I must . . ."

He was silent. He turned towards us. He smiled with his mouth, but not with his eyes, which were looking at my niece.

"We will overcome all obstacles," he said. "Sincerity is bound to overcome all obstacles."

"I wish you a very good night!"

I can't remember today everything that was said during the course of more than a hundred winter evenings, but the theme hardly ever varied; it was the long rhapsody of his discovery of France: how he

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had loved her from afar before he came to know her, and how his love had grown every day since he had had the luck to live there. And believe me, I admired him for it. Yes, because nothing seemed to discourage him, and because he never tried to shake off our inexorable silence by any violent expression . . . On the contrary, when he sometimes let the silence invade the whole room and, like a heavy unbreathable gas, saturate every corner of it, of the three of us it was he who used to seem most at ease. Then he would look at my niece with that expression of approval which was both solemn and smiling at the same time, and which he had kept ever since his first day, and I would feel the spirit of my niece being troubled in that prison which she had herself built for it. I would notice it by several signs, of which the least was a faint fluttering of her fingers, and so when at last Werner von Ebrennac set the silence draining away gently and smoothly with his droning voice, he seemed to make it possible for me to breathe more freely.

He would often talk about himself: "My house is in the forest; I was born there; I used to go to the village school on the other side; I never left home until I went to Munich for my examinations, and to Salzburg for the music. I've lived there ever since. I don't like big cities. I know London, Vienna, Rome, Warsaw, and, of course, the German towns, but I would not like to live in any of them. The only place I really liked was Prague – no other city has such a soul. And above all Nuremberg.²⁰ For a German it is the city which makes his heart swell because there he finds the ghosts which are dear to his soul. Every stone is a reminder of those who made the glory of the old Germany. I think the French must feel the same thing before the Cathedral of Chartres.²¹ There they too must feel the presence of their ancestors beside them, the beauty of their spirit, the greatness of their faith, and all their graciousness. Fate led me to Chartres. Oh, truly, when it appears over the ripe corn, blue in the distance, transparent, ethereal, it stirs one's heart! I imagined the feelings of those who used to go there on foot, on horseback or by wagon in the olden time. I shared their feelings, and I loved those people. How I wish I could be their brother!"

His face grew stern: "No doubt it's hard to believe that of

20. See Bruller's account of his 1938 visit to this medieval German city in *Battle of Silence*, pp. 33-34.

21. Town southwest of Paris on the Eure River, Department Eure-et-Loir; famous for its Gothic cathedral with twin spires, stained glass windows, and sculpture.

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somebody who arrived at Chartres in a huge armoured car; but all the same it's the truth. So many things are going on at the same time in the heart of a German, even the best German! Things of which he would so gladly be cured." He smiled again, a faint smile which slowly lit up all his face; then he said:

"In the country house nearest my home there lives a young girl. She is very beautiful and very sweet. My father at any rate would have been very glad if I had married her. When he died we were practically engaged, and they used to let us go out for long walks alone together."

My niece had just snapped her thread, and before going on he waited until she had threaded her needle again. She did it with great concentration, but the eye of the needle was very small and it was no easy matter. Finally she succeeded.

"One day," he went on, "we were in the forest. Rabbits and squirrels scampered before us. All kinds of flowers were there, narcissus, wild hyacinth, and amaryllis. The young girl cried out in her joy. She said, 'I'm so happy, Werner. I love, oh, how I love these gifts from God!' I too was happy. We lay down on the moss in the midst of the bracken. We did not say a word. Above our heads we saw the tops of the fir trees swaying and the birds flying from branch to branch. The young girl gave a little cry: 'Oh, he's stung me on the chin! Dirty little beast, nasty little mosquito!' Then I saw her make a quick grab with her hand. 'I have caught one, Werner! Oh, look, I'm going to punish him: I'm - pulling - his - legs - off - one - after - the - other . . .'" And she did so . . .²²

"Luckily," he went on, "she had plenty of other suitors. I did not feel any remorse, but at the same time I was scared away for ever where German girls were concerned."

He looked thoughtfully at the inside of his hands and said:

"And that's what our politicians are like too. That's why I never wanted to associate with them in spite of my friends who wrote to me: 'Come and join us.' No: I preferred to stay at home always. It wasn't a good thing for the success of my music, but no matter: success is a very little thing compared to a quiet conscience. And indeed I know very well that my friends and our Führer²³ have the grandest and the noblest conceptions, but I know equally well that

22. A German nurse in the employ of the Bruller family performed a similar action; see Vercors, *Battle of Silence*, p. 151.

23. Leader, that is, Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), chancellor of Germany from 1933 until his death by suicide.

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they would pull mosquitoes' legs off, one after the other. That's what always happens with Germans when they are very lonely: it always comes up to the top. And who are more lonely than men of the same Party²⁴ when they are in power?"

"Happily they are now alone no longer: they are in France. France will cure them, and I'm going to tell you the truth: they know it. They know that France will teach them how to be really great and pure in heart."

He went towards the door and said, swallowing his words as if talking to himself:

"But for that we must have love."

He held the door open for a moment and, looking over his shoulder, he gazed at my niece's neck as she leant over her work, at the pale, fragile nape of her neck whence the hair went up in coils of dark mahogany, and then he added in a tone of quiet determination:

"A love which is returned."

Then he turned his head, and the door closed on him as he rapidly uttered his evening formula:

"I wish you a very good night."

The long spring days came at last, and now the officer came down with the last rays of the setting sun. He still wore his grey flannel trousers, but he had on his shoulders a lighter woollen jacket, the colour of rough homespun, over a linen shirt with an open neck. One evening he came down holding a book with his forefinger closed in it. His face brightened with that half-withheld smile which foreshadows the pleasure we are confident of giving others. He said:

"I brought this down for you. It's a page of *Macbeth*. Ye gods, what greatness!"

He opened the book:

"It's at the end. *Macbeth's* power is slipping through his fingers, and with it the loyalty of those who have grasped at last the blackness of his ambition. The noble lords who are defending the honour of Scotland are awaiting his imminent overthrow. One of them describes the dramatic portents of this collapse . . ."

And he read slowly, with a pathetic heaviness:

24. National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP or Nazis).

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“Now does he feel
His secret murders sticking on his hands;
Now minutely revolts upbraids his faith-breach;
Those he commands move only in command,
Nothing in love: now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.”

He raised his head and laughed. I wondered with stupefaction if he was thinking of the same tyrant as I was, but he said:

“Isn’t that just what must be keeping your Admiral²⁵ awake at night? I really pity that man in spite of the contempt which he inspires in me as much as in you.”

“Those he commands move only in command,
Nothing in love . . .”

“A leader who has not his people’s love is a very miserable little puppet. Only . . . only, could one expect anything else? Who in fact except some dreary climber of that kind could have taken on such a part? And yet it had to be. Yes, there had to be someone who would agree to sell his country, because today – today and for a long time to come – France cannot fall willingly into our open arms without losing her dignity in her own eyes. Often the most sordid go-between is thus at the bottom of the happiest union. The go-between is none the less contemptible for that, nor is the union less happy.”

He closed the book with a snap and stuffed it in his coat pocket, mechanically giving the pocket a couple of slaps with the palm of his hand. Then he said with a cheerful expression lighting up his long face:

“I have to inform my hosts that I shall be away for a couple of weeks. I am overjoyed to be going to Paris. It’s now my turn for leave, and I shall spend it in Paris for the first time. This is a great day for me. It’s my greatest day until the coming of another one, for which I hope with all my heart, and which will be an even

25. Jean François Darlan (1881–1942), commander in chief of the French navy in 1939 and first naval, then (February 1941 to April 1942) foreign minister, vice-premier, and successor-designate to Marshal Pétain in the Vichy government; he ordered resistance to the Allied invasion of France’s North African territories in November 1942 to cease but was assassinated a month later.

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greater day. I shall know how to wait for years if necessary. My heart knows how to be patient."

"I expect I shall see my friends in Paris, where many of them have come for the negotiations which we are conducting with your politicians to prepare for the wonderful union of our two countries. So I shall be in a way a witness to the marriage . . . I want to tell you that I am happy for the sake of France, whose wounds will thus be so quickly healed, but I am even happier for Germany and for myself. No one will ever have gained so much from a good deed as will Germany by giving back to France her greatness and her liberty!"

"I wish you a very good night."

II

We did not set eyes on him when he came back.

We knew he was there (there are many signs which betray the presence of a guest in the house, even when he remains invisible). But for a number of days – much more than a week – we never saw him.

Shall I admit it? His absence did not leave my mind at peace. I thought of him, I don't know how far it wasn't with regret or anxiety. Neither I nor my niece spoke of him. But in the evening when we sometimes heard the dull echo of his uneven step upstairs I could clearly see from her sudden obstinate busying with her work, from the faint lines that gave her face an expression which was both set and expectant, that she was not immune from thoughts like mine.

One day I had to go to the Kommandantur²⁶ for some business about declaring tires.²⁷ While I was filling in the form they had given me, Werner von Ebrennac came out of his office. At first he did not see me. He spoke to the sergeant who was sitting at a little table before a long mirror on the wall. I heard the singsong inflection of his low voice, and, although I had nothing more to do, I waited there without knowing why, yet curiously moved, and expecting I know not what climax. I saw his face in the mirror, it seemed pale and drawn. He raised his eyes until they caught my own. For two seconds we stared at each other, then he suddenly turned on his heel and faced me. His lips parted, and slowly he raised his hand a little, then almost immediately let it fall again. He shook his head almost imperceptibly with a kind of pathetic irresolution, as if he had said 'No' to himself, yet never taking his eyes off me. Then he made a very slight bow, as he let his glance fall to the ground, hobbled back into his office, and shut himself in.

I said nothing of this to my niece, but women have a catlike

26. Local German military command headquarters in the occupied northern zone of France.

27. Because rubber for new production was in short supply, the Germans confiscated large numbers of tires in France for their own use.

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power of divination; for the whole evening she never stopped lifting her eyes from her work every minute to look at me; to try to read something in my face, which I forced myself to keep expressionless by pulling assiduously at my pipe. In the end she let her hands drop as if tired and, folding up her material, asked if I minded her having an early night. She passed two fingers slowly over her forehead, as if to drive away a headache. She kissed me good-night, and I thought I could read a reproach and a somewhat oppressive sadness in her beautiful grey eyes. After she had gone a ridiculous anger took possession of me: a rage at being ridiculous, and at having a niece who was ridiculous. What was the point of all this nonsense? But I could give no answer to myself. If it was nonsense its roots all the same went very deep.

It was three days later that, just as we were finishing our coffee, we heard the irregular beat of his familiar steps grow clear; and this time they were obviously bent in our direction. I suddenly remembered that winter evening six months ago when we first heard those steps. I thought, And it's raining today too – for it had been raining hard all the morning. A long-drawn, obstinate downpour which drowned everything outside and was even bathing the inside of the house in a cold and clammy atmosphere. My niece had covered her shoulders with a printed silk scarf where ten disturbing hands drawn by Jean Cocteau²⁸ were limply pointing at each other; as for me, I was warming my hands on the bowl of my pipe – and to think we were in July!

The steps crossed the anteroom and began to make the stairs creak. The man was coming down gradually with a slowness which seemed to increase, not as if a prey to hesitation, but like somebody whose will-power was being strained to the utmost. My niece had raised her head and was looking at me; during all this time she fixed on me the transparent, inhuman stare of a horned owl. And when the last stair creaked, and a long silence followed, her fixed expression vanished, I saw her eyelids grow heavy, her head bend and all her body fall back wearily into the armchair.

I don't believe that the silence lasted more than a few seconds, yet they seemed very long. I felt I could see the man behind the door, with his forefinger raised to knock and yet putting back, putting back the moment when by the mere gesture of knocking he would have to face the future . . . At last he knocked. And it was neither

28. Surrealistic writer, artist, and film-maker (1889–1963).

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the gentle knock of someone hesitating nor the sharp knock of nervousness overcome; they were three full, slow knocks, the calm sure knocks that mean a decision from which there is no going back. I expected to see the door open at once as on other occasions, but it remained closed; and then an uncontrollable agitation took possession of me, a medley of questioning and of wavering between conflicting impulses, which every one of the seconds that went by with what seemed to me the increasing velocity of a cataract only made more confused and inextricable. Ought we to answer? Why this sudden change? Why should he expect us this evening to break the silence whose healthy obstinacy had had his full approval, as his behaviour up to now had shown? This evening – this very evening – what was it that our dignity demanded of us?

I looked at my niece to try to catch from her eyes some prompting, some sign, but I met only her side-face. She was watching the handle of the door. She was watching it with that inhuman, owl-like stare which I had noticed already; she was very pale, and I saw her upper lip draw itself tight with pain over the delicate white line of her teeth. For my part, before this inward drama so suddenly revealed to me, something that went so far beyond the mild twinges of my own irresolution, I lost all resistance. At that moment two new knocks came, two only, two quick and gentle knocks, and my niece said, "He is going to leave," in a voice so low and so utterly disheartened that I did not wait any longer and said loudly: "Come in, sir."

Why did I add "sir"? To show that I was asking him in as a man and not as an enemy officer? Or, on the contrary, to show that I knew very well *who* had knocked, and that the words were addressed to him? I don't know, and it doesn't matter. The fact remains that I said "Come in, sir" and that he entered.

I had expected to see him appear in civilian clothes, but he was in uniform. Rather would I say that he was more in uniform than ever, if that will convey that it was quite clear to me that he had donned this attire with the deliberate intention of thrusting it on us. He had pushed the door back to the wall, and he was standing straight up in the doorway, so erect and so stiff that I almost began to doubt if it was the same man in front of me and, for the first time, I noticed how surprisingly he resembled Louis Jouvet, the actor.²⁹ He stood like that for a few seconds, stiff, straight, and

29. Theatre producer, director, and actor (1887–1951).

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silent, his feet a little apart and his arms hanging inert beside his body, his face so cold and so completely impassive that it did not seem as if the slightest emotion could ever dwell there.

But seated as I was deep in my armchair and with my face on a level with his left hand, I noticed that hand; my eyes were caught by that hand, and they stayed there as if chained to it, because of the pathetic spectacle it offered me, and which touchingly belied the man's whole attitude. . . .

I learnt that day that, to anyone who knows how to observe them, the hands can betray emotions as clearly as the face – as well as the face, and better – for they are not so subject to the control of the will. And the fingers of that hand were stretching and bending, were squeezing and clutching, were abandoning themselves to the most violent mimicry, while his face and his whole body remained controlled and motionless.

Then his eyes seemed to come back to life. They rested on me for a moment; I felt as if I had been marked down by a falcon. They were eyes shining between stiff wide-open eyelids, the eyelids, stiff and crumpled at the same time, of a victim to insomnia. Then they rested on my niece – and never left her.

At last his hand grew still, all the fingers bent and clenched in the palm. His mouth opened, and the lips as they separated made a little noise like the uncorking of an empty bottle, then the officer said in a voice that was more toneless than ever:

“I have something very serious to say to you.”

My niece sat facing him, but she lowered her head. She twisted round her fingers the wool from her ball, which came unwound as it rolled onto the carpet; this ridiculous task being doubtless the only one that would lend itself to being performed without her giving it a thought – and spare her any shame.

The officer went on – with such a visible effort that it seemed it might be costing him his life:

“Everything that I have said in these six months, everything that the walls of this room have heard . . .” He took a deep breath as laboriously as an asthmatic and kept his lungs full for a moment. “You must . . .” He breathed out again: “You must forget it all.”

The girl slowly let her hands fall into the hollow of her skirt where they remained lying helplessly on their sides like boats stranded on the sand; and slowly she raised her head, and then, for the first time – for the very first time – she gave the officer the full gaze of her pale eyes.

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He said, so that I scarcely heard him, in less than a whisper, "Oh, welch' ein Licht!"³⁰ And, as if his eyes were really unable to endure that light, he hid them behind his wrist. Two seconds went by; then he let his hand fall, but he had lowered his eyelids and now it was his turn to keep his gaze fixed on the ground. . . .

His lips made the same little noise, and then he said in a voice that went down, down, down:

"I have seen those men – the victors." Then, after several seconds, in a still lower voice:

"I have spoken to them." And at last in a whisper, slowly and bitterly:

"They laughed at me."

He raised his eyes to me and gravely nodded his head three times, almost imperceptibly. He closed his eyes, then said:

"They said to me: 'Haven't you grasped that we're having them on?' That's what they said. Those very words. 'Wir prellen sie.' They said to me: 'You don't suppose that we're going to be such fools as to let France rise up again on our frontiers? Do you?' They gave a loud laugh and slapped me merrily on the back as they looked at my face: 'We aren't musicians!'"

As he spoke these last words his voice betrayed an obscure contempt which might have been the reflection of his own feelings towards the others or simply the echo of the very tone in which they had spoken.

"Then I made a long speech – and a spirited one too. They went: 'Tst! Tst!' They answered me: 'Politics aren't a poet's dream. What do you think we went to war for? For the sake of their old Marshal?'³¹ They laughed again. 'We're neither madmen nor simpletons: we have the chance to destroy France, and destroy her we will. Not only her material power: her soul as well. Particularly her soul. Her soul is the greatest danger. That's our job at this moment – make no mistake about it, my dear fellow! We'll turn it rotten with our smiles and our consideration. We'll make a grovelling bitch of her.'"

He was silent. He seemed out of breath. He clenched his jaw with such force that I saw his cheekbones stand out and a vein, thick and winding as a worm, beat under his temple. Suddenly all the skin of his face moved in a sort of underground shiver – as a

30. "Oh, what a light!"

31. Pétain.

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puff of wind moves a lake; as with the first bubbles the film of cream thickens on the surface of the milk one is boiling. His eyes met the pale, wide-open eyes of my niece, and he said in a low voice, level, intense, and constrained, almost too overburdened to move:

"There is no hope." And in a voice which was even lower, more slow and more toneless, as if to torture himself with the intolerable but established fact: "No hope. No hope." Then suddenly in a voice which was unexpectedly loud and strong and, to my surprise, clear and ringing as a trumpet call, as a cry: "No hope!"

After that, silence.

I thought I heard him laugh. His forehead, racked with anguish, was as wrinkled as a hawser. His lips trembled – the pale yet fevered lips of a sick man.

"They reproached me, they were rather angry with me: 'There you are, you see! You see how infatuated you are with her. There's the real danger! But we'll rid Europe of this pest! We'll purge it of this poison!' They've explained everything to me. Oh, they've not left me in the dark about anything. They are flattering your writers, but at the same time in Belgium, in Holland, in all the countries occupied by our troops, they've already put the bars up. No French book can go through any more except technical publications, manuals on Refraction or formulas for Cementation . . . But works of general culture, not one. None whatever!"³²

His glance passed above my head, flitting about and coming up against the corners of the room like a lost night-bird. At last it seemed to find sanctuary in the darkest shelves – those where Racine, Ronsard, Rousseau³³ were aligned. His eyes stayed fixed there, and his voice went on with a groaning violence:

"Nothing, nothing, nobody!" And as if we hadn't yet understood or weighed the full measure of the threat: "Not only your modern writers! Not only your Péguy, your Proust, your Bergson . . ."³⁴ But all the others! All those up there! The whole lot! Every one."

32. On the quota imposed on French books exported to German-occupied Europe, see the manifesto of the Editions de Minuit reprinted in Vercors, *Battle of Silence*, p. 174.

33. Pierre de Ronsard (ca. 1524–1584), poet; Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Swiss-French philosopher, political theorist, and writer.

34. Charles Péguy (1873–1914), poet and writer; Marcel Proust (1871–1922), novelist; Henri Bergson (1859–1941), philosopher.

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His glance once more swept over the bindings which glittered softly in the twilight, with a kind of desperate caress. "They will put out the light altogether," he cried. "Never again will Europe be lit up by that flame." And his grave hollow voice made my breast echo with an unexpected and startling cry, a cry whose last syllable seemed drawn out into a wail.

"Nevermore!"

Once more the silence fell. Once more, but this time how much more tense and thick! Underneath our silences of the past I had indeed felt the submarine life of hidden emotions, conflicting and contradictory desires and thoughts swarming away like the war-
ring creatures of the sea under the calm surface of the water. But beneath this silence, alas! there was nothing but a terrible sense of oppression. At last his voice broke the silence. It was gentle and distressed:

"I had a friend. He was like a brother. We had been to school together. We shared the same room at Stuttgart. We had spent three months together in Nuremberg. We never did anything without each other: I played my music to him; he read me his poems. He was sensitive and romantic. But he left me. He went to read his poems at Munich,³⁵ to some of his new friends. It was he who used always to be writing to me to come and join them. It was he that I saw in Paris with his friends. I have seen what they have made of him!"

He slowly shook his head as if he had to return a sorrowful refusal to some request.

"He was the most violent of them all. He mingled anger with mockery. One moment he would look at me with passion and cry: 'It's a poison! We've got to empty the creature of its poison!' The next moment he would give me little prods in the stomach with the end of his finger. 'They're scared stiff now, ha-ha! They're afraid of their pockets and for their stomach - for their trade and industry! That's all they think of! And as for the few others, we'll flatter them and put them to sleep, ha-ha! It will be easy!' He laughed at me till he went pink in the face. 'We'll buy their soul for a mess of pottage!'"

Werner paused for breath.

"I said to him: 'Have you grasped what you are doing? Have you

35. Capital of the southern German state of Bavaria and site of the founding of the Nazi party in 1919.

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really *grasped* what it means?' He said, 'Do you think that is going to frighten us? Not with our kind of clearheadedness!' I said: 'Then you mean to seal up the tomb – and for ever?' He replied, 'It's a matter of life or death. Force is all you need to conquer with, but it's not enough to keep you masters. We know very well that an army counts for nothing in keeping you masters.' 'But at the price of the Spirit!' I cried. 'Not at that price!' 'The Spirit never dies,' he said. 'It has known it all before. It is born again from its ashes. We've got to build for a thousand years hence: first we must destroy.'³⁶ I looked at him. I looked right down into his pale eyes. He was quite sincere. That's the most terrible thing of all."

His eyes opened very wide, as if at the spectacle of some appalling murder: "They'll do what they say!" he cried, as if we wouldn't have believed him. "They'll do it systematically and doggedly. I know how those devils stop at nothing."

He shook his head like a dog with a bad ear. A murmur came from between his clenched teeth, the plaintive, passionate moan of the betrayed lover.

He hadn't moved. He was still standing rigidly and stiffly in the opening of the door, with his arms stretched out as if they had to carry hands of lead, and he was pale – not like wax, but like the plaster of certain decaying walls: grey, with whiter stains of salt-petre.

I saw him stoop slowly. He raised his hand and held it forward, palm down, towards my niece and myself, with the fingers a little bent. He clenched it and moved it up and down a little, while the expression on his face tightened with a kind of fierce energy. His lips parted, and I don't know what kind of appeal I thought he was going to make to us: I thought – yes, I thought that he was going to exhort us to rebel. But not a word crossed his lips. His mouth closed, and once again his eyes closed too. He stood up straight. His hands rose up the length of his body and, when they reached the level of his face, performed some unintelligible movements, something like certain figures in a Javanese religious dance. Then he seized his forehead and his temples, pressing down his eyelids with his stretched-out little fingers.

"They said to me: 'It's our right and our duty.' Our duty! . . . Happy is the man who discovers the path of his duty as easily as that."

36. The Nazis predicted their Third Reich would last for one thousand years; it was destroyed in a dozen.

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He let his hands fall.

"At the crossroads you are told: 'Take that road there.'" He shook his head. "Well, that road doesn't lead up to the shining heights of the mountain-crest. One sees it going down to a gloomy valley and losing itself in the foul darkness of a dismal forest! . . . O God! Show me where *my* duty lies!"

He said – he almost shouted: "It is the Fight – it's the Great Battle of the Temporal with the Spiritual."

With pitiful insistency he fixed his eyes on the wooden angel carved above the window. The ecstatic, smiling angel, radiant with celestial calm.

Suddenly his expression seemed to relax, his body lost its stiffness, his face dropped a little towards the ground, he raised it.

"I stood on my rights," he said more naturally. "I applied to be reposted to a fighting unit, and at last they've granted me the favour. I am authorized to set off tomorrow."

I thought I saw the ghost of a smile on his lips when he amplified this with:

"Off to Hell."

He raised his arm towards the east – towards those vast plains where the wheat of the future will be fed on corpses.³⁷

My niece's face gave me a shock: it was as pale as the moon. Her lips, like the rim of an opaline vase, were wide open, almost in the grimace of the Greek tragic masks, and, at the line where the hair rose from the forehead, I saw beads of sweat – not slowly gather, but gush out – yes, gush out.

I don't know if Werner von Ebrennac noticed. The pupils of his eyes and those of the girl seemed moored to each other, as a boat in a current is tied to a ring on the bank, and moored moreover by a line so tightly stretched that one would not have dared to pass a finger between the pairs of eyes. Ebrennac with one hand had taken hold of the door-handle; with his other he held the side of the doorway. Without moving his gaze a hair's-breadth, he slowly drew the door towards him. He said – in a voice that was strangely devoid of expression: "I wish you a very good night."

I thought that he was going to close the door and go; but not at all. He was looking at my niece. He looked at her, and said, or rather whispered, "Adieu."

He did not move; he remained quite motionless, and in his

37. Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941.

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strained and motionless face his eyes were the most strained and motionless things of all, for they were bound to other eyes – too wide open, too pale – the eyes of my niece. That lasted and lasted – how long? – lasted right up to the moment when at length the girl moved her lips. Werner's eyes glittered. I heard:

“Adieu.”

One could not have heard the word if one had not been waiting for it, but at last I did hear it. Von Ebrennac heard it too, and he drew himself up, and his face and his whole body seemed to relax as if they had taken a soothing bath.

He smiled, and in such a way that the last picture I had of him was a smiling one; then the door closed and his steps died away in the depths of the house.

The next day, when I came down to have my morning glass of milk, he was gone. My niece had got breakfast ready as she always did. She helped me to it in silence, and in silence we drank. Outside, a pale sun was shining through the mist. It struck me as being very cold.

October, 1941