

KAPUTT

CURZIO MALAPARTE

Translated from the Italian by
CESARE FOLIGNO

Afterword by
DAN HOFSTADTER

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Malaparte, Curzio, 1898-1957.

World War, 1939-1945— Personal narratives, Italian.

World War, 1939-1945—Europe, Eastern.

War correspondents—Italy—Biography

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Afterword

The History of a Manuscript

THE MANUSCRIPT of Kaputt has a tale of its own, and it seems to me that the secret history of the manuscript is the most appropriate preface for the book. I began Kaputt in the summer of 1941—at the beginning of the German war against Russia—in the village of Pestchanka in the Ukraine, in the home of a Russian peasant, Roman Suchena. Every morning I sat in the garden under an acacia tree and worked while Suchena, squatting on the ground by the pig sty, sharpened his scythe or chopped beets and cabbages for the pigs. The garden adjoined the House of the Soviets which was occupied at the time by a detachment of Hitler's SS men. Whenever an SS trooper came near the hedge, Suchena gave a warning cough.

The thatched-roof hut with its mud and straw walls plastered with ox dung was small and clean-, in the only luxuries were a radio, a gramophone and a small library of the complete works of Pushkin and Gogol. This was the home of an old peasant whom three five-year plans and collective farming had freed from the bonds of misery, ignorance and filth. The son of Roman Suchena, a Communist party member, had been a mechanic on the Voroshilov Collective Farm in Pestchanka. He and his wife had worked on the same collective and had followed the Soviet Army with their tractor. She was a silent and gentle girl-, in the evenings, when work in the small field and in the garden was done, she sat under a tree and read Pushkin's Eugene Onegin from the special State edition published in Kharkov on the centenary of the great poet's death. She reminded me of Croce's two oldest daughters, Elena and Aida, who used to sit under a heavily laden apple tree in the garden of their summer home in Meana and read Herodotus in the original.

When I had to visit the front, only a couple of miles from Pestchanka, I entrusted the manuscript of Kaputt to my friend Roman Suchena who hid it in a hole in the wall of the pig sty. When the Gestapo came at last to arrest and expel me from the Ukraine because of the sensation caused by my war dispatches in the Corriere della Sera, Suchena's daughter-in-law sewed the manuscript into the lining of my uniform. I will always be grateful to Suchena and his young daughter-in-law for helping me to save my dangerous manuscript from the hands of the Gestapo.

I resumed work on Kaputt during my stay in Poland and while on the Smolensk front, in January and February of 1942. When I left Poland for Finland, I carried the pages of the manuscript hidden in the lining of my sheepskin coat. I finished the book, except for the last chapter, during the two years spent in Finland. In the fall of 1942 I returned to Italy on sick leave after a serious illness I had contracted on the Petsamo front in Lapland. At the Templehof Air Field, near Berlin, all passengers were searched by the Gestapo. Fortunately I had not a single page of Kaputt on me. Before leaving Finland I had divided the manuscript into three parts-, I gave one part to the Spanish Minister in Helsinki, Count Augustin de Foxá, who was leaving his post to return to the Foreign Ministry in Madrid-, I gave another part to the Secretary of the Romanian Legation in Helsinki, Prince Dinu Cantemir, who was leaving to assume a new post with the Romanian Legation in Lisbon; and I gave the third part to the press attaché of the Romanian Legation in the Finnish capital, Titu Michailescu, who was returning to Bucharest. After a long Odyssey the three parts of the manuscript finally reached Italy, where I hid them in the wall surrounding the woods of my house on Capri, facing the Faraglioni reefs.

My friends de Foxá, Cantemir and Michailescu know how deeply I am indebted to them. Some day I hope to return to Berlin to thank my German friends whose names I still dare not mention, for preserving for several months, at the gravest risk to themselves, the chapters of Kaputt that I wrote in Berlin.

In 1943 I was in Finland and, as soon as I heard the news of Mussolini's fall, I flew back to Italy.

with the manuscript of the final chapters concealed in the double soles of my shoes. Two days after my arrival in Rome, on July 31, I was arrested because I had publicly declared that the German offensive against Italy was imminent and had blamed Badoglio for not taking active steps to meet the danger.

I was not even given time to change my shoes, but was sent just as I was, to the prison of Regina Coeli, with which I had become so familiar during the preceding years. The happy fact that I and my manuscript were released from prison is due to the quick intervention of Ambassador Rocco, the Minister of Popular Culture and later Ambassador at Ankara, of General Castellano who met with the Allies to discuss Armistice terms, of Minister Pietromarchi, and of Counselor of the Legation Rullini, then chief of the foreign press section. Once out of prison, I left Rome and sought refuge on Capri where I awaited the arrival of the Allies and where in September, 1943, I finished the last chapter of *Kaputt*.

Kaputt is a horribly gay and gruesome book. Its gruesome gaiety is the most extraordinary spectacle that I have witnessed in the debacle of Europe in the war years. Among the characters in this book War is of secondary importance. I am tempted to say that it serves only as a pretext, but pretexts inevitably belong to the sphere of Destiny. So in *Kaputt*, War is Destiny. It does not appear on the scene in any other way. War is not so much a protagonist as a spectator, in the same sense that a landscape is a spectator. War is the objective landscape of this book. The chief character is *Kaputt*, the gay and gruesome monster. Nothing can convey better than this hard, mysterious German word *Kaputt*— which literally means, "broken, finished, gone to pieces, gone to ruin, " the sense of what we are, of what Europe is—a pile of rubble. But I prefer this *Kaputt* Europe to the Europe of yesterday—and of twenty or thirty years ago. I prefer starting anew, rather than accepting everything as if it were an immutable heritage. Let us hope that the new era will really be new and that writers will enjoy liberty and respect, because Italian literature needs respect as much as it needs liberty I say "let us hope " not because I lack faith in liberty and its benefits—I belong to that group of people who have suffered imprisonment and deportation to the Island of Lipari for their freedom of spirit and their contribution to the cause of liberty—but because we all know how difficult it is in Italy and throughout large sections of Europe to be a human being, and how dangerous it is to be a writer.

May the new era be an era of liberty and respect for everyone— including writers! Only through liberty and respect for culture can Europe be saved from the cruel days of which Montesquieu spoke in the *Esprit des lois*: "Thus, in the days of fables, after the floods and deluges, there came forth from the soil armed men who exterminated each other."—BOOK XXXII, CHAPTER XXIII.

&MDASH;CURZIO MALAPARTE

PART ONE

The Horses

I. Du côté de Guermantes

PRINCE Eugene of Sweden stopped in the middle of the room. "Listen," he said.

A sad, yearning wail was swept with the wind through the oaks of Oakhill, the pines of Valdemarsudden Park, from beyond the inlet of the sea stretching as far as Nybroplan, in the heart of Stockholm. It was not the nostalgic sound of the ships' sirens rising from the sea to the harbor, nor the raucous cry of the seagulls, - it was a feminine voice, doleful and distracted.

"It is the horses of the Tivoli, the amusement park opposite the Skansen," said Prince Eugene in a low voice.

We went and stood by the large windows overlooking the park, pressing our foreheads against the windowpanes that were filmed with the blue mist rising from the sea. Three white horses, followed by a little girl in a yellow dress, were limping along the path that slopes down the hill. They passed through a gate to a small beach cluttered with sloops, canoes and fishermen's boats painted green and red.

It was a clear September day of almost springlike softness. Autumn was already reddening the oaks of Oakhill. Large gray ships with huge Swedish flags—a yellow cross on a blue field—painted on their bulwarks, steamed along the inlet onto which juts the headland where stands the Villa Valdemarsudden, the residence of Prince Eugene, brother of King Gustav V of Sweden. Flocks of seagulls screeched their laments, like wailing children. Below, by the docks of Nybroplan and Strandvägen rocked white steamers that bear the quaint names of villages and islands and that ply back and forth between Stockholm and the islands. Beyond the arsenal a cloud of blue smoke was rising that a darting seagull pierced from time to time with a flash of white. The wind carried the sound of the music played by the little orchestras at Belmannere and Hasselbacken, the shouts of sailors, soldiers, girls and children crowding around acrobats, jugglers and the strolling musicians who hang about the entrance to the Skansen.

Prince Eugene followed the horses with his attentive, affectionate half-closed eyes, his light eyelids traced by green veins. Seen in profile against the tired glow of sunset, his rosy face (the lips rather swollen, greedy, to which his white mustache lent a childlike gentleness, the arched nose, the high forehead crowned with curly white hair, ruffled like that of a newly awakened child) had the medallion-like cast of the Bernadotte. Of the whole Swedish royal family, Prince Eugene is the one who most resembles Napoleon's marshal, the founder of the Swedish dynasty; that clear-cut, sharp almost hard profile contrasts strangely with the sweetness of his expression, and with the delicate elegance of his mannerisms in talking, smiling and moving his shapely hands, the Bernadotte hands with pale slender fingers. (A few days before I had seen in a shop in Stockholm the designs that King Gustav V embroidered, surrounded by his family and by his most intimate court circle, during the long winter evenings in the Royal Palace designed by Tessin and in the white summer nights in the Castle of Drottningholm—designs with a grace and delicacy of pattern that bring to mind old Venetian, Flemish and French art.)

Prince Eugene does not embroider, he is a painter. His very manner of dressing bespeaks that free and careless Montmartre manner of fifty years ago, when Prince Eugene and Montmartre were both young. He wore a heavy tobacco-colored Harris tweed jacket, of an old-fashioned cut, buttoned high. A knitted tie, twisted like a plait of hair, cast a shadow of a deeper blue on his pale blue shirt with

white, faded stripes.

"~~They go down to the sea every day, at this time,~~" said Prince Eugene in a low voice. In the rosy and sky-blue light of sunset those three white horses, followed by a girl dressed in yellow, were sad and very beautiful. Knee deep in the surf, spreading their manes on their long arched necks, they shook their heads and neighed.

The sun was setting. For many months I had not seen a sunset. After the long northern summer, after the endless unbroken day without dawn or sunset, the sky at last began to fade above the woods, above the sea and the roofs of the city; and something like a shadow (it was perhaps only the reflection of a shadow—the shadow of a shadow) was gathering in the east. Little by little, night was being born, night loving and delicate; and in the west, the sky was blazing above the woods and the lakes, curling itself up within the glow of sunset like an oak leaf in the fragile light of autumn.

Amid the trees of the park, the two statues, Rodin's "Penseur" and the "Niké of Samothrace" wrought in excessively white marble made one think, in an unexpected and peremptory way, of the decadent and Parnassian *fin de siècle* Parisian taste that at Valdemarsudden seemed artificial and unreal against the background of that pale and delicate northern landscape.

In the large room where we stood with our foreheads pressed against the panes of the wide window—it was the room where Prince Eugene studied and worked—there still lingered a languid and discordant echo of Parisian estheticism as it was in those years around 1888, when Prince Eugene had a studio in Paris (he lived in rue Monceau under the name of Monsieur Oscarson) and was a pupil of Puvis de Chavannes and Bonnet. Some of his early canvases were hung on the walls—landscapes of the Ile-de-France, of the Seine, of the Chevreuse valley, of Normandy; portraits of models with their hair flowing over their bare shoulders, pictures by Zorn and by Josephson. Oak branches with russet and gold-veined leaves filled amphorae of Marieberg porcelain and vases decorated by Isaac Grünevald in the style of Matisse. A large white majolica stove decorated in relief with two crossed arrows topped by a closed heraldic coronet, occupied a corner of the room. A handsome mimosa plant that Prince Eugene had brought over from a garden in southern France, blossomed in a vase of Orefors crystal. I closed my eyes a moment; it was really the scent of Provence, the scent of Avignon, of Nîmes, of Arles that I was breathing; the scent of the Mediterranean, of Italy and of Capri.

"I wish I could live as Axel Munthe does in Capri," said Prince Eugene. "He seems to live surrounded by flowers and birds, and I sometimes wonder," he added smiling, "whether he truly loves flowers and birds."

"The flowers love him," I said.

"And do the birds love him?"

"They mistake him for an old withered tree."

Prince Eugene was smiling, his eyes half closed. As in previous years, Axel Munthe had spent the summer at Drottningholm Castle, as the King's guest, and he had started back for Italy a few days earlier. I was sorry not to have met him in Stockholm. Five or six months before, on the eve of my departure for Finland, at Capri, I had gone up to the Torre di Materita to take leave of Munthe, who was to give me letters to Sven Hedin, Ernst Manker and other friends of his in Stockholm. Axel Munthe was waiting for me under the pines and cypresses of Materita. He stood there stiff, woodenly sulky; an old green cloak over his shoulders, a little hat perched crossways on his ruffled hair, his lively mischievous eyes hidden behind dark glasses, which gave him something of that mysterious and menacing air that belongs to the blind. Munthe held a police dog on a leash, and although the dog looked tame, as soon as Munthe saw me among the trees, he began to shout to me not to come too close. "Keep away! Keep away!" he shouted, wildly gesticulating with one arm, urging the dog not to leap at me, not to tear my flesh, pretending that he was restraining it with great difficulty, that he was scarcely able to hold back the furious thrusts of that wild beast of his that watched my approach.

quietly wagging its tail in a friendly welcome. I advanced slowly, simulating fear, happy to lend myself to that innocent comedy.

When Axel Munthe is in a good mood, he amuses himself with improvising mischievous jokes at the expense of his friends. And that was perhaps his first good day after some months of raging loneliness. He had gone through a dismal autumn, a prey to his black whims, his irritable melancholy, shut up day after day in his tower, stripped bare and like an old bone gnawed by the sharp teeth of the southwest wind that blows from Ischia, and by the north wind that carries the acrid smell of the Vesuvian sulphur as far as Capri; locked up in his prison damp with brine, amid his faked old pictures, his faked Hellenic marbles, his fifteenth-century Madonnas carved from pieces of Louis XV furniture.

Axel Munthe looked calm that day; after a while, he began talking of the birds of Capri. Every evening toward sunset he comes out of his tower and moves with slow and cautious steps through the park to a spot where the trees thin out and expose the grass to the sky; he stops and waits—stiff, lean, wooden, like an old tree trunk, worn and withered by the sun, by the frost and the storms, and with a happy smile hidden amid the hair of his small beard like that of an aged faun; and the birds fly to him in flocks, twittering lovingly; they perch on his shoulders, on his arms, on his hat. They peck at his nose, his lips and his ears. And Munthe remains there, stiff, motionless, talking to his little friends in the sweet Capri dialect, until the sun sets and dives into the blue-green sea,— and the birds fly away with their nests all together with a high chirrup of farewell—

"Ah, that rascal Munthe," said Prince Eugene; his voice was loving, trembling a little.

—We walked for a while in the park, beneath the pines swollen with wind. Later, Axel Munthe took me to the topmost room of his tower. It must once have been a granary; he uses it now as his bedroom for the black days of loneliness when he shuts himself up as in a prison cell, stopping his ears with cotton in order not to hear a human voice. He sat down on a stool, with a heavy stick between his knees and the dog's leash coiled around his wrist. The dog, crouching at his feet, gazed at me with a frank, sad look. Axel Munthe raised his face; a sudden shadow had overcast his brow. He told me that he could not sleep—that war had killed his sleep; he spent his nights in tortured wakefulness, listening to the call of the wind through the trees, to the distant voice of the sea.

"I hope," he said, "that you have not come to talk about the war."

"I shall not talk to you about the war," I replied.

"Thank you," said Munthe. And suddenly he asked me whether it was true that the Germans were so dreadfully cruel.

"Their cruelty," I replied, "is made of fear; they are ill with fear. They are a sick nation, *Krankesvolk*."

"Yes, a sick people," said Munthe, tapping the floor with the tip of his cane, and after a long silence he asked me whether it was true that the Germans were thirsting for blood and destruction.

"They are afraid," I replied, "they are afraid of everything and everybody,— they kill and destroy out of fear. Not that they fear death; no German, man or woman, young or old, fears death. They are not even afraid of suffering. In a way one may say that they like pain. But they are afraid of all that is living, of all that is living outside of themselves and of all that is different from them. The disease from which they suffer is mysterious. They are afraid above all of the weak, of the defenseless, of the sick, of women and of children. They are afraid of the aged. Their fear has always aroused a profound pity in me. If Europe were to feel sorry for them, perhaps the Germans would be healed of the horrible disease."

"They are bloodthirsty then, it is true then, that they butcher people without mercy?" broke in Axel Munthe tapping his stick impatiently on the floor.

"Yes, it is true," I replied. "They kill the defenseless,— they hang Jews on the trees in the village squares, burn them alive in their houses, like rats. They shoot peasants and workers in the yards of the

kolkhoz—the collective farms—and factories. I have seen them laughing, eating and sleeping in the shade of corpses swinging from the branches of trees."

"It is a *Krankesvolk*," said Munthe removing his dark glasses and wiping the lenses carefully with his handkerchief. He had lowered his eyelids. I could not see his eyes. Later he asked me whether it was true that the Germans kill birds.

"No, it is not true," I replied. "They have no time to bother with birds. They have just time enough to bother with human beings. They butcher Jews, workers, peasants. They set fire to towns and villages with savage fury, but they do not kill birds. Oh, how many beautiful birds there are in Russia! Even more beautiful perhaps than those of Capri."

"More beautiful than those of Capri?" asked Axel Munthe in an irritable voice.

"More beautiful and happier," I replied. "There are countless families of the most beautiful birds in the Ukraine. They fly about in thousands, twittering among the acacia leaves. They rest on the silver branches of birches, on the ears of wheat, on the golden petals of sunflowers in order to peck the seeds out of the large black centers. They can be heard singing ceaselessly through the rumble of guns, the rattling of machine guns, through the deep hum of aircraft over in the vast Ukrainian plain. They rest on the shoulders of men, on saddles, on the manes of horses, on gun carriages, on rifle barrels, on the Panzers' conning towers, on the boots of the dead. They are not afraid of the dead. They are small, alert, merry birds, some gray, others green; still others red and some yellow. Some are only red or blue on their chests, some only on their necks, some on their tails. Some are white with a blue throat and I have seen some that are very tiny and proud, all white, spotlessly white. At dawn they begin to sing sweetly in the cornfield, and the Germans raise their heads from a gloomy slumber to listen to their happy song. They fly in thousands over the battlefields on the Dniester, the Dnieper, the Dni. They twitter away free and merry, and they are not afraid of the war. They are not afraid of Hitler, or the SS, or of the Gestapo. They do not linger on branches to look down on the slaughter, but they fly on in the blue singing. They follow from above the armies marching across the limitless plain. The birds of the Ukraine are truly beautiful."

Axel Munthe raised his face, removed his dark glasses, looked at me with his lively, mischievous eyes and smiled. "At least the Germans do not kill birds," he said. "I am really happy that they do not kill birds."

"Dear Munthe," said Prince Eugene, "has truly a tender heart, truly a noble soul."

Suddenly there came a long low neighing from the sea, and Prince Eugene shuddered. He wrapped himself in his wide gray woolen cloak that he had left on the back of his armchair. "Come and see the trees," he said. "At this time the trees are very beautiful."

We went into the park. It was getting cold. The eastern sky looked like filmed silver. The slow death of the light, the return of darkness after the endless summer day, gave me a feeling of peace and calm. I felt as if the war were over and Europe still alive, "the glory that was..." etc., "the grandeur that was..." etc. I had spent the summer in Lapland, on the Petsamo front, on the Liza, in the vast Inari forests, in the dead, moonlike, arctic tundra, lit by a merciless sun that never sets; and now those first autumn shadows called me back to warmth, to rest, to a feeling of life serene, untainted by the continuous presence of death. I wrapped myself in the shadow that I had at last found again, as if it were a woolen blanket. The air had the warmth and the scent of a woman.

I had reached Stockholm only a few days previously, after a long cure in a Helsinki hospital, and I recaptured in Sweden the sweetness of a serene life that had once been the grace of Europe. After so many months of savage loneliness in the far North among the bear-hunting, reindeer-breeding, salmon-fishing Lapps, the almost forgotten peaceful business of life, such as I had just been admiring in the streets of Stockholm, exhilarated, almost bewildered me. The women above all—the athletes

and gentle grace of the clear and transparent Swedish women, blue-eyed, with hair of old gold, and little breasts placed high like two medals for athletic valor—like two memorial medals for the eighteenth birthday of King Gustav V—restored my feeling of the dignity of life. The shadows of the first sunsets added feminine gentleness to something secret and mysterious.

Along the streets sunk into a blue light, under a sky of pale silk, in the air illuminated by the white reflections of the house fronts, the women passed as comets of blue gold. Their smiles were warm, their glances absorbed and innocent. The couples embracing on the benches in Humle Garden, under trees already damp with the night, seemed to me ideal replicas of the embracing couple in Josephson's "Festive Scene." The sky above the roofs, the houses along the sea, sailing boats and steamers moored in the Storm and along the Strandvägen were as blue as Marieberg and Rörstrand porcelain, blue as the sea around the islands, as the Mälaren near Drottningholm, as the woods round Saltsjöbaden, as the clouds above the highest housetops of the Valhallavägen; that blue that is discernible in the white of the North, in the snow of the North, in the rivers, the lakes, and the forests of the North; the blue that is in the stuccoes of Swedish ecclesiastical architecture, in the coarse, white-painted Louis XV furniture found in the houses of Norrland and Lapland peasants; that blue about which Ande Öesterling talked to me in his warm voice as we walked between the white wooden columns with golden Doric fluting in the auditorium of the Swedish Academy in the Gamle Stade; the milky blue of the Stockholm sky at dawn, when the ghosts who have wandered all night through the streets (the North is the land of ghosts—trees, houses and animals are ghosts of trees, houses and animals) glide back along the pavements like blue shadows; and I had watched them from my window at the Grand Hotel or from the windows of Strindberg's house, the red brick house at Number Ten Karlaplan where Maioli, First Secretary of the Italian Legation, and the Chilean singer Rosita Serrano now live on different floors. (Rosita Serrano's ten dachshunds rushed up and down the stairs barking, Rosita's famous voice rose husky and sweet above the notes of the guitar, and I saw the same blue ghosts wandering through the square that Strindberg met on the stairs returning home at dawn, or caught sitting in his hall, stretching on his bed, leaning from his window, pale against the pale sky making signs to invisible passers-by.) Through the gurgling of the fountain in the middle of the Karlaplan the leaves of the trees could be heard rustling in the breeze that blew over the morning sea.

We were sitting in the little neoclassical temple at the end of the park, where the rock drops steeply to the sea, and I watched the white Doric columns etched against the background of the blue autumn landscape. By degrees, something bitter was arising in me, something like a sad anger; bitter words came to my lips, and my effort to choke them back was useless. Thus I began almost unwittingly, to talk about Russian prisoners in the Smolensk camp who fed on the corpses of their mates under the impassive gaze of German officers and soldiers. I felt horror and shame at my own words. I would have liked to apologize to Prince Eugene for that cruelty of mine; and Prince Eugene kept silent, wrapped in his gray cloak, his head bent down over his chest. Suddenly he lifted his face, his lips moved as if in speech, but he kept silent, and I read a pained reproach in his eyes.

I would have liked to read the same cold cruelty in his eyes and on his brow that had hardened the countenance of Obergruppenführer Dietrich when I told him about the Russian prisoners in the Smolensk camp who fed on the corpses of their comrades. Dietrich had burst out laughing. I had met Obergruppenführer Dietrich, the commander of Hitler's bodyguard, in the villa of the Italian Embassy on the shores of the Wannsee near Berlin: I had felt strangely attracted by his pale face, his unbelievably cold eyes, his huge ears and his small fish-mouth. Dietrich burst out laughing: "*Haben sie ihnen geschmeckt*—Did they enjoy eating them?" he laughed opening wide his small pink-roofed fish-mouth, showing his crowded sharp fishlike teeth. I would have liked to see Prince Eugene's face harden with the same cruel expression that disfigured Dietrich and to hear him also ask me in his tired mellow voice, "Did they enjoy eating them?" But Prince Eugene raised his eyes and gazed at me with

a look of pained reproach.

His face was covered with a mask of deep suffering. He knew that I also was suffering and he gazed silently at me with loving pity. I felt that if he had spoken, if he had said one single word, if he had touched my hand, I might have burst into tears. But Prince Eugene gazed silently at me and crucial words rose to my lips; I became suddenly aware that I was telling him about a day when I had gone to the Leningrad front. I motored through a deep forest, near Oranienbaum, with a German officer—Lieutenant Schultz of Stuttgart, to be exact—he hailed from the valley of the Neckar, Schultz called "the poet's valley," and he talked to me about Hölderlin, and Hölderlin's madness.

"He was not mad, he was an angel," said Schultz, moving his hand in a slow vague gesture, as if he were drawing invisible wings in the frosty air, and he looked upward as if he followed an angel's flight with his eyes. The forest was deep and thick; the blinding reflection of the snow was mirrored with a slight blue tinge by the tree trunks; the car glided on the frozen track with a mellow rustle, and Schultz said, "Among the trees of the Black Forest Hölderlin flew like a large bird," and I kept silent staring into the deep forest, listening to the rustle of the wheels on the icebound track. Schultz recited Hölderlin's lines:

*On the Rhine where the Neckar's lawns grow
they think that to abide
there is no better spot in the world.
But let me to the Caucasus go.*

"Hölderlin was a German angel," I said smiling.

"He was a German angel," said Schultz, and he recited:

But let me to the Caucasus go.

"Hölderlin also wanted to go to the Caucasus, didn't he?" I said.

"Ach, so!" said Schultz.

Just then, where the forest was thickest and deepest, and another track crossed our way, I perceived suddenly in front of us looming out of the mist a soldier sunk to his belly in the snow; he stood motionless, his right arm outstretched, pointing the way. When we passed him, Schultz raised his hand to his cap as if to salute him and thank him. Then he said: "There's another one who would like to go to the Caucasus," and he began to laugh throwing himself against the back of the seat.

Farther on, at another crossing of tracks, another soldier loomed in the distance; he also was sunk into the snow, his right arm outstretched.

"They'll die of cold, these poor devils," I said.

Schultz turned to look at me. "There's no danger that they will die of cold," said he and laughed. I asked him why he thought that these poor devils ran no risk of being frozen. "Because, by now, they are used to the cold," replied Schultz, laughing and patting my shoulder. And having stopped the car, he turned to me smiling: "Do you wish to see him close by? You'll be able to ask him whether he is cold."

We climbed out of the car and approached the soldier. He stood there motionless, his right arm outstretched to point the way. He was dead. His eyes were wide open, his mouth half closed. He was a Russian soldier, dead.

"That's our traffic police," said Schultz. "We call them the 'Silent Police.'"

"Are you sure they won't talk?"

"That they won't talk? Ach, so! Try to ask him."

"I'd better not. I feel sure he would answer me," I said.

"Ach, very amusing!" exclaimed Schultz laughing.

"Yes, very amusing, *nicht wahr?*" Then I added, feigning indifference, "Are they dead or alive when you place them on their posts?"

"Alive, of course!" replied Schultz.

"And then they freeze to death, of course," said I.

"*Nein, nein.* They do not die of the cold! Look here!" and Schultz pointed to a clot of blood, a clot of red ice on the temple of the corpse.

"*Ach, so.* Very amusing."

"Very amusing, isn't it?" said Schultz, and he added still laughing: "Russian prisoners must be put to some use."

... "Stop, please," said Prince Eugene softly. He said only: "Stop, please." And I wanted to hear him also tell me in his mellow, tired, rather distant voice, "Of course, Russian prisoners must be put to some use." But he kept silent and I felt a horror and a shame at my own words. Perhaps I was expecting Prince Eugene to place his hand on my arm. I felt humbled, a sad and cruel rancor gnawed at my heart.

The noise of restless hooves beating the damp soil, and of soft neighing reached us from the depths of the wood of Oakhill. Prince Eugene raised his brow and stood listening for a moment. Then he got up and moved in silence toward the villa. I followed him. We went silently to his study and sat at a small table on which tea was served in the fine Russian transparent, slightly bluish china of Catherine's days; the teapot and the sugar bowl were of old Swedish silver, not as shiny as the Fabergé Russian silver, but slightly dull, with the dark luster that old *tenn*^[1] has in the Baltic countries. The neighing of the horses reached us dimly, mingled with the rustle of the wind through the leaves.

I had gone to Upsala the previous day to visit the famous garden of Linnaeus and the tombs of the old Swedish kings, those large earthen graves similar to the tombs of the Horatii and Curiatii on the Appian way. I asked Prince Eugene whether it was true that the old Swedes sacrificed horses on the tombs of their sovereigns.

"Occasionally they sacrificed the sovereigns on the tombs of the horses," replied Prince Eugene, and he laughed mischievously as if pleased to see me composed once again, without a hint of cruelty in my voice or in my eyes. The wind was blowing through the trees in the park, and I was thinking of the heads of horses hanging from the branches of the Upsala oaks around the graves of their sovereigns. I was thinking of the large equine eyes filled with that same damp light that women's eyes have when pleasure or pity shines in them.

"Did it ever occur to you," I said, "that the Swedish landscape is equine in character?"

Prince Eugene smiled and asked. "Do you know Carl Hill's drawings of horses, Carl Hill's *häster*?" And he added, "Carl Hill was mad; he thought trees were green horses."

"Carl Hill," I replied, "painted horses as if they were landscapes. There is something strange in the Swedish nature, the same sort of madness that is in the nature of horses. There is also the same gentleness, the same morbid sensitiveness, the same free and abstract fancy. The equine character, the equine madness of the Swedish landscape is revealed not only in the great, solemn, incomparable green trees of the forests but also in the silky gloss of the vistas of water, woods, islands and clouds, the light and deep airy vistas in which a transparent white lead, warm vermilion, cold blue, damask green and shiny turquoise compose a clear and elusive harmony, as if the colors never rested long on the woods, meadows and waters, but flitted instantly away like butterflies. (If you touch the Swedish landscape it tinges your fingertips just like a butterfly's wing.) It is a landscape as smooth to the touch as a horse's coat. And it possesses the same elusive tones, the same airy lightness and shine, the same changing gloss that is seen on the coat of a horse fleetly prancing along stretches of grass and leaves in the turmoil of the hunt, beneath a gray and pink sky.

"Look at the sun," I said, "when it rises above the blue pine woods, on the light birch groves, on the

old silver of the water, on the greeny blue of the meadows,- look at the sun," I said, "when it rises over the horizon lighting up the landscape with the liquid splendor of a large, staring equine eye. There is something unreal in Swedish nature, full of fancies and whims, of that tender and lyrical madness that shines from the eye of a horse. The Swedish landscape is a galloping horse. Listen," I said, "to the neighing of the wind through the trees. Listen to the neighing of the wind among the leaves and the grass."

"The Tivoli horses are returning from the sea," said Prince Eugene listening.

"Some time ago," I said, "I went to the steeplechase near the Royal Hussar barracks, to the Stockholm Fattitklubb, on the last day of the horse show when the best horses of the finest royal regiments were competing. The horses, the trees, the grass of the field, the dead gray walls of the large indoor tennis court, the light dresses of the feminine spectators, the pale blue uniforms of the officers made up a delicate and tender picture by Degas shaded in light gray, pink and green tones in the silvery air.

"It was on that last day of the horse show that the horse Führer, ridden by Lieutenant Eriksson of the Norrland Royal Artillery in the *löktaren* race, knocked down at the start bars, fences and every kind of hurdle, and the onlookers kept silent in order that the Führer's Germany across the sea might not find a pretext to invade Sweden. It was on that day that, owing to a highly sensitive spirit of neutrality the horse Molotov, ridden by an officer with an English name, and thus an awkward name at the time—Captain Hamilton of the Göta Royal Artillery—had withdrawn from the race at the very last moment as much because of the dangerous tension that just then existed between Sweden and the U.S.S.R. after the sinking of some Swedish ships in the Baltic, as to avoid a public competition between Führer and Molotov.

"Two or three hundred people seated informally on rough benches that took the place of the customary stands belonged to the select circle of Stockholm and were gathered around the Crown Prince, who sat in the center of a long backless bench; the foreign diplomatic corps cut a gray row through the green, red, yellow and blue skirts and the pale blue uniforms.

"After a time, all the horses on the field answered to the loud, sweet, mellow and almost amorous whinnying of Rockaway, ridden by H.R.H. Prince Gustavus Adolphus. It seemed a love challenge answered by Bäckhästen ridden by Rittmaster Ankarcrona, Royal Hussars; Miss Kiddy ridden by Lieutenant Nyholm, Norrland Royal Dragoons, and Babian ridden by Lieutenant Nihlen, Svea Royal Artillery began frisking on the meadow under the stern eyes of the Crown Prince, while from behind the screen of trees, from the end of the field, and from the stables of the Royal Hussars across the road came the neighing of invisible horses. The horses of the gala royal carriages also began neighing, and for a time only voices of horses could be heard; little by little, the voice of the wind, the hooting of the steamboats, the raucous lament of the seagulls, the rustling of the branches of the trees and the dripping of the invisible soft rain recovered strength and daring, and the neighing abated. But during those few moments, I believed I really heard the voice of Swedish nature in its purity; it was an equine voice, an amorous neighing, a profoundly feminine voice."

Prince Eugene placed his hand on my arm, and smiling said: "I am glad that you—" and he added in an affectionate tone, "don't go back to Italy yet. Stay a little longer in Sweden. You will recover from all your suffering."

Little by little daylight was fading, the color of violets at night slowly filled the room. And little by little an indefinable feeling of shame was taking possession of me. I felt shame and horror for all I had endured in those years of war. Then as always in my journeys to and from Finland, I was stopping for a short time in Sweden—that happy island in the midst of a Europe humiliated and defiled by hunger by hate and by despair, where I recovered the sense of a serene life, the sense of human dignity. I felt

free again, but it was a painful, cruel feeling. I was to start for Italy in a few days. The thought that I would have to leave Sweden, to travel through Germany, to look again at those German faces distorted by hatred and fear and bathed in morbid sweat, filled me with disgust and humiliation. In a few days I was to see Italian faces again—my Italian faces, cowed, white with hunger. I was to see myself in the secret anguish of those faces, in the eyes of the crowd, in the trolleys, in the buses, in the cafés and the streets, beneath the large portraits of Mussolini stuck on the walls and on the shop windows, beneath that swollen and whitish head with its cowardly eyes and lying mouth. And little by little I was overcome by a sensation of pity and revulsion.

Prince Eugene stared at me in silence. He understood what was happening within me, what anguish was obsessing me, and he began to talk gently of Italy, of Rome, of Florence, of Italian friends whom he had not seen for many years,- and after a while, he asked me what the Prince of Piedmont was doing.

I would have liked to answer, "He is losing his hair." But I only said, smiling, "He is at Anagni near Rome at the head of the troops defending Sicily."

He smiled, too, but not at my innocent malice,- then he asked whether it was long since I had seen the Prince. "I saw him in Rome, shortly before I left Italy," I replied. And I should have liked to tell him that my last meeting with Prince Umberto had left me with a feeling of sorrow and regret. A few years had sufficed to turn that proud and smiling young Prince into a poor, sad and humbled-looking man. Something in his face, in his eyes, revealed a cowed and restless conscience. Even his cordiality, once kindly and sincere, was no longer spontaneous; his smile looked humble and uncertain. I had already perceived this dejection one evening shortly before the war at supper at Zum Katzenhiddigeigei, in Capri, on the narrow glass-covered terrace facing the road. In the next room a crowd of young people led by Countess Ciano danced noisily amid the excitable and sweating throng of the Neapolitan Sunday crowd. The Prince of Piedmont watched with a dull gaze the table at which the Countess Ciano's youthful court was seated, and the small group gathered at the bar around Morrell Williams, Noel Coward and Eddi Bismarck. The Prince rose from time to time and with a brief bow asked Elisabetta Moretti or Marita Guglielmi—a daughter of the President of the Senate, or Cyprien Charles Roux—daughter of the French Ambassador to the Vatican, or Countess Eileen Branca or Countess Lola Caetani to dance. Between the dances he came back to our table and sat down, mopping up the perspiration with his handkerchief. He smiled but his smile was bored, almost frightened. He wore white linen trousers, short and tight fitting, and a blue woolen sweater in the style that Gabriel Robilant had made fashionable that year. He had taken off his jacket and hung it on the back of his chair. I had never seen him dressed so carelessly. I noticed with pained surprise the glaring bare pate on the top of his head. It looked like a kind of large tonsure. He appeared greatly aged. His voice also had aged; it had grown yellow, hoarse, quite throaty.

Softness, lassitude, boredom appeared in his every gesture, in his smile, in the look of his large black eyes,- and I felt a gentle pity for that young prince, so faded and downcast, aging so humbly with soft resignation. I thought that we all had prematurely aged in Italy, that the same softness, the same lassitude and boredom slackened the gestures and infected the smiles and the looks of all of us. There was nothing pure, nothing truly young any more in Italy. The wrinkled face of that young prince, his premature baldness and withered skin were almost a mark of vulgar destiny. I felt that that painful and humiliating thought was weighing on his mind, that the humiliation of slavery had corrupted him, that he was a slave, and I could have laughed thinking that he, too, was a slave.

He was no longer that azure prince who walked through the streets of Turin with a warm smile on his proud red lips, that Prince Charming who appeared on the threshold of friendly houses by the side of the Princess of Piedmont at dinners and dances tendered to the young couple by the aristocracy of Turin. They were then a truly charming pair and pleasant to see, the Prince rather bothered by too tight

a wedding ring, his Princess rather cross and diffident, her clear gaze resting on the other young women with a jealous suspicion that her silent graciousness could not fully conceal.

The Princess of Piedmont also had looked sad and downcast the last time I had seen her. How different from the first time I had met her at a dance in Turin, all dressed in white, sweet and splendid. It was one of the first dances she attended in Italy after her wedding; she entered, and it seemed as if she penetrated our lives softly like a secret image. How different she was now from the person I used to meet in Florence or at Forte dei Marmi; whom I sometimes surprised in Capri on the rocks or in the grottos of the Marina Piccola toward the Faraglioni. Now there was something humiliated—even in her.

I had become aware of it a few years before on the Côte d'Azur. I was sitting one evening with some friends close to the swimming pool on the terrace of Monte Carlo Beach. On the stage of the open-air theater rhythmically rose and fell a wavering fringe of bare legs of a famous troupe of New York chorus girls. It was a warm night, the sea stretched out on the rocks and slumbered. Toward midnight the Princess of Piedmont appeared. With her was a relative of the Royal family, Count Gregorio Calvi di Bergolo, and after a while she sent Calvi to invite us to her table. The Princess was silent. She watched the show with a strangely concentrated gaze; the orchestra played "Stormy Weather" and "Singing in the Rain." After a while she turned to me and asked when I would return to Turin. I replied that I would never return to Italy, unless things changed. She gave me a long, silent, sad look.

"Do you remember the other night at Vence?" she asked suddenly.

A few days earlier I had gone up to Vence to carry the greetings of Roger Cornaz, the French translator of D. H. Lawrence, to two young American girls who were famous at the time throughout the Côte d'Azur for certain "sacred dances" they performed. The two American girls lived alone in a small old house, extremely poor and apparently happy. The younger one resembled Renée Vivien. They told me that they were expecting the Princess of Piedmont that evening. While the younger one concealed behind a dusty curtain prepared for her dance, and her friend selected records and wound the gramophone, the Princess of Piedmont entered accompanied by Gregorio Calvi and several other people. At first I did not discern any change in her, but gradually I became aware that something was withered, humiliated in her too. The young American who resembled Renée Vivien began dancing in that ill-lit room, low-vaulted like a grotto, on a tiny wooden stage decorated with cloth and paper. It was a pitiful dance, deliciously *démодée*, "inspired by a fragment of Sappho," her friend explained. At first the dancer appeared to be burning with a pure fire, a blue flame shone in her clear eyes, but after a while she appeared tired, bored. Her friend stared at her with a loving yet commanding look, which she talked softly to the Princess of Piedmont about sacred dances, Plato, and Aphrodite's statues. In the reddish light of two lamps with bell-like shades of purple satin, the dancer moved slowly about the tiny stage and raised and lowered first one leg, then the other, to the husky rhythm of the gramophone, at times lifting her arms and joining her hands over her head, at times letting them drop to her sides with a supreme gesture of abandon, until she stopped, bowed and, saying with childlike simplicity, "I am tired," sat down on a cushion. Her friend took her in her arms calling her *petite chérie*. She turned to the Princess of Piedmont saying, "Isn't she wonderful?"

"Do you know what I was thinking the other night while we watched that young American dancing?" the Princess asked me. "I was thinking that her gestures were not pure. I do not mean sensuous or lacking in modesty. I mean to say that they were proud. Not pure. I often ask myself why it is so hard to be pure today. Don't you think we ought to be more humble?"

"I believe," I replied, "that you are using the dances of that young American only as an excuse, that perhaps you are thinking of something else."

"Yes, perhaps I am thinking of something else." She was silent for a while and then repeated, "Don't you think we ought to be more humble?"

"We ought to have more dignity, more self-respect," I replied. "But perhaps you are right. Only humility can raise us from the humiliation into which we have sunk."

"Perhaps that is what I meant," said the Princess of Piedmont lowering her head. "We are ill with pride. And pride is not enough to raise us from humiliation. Our actions, our thoughts are not pure. She went on to say that a few months before, when she had Monteverde's *Orpheus* performed in the Royal Palace at Turin for a small audience of friends and connoisseurs, she had been overtaken at the last moment by a feeling of shame. She had felt as if her intention had not been pure. As if she were only making a proud gesture. I said: "I, too, was at the Royal Palace that day and I felt uneasy; I do not know why. Perhaps, now, in Italy, even Monteverde sounds false. But it is a pity that you should waste your feeling of shame on things that do honor to your taste and intelligence. There are many other things that should cause us all to blush; even you."

The Princess of Piedmont looked greatly taken aback at my words and I saw that she blushed slightly. I had already regretted having spoken to her in that way. I feared I had offended her. But after a few moments she said to me in a gentle voice that one morning, perhaps tomorrow, she would go to Venice to visit Lawrence's tomb (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* was much read and talked about in those days), and I spoke of my last visit there. Night had already fallen when I reached Venice. The cemetery was closed; the attendant was asleep and he refused to get up, saying that "cemeteries, at night, are intended for sleep." Pressing my head against the bars of the gate, I endeavored to make out in the silvery moonlight, the simple and humble tomb, and the coarse mosaic of colored pebbles portraying a phoenix, the immortal bird Lawrence wanted to have on his tombstone.

"Do you think Lawrence was a pure man?" asked the Princess of Piedmont.

"He was a free man," I replied.

Later, when she was saying good-by, the Princess said to me in a low voice and a sad tone that surprised me, "Why don't you go back to Italy? Don't take my words as a reproach. It is the advice of a friend."

I returned to Italy two years later. I was arrested, locked up in a cell at *Regina Coeli*, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment without a trial. While in prison, I was thinking that the Princess of Piedmont was already a prey to the deep sadness of the Italian people, that she was humiliated by the general slavery, and I was grateful to her for the sad, almost affectionate tone I had detected in her words.

My last meeting with her occurred some time ago in the station lobby in Naples just after an air raid. The wounded waiting for the ambulances lay on stretchers ranged under the shed. There was anguish in the deathly pale features of the Princess of Piedmont, and not anguish alone, but something deep and secret. She had grown thinner, there were dark circles under her eyes, and there was discernible white, very faint tattoo of wrinkles on her temples. The pure splendor that had emanated from her when she first came to Turin, a few days after her wedding to Prince Umberto, was quenched by now. Her movements were slower, she had grown more serious, she seemed strangely faded. She recognized me and stopped to greet me, asking from which front I had arrived.

"From Finland," I replied.

She looked at me and said: "You will see, all will end well. Our people are marvelous."

I broke into a laugh and wanted to reply, "The war is already lost. We have all lost the war, you too. But I said nothing. I only said: "Our people are very unhappy," and she moved on among the crowd with her slow, rather uncertain step— This, all this I should have liked to say to Prince Eugene, but I held myself back and smiled, thinking of that young princely couple.

"The Italian people are very fond of them, aren't they?" asked Prince Eugene, and before I could answer, "Yes, the people are very fond of them." (But I would have liked to answer him differently and did not dare.) He went on saying that he possessed many letters from Umberto—he actually said

"from Umberto"—that he was putting them in order because he intended to collect and publish them and I was unable to gather whether he was talking of King Humbert or of the Prince of Piedmont. I asked me later whether in Italian, Umberto is written with an "h."

"Without the 'h'" I replied. And I laughed thinking that the Prince of Piedmont was a slave himself as we all were—a poor, crowned slave, his chest laden with medals and crosses. I thought that he too was a slave, and I laughed. I was ashamed of my laughter, and still I laughed.

I noticed after a while that Prince Eugene's gaze was slowly turning toward a canvas hanging on the wall of the room. It was the famous picture "Pa balkong"—"From the Balcony"—that he had painted in Paris during his early years, in about 1888. A young woman, Friherrina Celsing, leans from the balcony facing one of the avenues radiating from the Etoile. The brown skirt with its blue and green reflections, the warm blond hair tucked under a little hat such as Manet's and Renoir's women wear stand out in the canvas against the transparent white lead, the gray-pink of the house fronts, and the damp green of the trees in the avenue. A carriage is passing below the balcony. It is a black cab and seen from above, the horse looks as if it were made of wood: stiff and lean, it strikes a note of childish play in that quaint and delicate Parisian street. The horses of the omnibus that is driving down from the Etoile appear to be freshly varnished with the same shiny enamel as that of the horse chestnut leaves. They look like the wooden horses on a merry-go-round during a provincial fair in the delicate provincial hue of trees, of houses, of sky above the roofs of the avenue. The sky is still that of Verlaine and already that of Proust.

"Paris was very young then," said Prince Eugene approaching the canvas. He was gazing at Friherrina Celsing leaning from the balcony, and he spoke to me softly, almost reluctantly of the young Paris of his, of Puvis de Chavannes, of his painter friends, Zorn, Wahlberg, Cederström, Arsenius, Wenneberg and of those happy years. "Paris was very young then. It was the Paris of Madame de Morienval, Madame de Saint-Euvert, of the Duchess of Luxembourg (and also of Madame de Cambremer and of the young Marquess de Beausergent), and of those Proustian goddesses *profondeur du parterre de feux inhumains, horizontaux et splendides*—whose glances enflamed the depths of the orchestra with inhuman, horizontal and splendid fires. Of the *blanches déités*—white goddesses, dressed in *fleurs blanches*—white flowers, *duvetées comme une aile*—downy as a wing, *la fois plume et corolle*—at the same time feather and flower, *ainsi que certaines floraisons marines*—do well as certain marine vegetation, who spoke with the delicious refinement *d'une sécheresse voulue, à la Mérimée ou à la Meilhac, aux demi-dieux du Jockey Club*—of a studied brittleness, in the Mérimée or Meilhac manner, to the elect of the Jockey Club, in the atmosphere of Racine's *Phèdre*. It was the Paris of the Marquess de Palancy who passed through the transparent shadows of his box at the theater *comme un poisson derrière la cloison vitrée d'un aquarium*—like a fish behind the glass enclosure of an aquarium. And it was also the Paris of the *Place du Tertre*, of the earlier cafés of Montparnasse, of the *Cloiserie des Lilas*, of Toulouse-Lautrec, of the *Goulue* and Jean le Désossé. I should have liked to interrupt Prince Eugene to ask him whether he had ever seen the Duke de Guermantes entering a box *et d'un geste commander de se rasseoir aux monstres marins sacrés flottant au fond de l'ancre*—and with a gesture commanding those sacred marine monsters floating on the bottom of the grotto to be seated—in order to ask him to talk about the women, *belle et légères comme Diane*—beautiful and easy of virtue like Diana, of the smart people who used the *jargon ambigu*—strange lines—of Swann and Monsieur de Charlus. And I was just going to ask him the question that had been for some moments surging to my lips. I was just going to ask him with a tremor in my voice, "You have no doubt met Madame de Guermantes—" when the Prince turned, and offered his face to the tired light of sunset. He moved away from the canvas and seemed to step out

that warm and golden shadow of that *côté de Guermantes* in which he too appeared to conceal himself emerging from behind the glass of an aquarium, himself like some *monstre marin et sacré*—sacred sea monster. Settling in an armchair at the end of the room that was farthest away from the balcony of Friherrina Celsing, he began talking about Paris, as if Paris in his painter's eyes were only a color—the memory and yearning for a color: those pinks, grays, greens, blues all faded. Perhaps for him Paris was only a mute color, a soundless color—his visual recollections, the pictures of his young Parisian years, stripped of any quality of sound, lived by themselves in his memory, moved, were lighted, flew away *comme les monstres ailés de la préhistoire*—like those prehistoric winged monsters. The mute pictures of that young, distant Paris of his crumbled noiselessly before his eyes, but not to a point when the destruction of that happy world of his youth would *ternisse, de la vulgarité d'aucun bruit, de la chasteté de silence*—spoil the chastity of silence by the vulgarity of any noise.

Meanwhile, as if to work free of the sad spell of that voice and of the pictures that were called up before it, I raised my eyes and looked across the trees in the park at the Stockholm houses, ash-colored in the tired glow of the sunset. I saw a blue sky slowly darkened by the night, similar to the Paris sky looking down on the Royal Palace far away and on the churches of the Garnie Stade—that Proustian sky of *papier gros bleu*—blue wrapping paper—which I used to see from the windows of my Paris house in Place Dauphine over the roofs of the rive Gauche, over the spire of the Sainte Chapelle, over the bridges on the Seine, and over the Louvre; and those dull purples, those fiery pinks, those gray-blue hues of the clouds delicately attuned with the shaded black of the slate roofs, were sweetly gripping my heart. I thought then that perhaps Prince Eugene was also a character *du côté de Guermantes. Peut-être un de ces personnages qu'évoque le nom d'Elstir.*—Perhaps one of those types that remind you of Elstir. I was just going to ask him the question that had been surging to my lips for some moments. I was just going to ask him with a tremor in my voice to speak to me of her, of Madame de Guermantes, when Prince Eugene fell silent, and after a long silence during which he seemed to gather the pictures of his youth behind the screen of his lowered lids, as if to protect them, he asked whether I had ever been back to Paris during the war.

I would have preferred not to answer. I felt a sort of painful reluctance; I should not have liked to talk to him of Paris, of my own young Paris, and I shook my head. I kept slowly shaking my head gazing at him. Then I said, "No, I have not been back to Paris during the war. I do not wish to return to Paris while the war lasts."

The painful and beloved pictures of a younger Paris, more troublous perhaps, more restless and sad were gradually superimposing themselves on the faraway pictures of the Paris of Prince Eugene and Madame de Guermantes. As faces of passers-by loom out of the mist outside the windows of a café there rose in my memory the faces of Albertine, Odette, and Robert de Saint Loup, the shadows of young men with brows marked with drink, lack of sleep and lust—who may be found behind the shoulders of Swann and M. de Charlus, in the characters of Apollinaire, Matisse, Picasso, Hemingway and Paul Eluard's gray-blue ghosts.

"I have seen German soldiers in every town in Europe," I said. "I do not want to see them in Paris."

Prince Eugene dropped his head on his chest and said in a distant voice: "Alas, Paris!"

Suddenly he raised his face, crossed the room and approached the portrait of Friherrina Celsing. Leaning from the balcony, the young woman looks down on the avenue damp with autumn rain. She looks on the cab-horse and the bus-horses swinging their heads beneath the green trees already parched by the first autumn fire. Prince Eugene placed his hand on the canvas, stroked with his long pale fingers the house fronts, the sky above the roofs and the leaves; he caressed that Paris air, that Paris color, those pink, gray, green and blue hues, all slightly faded—that pure and transparent Paris light. He turned and looked at me with a smile. And I saw that his eyes were wet with tears, that a te

was slowly rolling down his cheek. Prince Eugene brushed away the tear with an impatient movement and said, smiling, "Please don't say anything to Axel Munthe. He is an old rascal. He would tell everybody that he has seen me weep."

II. Horse Kingdom

DAYLIGHT was beginning to lose its youth after the ghostlike endlessness of a pellucid summer day without dawn or sunset. Already the face of the day was growing wrinkled, and little by little the evening was darkening the first, still-luminous shadows. Trees, rocks, houses and clouds sweeter and more intense in their foreboding of the coming night were slowly melting into the mellow autumn landscape, as in those landscapes of Elias Martin.

Suddenly I heard the Tivoli horses neighing, and I said to Prince Eugene: "It's the voice of the dead mare of Alexandrovskaya, in the Ukraine—the voice of the dead mare."...

Evening was already falling; occasional rifle shots of the partisans were piercing the vast red flag sunset fluttering in the dusty wind far away on the horizon. I had arrived within a few miles of Nemirovskoye, near Balta, in the Ukraine. It was the summer of 1941. I meant to push on to Nemirovskoye to spend the night in safety. But it was dark already and I preferred to stop in an abandoned village, lying in one of those valleys that cut the vast plain from north to south, between the Dniester and the Dnieper.

The village was called Alexandrovskaya. In Russia the villages are all alike, as are their names. There are many villages called Alexandrovskaya in the Balta region. There is one in the west of Balta, some seventeen miles away. Another, eleven miles to the south. A third one, west of Federimova, on the road to Odessa, where the electric railway passes. And a fourth one, some nine miles north of Federimova. The one where I had stopped to spend the night, lay close to Nemirovskoye, along the Kodima river.

I had left my car, an old Ford, at the roadside, close to a fence surrounding the orchard of a prosperous-looking house. Next to the wooden gate was stretched out the dead body of a horse. I lingered a moment looking at the carrion; it was a beautiful mare, a dark bay with a long yellow mane. It lay on its side, its hind legs sunk in a puddle. I pushed the gate open, crossed the orchard and leaned on the house door that opened with a squeak. The house had been abandoned; the floors were littered with scattered papers, straw, newspapers and clothes. The drawers were pulled half open, the cupboards ajar, the beds unmade. It was certainly no peasant's home. Perhaps it belonged to a Jew. In the room I chose, the mattress on the bed had been ripped open. The windowpanes were intact. It was very hot. A thunderstorm, I thought, as I closed the window.

Night had fallen and the large, black, golden-lashed eyes of the sunflowers shone in the faint light. They gazed at me swaying their heads in the wind, already damp with the far-off rain. Romanian cavalrymen walked along the road leading their horses after watering them—fine full-hipped horses with yellow manes. The sand-colored uniforms stained the shadows with yellowish spots, they seemed like large insects entangled in the thick and sticky air of the coming storm. The yellow horses followed them, raising a cloud of dust.

There was still some bread and cheese in my knapsack, and walking up and down the room, I began eating. I had taken off my boots and barefooted I paced the packed-down, earthen floor along which columns of large black ants were marching. I felt the ants crawling over my feet, squeezing between my toes, climbing upward to explore my ankles. I was dead tired; I could not even chew, my jaws were so heavy and my teeth were so tender from fatigue. Finally, I threw myself on the bed and closed my eyes but I could not sleep. Once in a while close by or far away a shot pierced the night. They were shots fired by the partisans concealed amid the wheat and the sunflower forests that cover the vast Ukrainian plain toward Kiev, toward Odessa. And as the night grew thicker, the stench of carrion merged with the smell of grass and sunflowers. I could not sleep. I lay stretched out on the bed with

my eyes shut and I could not fall asleep, my bones were too sore from fatigue.

Suddenly the stench of the dead mare penetrated the room; it stopped on the threshold. It looked at me. I felt that the smell was gazing at me. Half asleep, I thought, it's the dead mare. The air was heavy as a woolen blanket, the impending storm crushed the thatched roofs of the village. It rested its heavy load on the trees, the wheat and the dust on the road. Now and again the noise of the river sounded like bare feet shuffling through the grass. The night was as black, thick and clammy as black honey. It's the dead mare, I thought.

The squeaking of cart wheels across the fields, of those four-wheeled Romanian and Ukrainian *carutza*, drawn by little lean, hairy horses that follow the armies with loads of ammunition, clothing and arms along the endless Ukrainian tracks—the squeaking of these cart wheels reached me from across the fields. I thought the dead mare had dragged itself to the threshold and that it was gazing at me. I cannot say how I came to believe this. I was dead tired, drugged with sleep. I could not rid myself of these thoughts. It was as if the heat and the stench of carrion had filled my room with black slimy mud into which I was slowly sinking, and my struggles were growing more and more feeble. I cannot say how I came to think that the mare was not dead, only wounded, its wounds festering; that it was already rotting and still alive, like those prisoners whom Tartars tie to corpses, stomach to stomach, face to face, mouth to mouth, until the corpse devours the living. That stench was there at the door, and it was gazing at me.

I felt all of a sudden that it was approaching, getting slowly closer to my bed. "Off—off with you!" I shouted in Romanian. "Merge! Merge!" Then it occurred to me that perhaps the mare was Russian and I shouted: "Poshol! Poshol!" The stench halted. A moment later it began getting closer to my bed again. Then I became frightened. I clutched the automatic that I had shoved under the mattress, and sitting up suddenly, I turned on my flashlight. The room was empty,— nothing was on the threshold. I jumped out of my bed and barefooted approached the door. I looked outside. The night was empty. I went out into the orchard. The sunflowers were bending mildly with the wind; the storm weighed down upon the horizon. It looked like an enormous, painfully breathing black lung. Swollen and empty like an enormous lung. I saw the sky expand and contract; I saw it breathe like a huge lung, its network of veins and bronchial tubes for a moment lighted by the sulphurous flashes of lightning. I pushed the little wooden gate open and went into the road. The carrion lay there, sideways in the puddle, its head resting on the dusty edge of the road. Its wrinkled belly was swollen. Its wide-open eye shone damp and round. Its dusty yellow mane, smeared and clotted with blood and mud, stood rigidly erect, like the manes on the helmets of ancient warriors. I sat on the roadside, my shoulder resting against the fence. A black bird flew by in slow silent flight. Soon it would rain. Invisible gusts of wind rushed through the sky, dust clouds ran along the road with a long soft hiss; particles of dirt clawed at my face and lashes, and crawled through my hair like ants. Soon it would rain. I went back into the house and stretched out on the bed. My arms and my legs ached. I was dripping with sweat. And suddenly I fell asleep.

And then the carrion stench came in again. It stopped on the threshold. I was not quite awake; my eyes were still shut and I felt that the stench was gazing at me. It was now a soft and greasy stench; thick, slimy, deep smell, a yellow smell, stained with green. I opened my eyes. It was sunrise. The room was enveloped in a spider web of uncertain whitish light. Things grew slowly out of the shadows, so slowly they became distorted and twisted like things pulled out of the neck of a bottle. The cupboard stood against the wall between the door and the window, the hangers dangled— empty and swaying. The wind made the window curtains flutter— there were heaps of paper, dirty rags, cigarette butts on the earthen floor, and the papers rustled in the wind.

Suddenly the stench came in, and on the threshold stood a young foal. It was lean and hairy. It started at me, of decay, of carrion. It gazed fixedly at me and snorted. It came close to the bed, stretched its neck and

sniffed at me. It stank horribly. As I started to get out of bed, it turned suddenly, knocked its side against the cupboard, and fled, neighing with fright. I drew on my boots and followed it out on the road. The foal was stretched alongside the dead mare. It gazed at me fixedly. "*Asculta!*—Listen here. I called out to a passing Romanian soldier carrying a pail of water. I told him to take care of the foal.

"It was foaled by the dead mare," said the soldier.

"Yes," I replied, "it was foaled by the dead mare."

The little foal was gazing fixedly at me, rubbing its back against the side of the carcass. The soldier approached and began stroking the foal's neck.

"It must be taken away from its mother. If it stays here, it will end by rotting. It can be your squadron's mascot," I said.

"Yes," said the soldier. "Yes, poor beast. It will bring luck to our squadron." Saying this he took off his trouser belt and looped it around the foal's neck. At first the foal did not want to get up, then it leaped up and backed, neighing and twisting its neck toward the dead mare. The soldier dragged it toward the camp in the woods. I stood watching it for a while; then I pulled open the door of my car and started the motor. I had forgotten my knapsack. I went back to the house, took my sack and, kicking the door shut, I climbed into my car and drove off to Nemirovskoye.

In the whitish light of dawn the river had a strange glitter. The sky was overcast; it looked like a winter sky. The wind blew along the river. Thick reddish clouds of dust passed low on the horizon like clouds escaping from a fire. Water birds among the reeds along the banks croaked raucously; flocks of wild ducks rose into flight, beating their wings slowly above the water, through thickets of willow, shivering in the biting cold of the morning. And everywhere hung that smell of things rotting, of decomposing matter.

From time to time, I passed long rows of Romanian army carts. The soldiers walked ahead of the horses chattering aloud among themselves and laughing, or they slept stretched out on sacks of bread, ammunition boxes, bundles of spades and hoes. And that odor of rotting things rose from everywhere. Sometimes along the banks of the river and on the sandbars emerging from it, the reeds and willows began to sway as if some wild beast at the approach of men had hidden among them. The soldiers shouting "Mice! Mice!" unslung their rifles and shot into the reeds, out of which women, disheveled girls, men dressed in long coats, and small boys came rushing hither and yon, stumbling, falling and getting up again. They were Jews from the neighboring villages who had escaped and who had taken cover among the reeds and willows.

Farther along on a marshy stretch between the road and the river, a Soviet armored car lay overturned. The gun stuck out of the conning tower, the trap door was open and twisted by the explosion,—inside, amid the mud that had filled the car, was a man's arm. It was a carcass of an armored car. It stank of oil and petrol, of burnt paint, of gutted leather and scorched iron. It was a strange odor. A new odor. The new odor of the new war. I felt sorry for that armored car, but sorry in a different way than I had felt at the sight of the dead horse. It was a dead machine. A rotting machine. It had already begun to stink. It was iron carrion, overturned in the mud.

I stopped and went down to the side of the mudhole, close to the armored car. I grasped the arm of the tankman and tried to pull him out. I pulled with all my strength until I felt the arm yielding and saw a head gradually emerging from the mud. It was a mud ball. I wiped the face with my hand, clawed with my nails at that mass of filth, and a small gray face with black lashes and black eyes appeared under the palm of my hand. It was a Tartar, a Tartar tankman. I began pulling once more to draw him out of the car, but soon gave up; the mud was stronger. I climbed into my car and drove on toward a cloud of smoke that rose from the plain, on the edge of a huge blue forest.

Meanwhile the sun was coming up from the horizon of green, and gradually the hoarse call of the

birds was becoming shriller and more lively. The sun seemed to beat down hammer-like on the cast-iron plate of the lagoons. A shiver ran along the water with a kind of metallic vibration and spread over the surface of the pools, just as the sound of a violin spreads like a shiver along the arms of a musician. By the roadside, and here and there in the cornfields, were overturned cars, burned trucks, disemboweled armored cars, abandoned guns, all twisted by explosions. But nowhere a man, nothing living, not even a corpse, not even any carrion. For miles and miles around there was only dead iron. Dead bodies of machines, hundreds upon hundreds of miserable steel carcasses. The stench of rotting iron rose from the fields and the lagoons. The cockpit of a plane was sticking up from the mud in the middle of a pool. The German cross was clearly discernible: it was a Messerschmitt. The smell of rotting iron won over the smell of men and horses—that smell of old wars,—even the smell of grain and the penetrating, sweet scent of sunflowers vanished amid that sour stench of scorched iron and rotting steel, dead machinery. The clouds of dust lifted by the wind from the far ends of the vast plain carried no smell of organic matter with them but a smell of iron filing. And all the time, while I was pushing into the heart of the plain and approached Nemirovskoye, the smell of iron and of petrol grew stronger in the dusty air,—even the grass seemed to be permeated with that undefinable, strong and exhilarating smell of gasoline, as if the smell of men and beasts, the smell of trees, of grass and mud was overcome by that odor of gasoline and scorched iron.

I was forced to stop some miles from Nemirovskoye. A German Feldgendarme—a field policeman—with his glittering brass plate like some knightly order hanging on a chain from his neck commanded me to stop. "*Verboten!*—Prohibited!" It was impossible to go ahead. "*Nein! Nein! Nein!*" I drove along a side road, a kind of cart track; I meant to get as close as possible to Nemirovskoye, but I could see the Russian "bulge" that the Germans had encountered on their way, and were now attacking on all sides. Fields, ditches, villages, the *kolkhoz*—the collective farms—were all full of German troops. And everywhere *verboten*. Everywhere *zurück*—turn back. Toward sunset I made up my mind to go back. It was useless to lose time and to try to get through. Much better to turn back toward Balta and edge northward toward Kiev.

I drove on and stopped after a long stretch in an abandoned village where I ate a little of my dry bread and cheese. Most houses had been destroyed by fire. From the southwest came the roar of guns at my back. Yes, literally at my back. A large hammer and sickle were painted on the front of a house. Entering I saw that it was a Soviet office. A huge portrait of Stalin was pasted on the wall. Some Romanian soldiers had penciled: "*Aiurea!*" under that portrait, which means "Oh, yeah!"

I sat down on a writing desk cluttered with papers: the floor also was covered with papers, ragged books and propaganda pamphlets. And I thought of the dead mare stretched in front of the house where I had spent the night in the village of Alexandrovskaya; I thought of the poor, lonely carrion lying on the side of the road, in the midst of the crowd of dead machines and steel carcasses. I thought of the poor, lonely stench of the dead mare overcome by the smell of scorched iron, gasoline, rotting steel, the new smell of this new war of machinery. I thought of the soldiers in *War and Peace*, of the Russian roads along which Russian and French bodies and carcasses of horses were scattered. I thought of the odor of dead men, dead beasts, of the soldiers in *War and Peace* who were left alive by the roadside to the rapacious beaks of the crows. I thought of the Tartar horsemen armed with bows and arrows, the horsemen of the Amur river, whom Napoleon's soldiers called *les Amours*—the tireless fleet, merciless Tartar horsemen, speeding out of the woods and flaying the enemy stragglers. I thought of that ancient and noble race of horsemen who were born and lived with horses, fed on horse flesh and mare's milk, dressed in horses' skins, slept under tents made out of horsehides, and were buried in deep graves astride their horses.

I thought of the Tartars in the Red Army, who are the best mechanical workers in the U.S.S.R., the

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