THE PLAYGROUND OF SATAN

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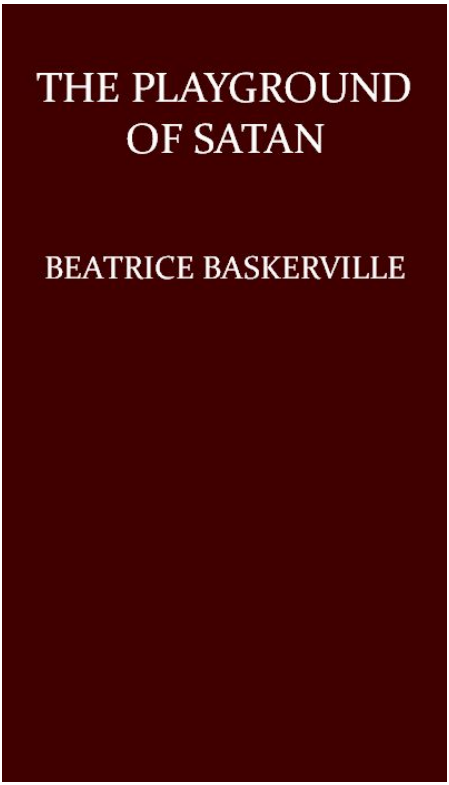
THE
Playground *of* Satan

BY
BEATRICE BASKERVILLE



Cover

AUTHOR OF
"Baldwin's Kingdom," "When Summer Comes Again,"
"Their Yesterday," "The Polish Jew,"
English Translation Of Gogol's "Taras Bulba," Etc.

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TO
Janina Korsakova
WITH LOVE

Rome, 1917

THE PLAYGROUND OF SATAN

I

Ian went into his mother's sitting-room, carrying an open telegram.

"Roman Skarbek has wired for horses to meet the express from Posen," he remarked. "He says it's important business."

As Countess Natalie looked up from her letter–she wrote hundreds a year–her hazel eyes twinkled with a mischievous thought.

"Roman and business, indeed! He's after Vanda."

Ian's brows contracted over his clear gray eyes; they were of the kind you find in outdoor men, used to gazing over long distances and watching for wild fowl to come out of the rushes at the dawn of day. Vanda was his cousin, and an orphan; she had lived at Ruvno since her babyhood.

"Give me a cigarette," said his mother, leaving her letter.

He obeyed, offered one to Minnie, who refused, and lit another for himself. The two smoked on in silence for awhile. Roman Skarbek was his cousin, too, though not Vanda's.

"I don't think so," he said.

"Why?" asked his mother.

"He's been to Monte Carlo. If he's had any luck he'll want some horses."

"He never had any luck. No. It's Vanda. *She's* in love."

"Vanda in love?" He laughed. "Nonsense!"

"Why not?" put in Minnie, the English girl, from her seat in the window.

He did not answer. His mother went on:

"Something has happened to Vanda lately. I don't know what, yet. When she was stopping with Aunt Eugenie she must have seen Roman every day. They rode together, too."

He walked over to the long window which opened into the rose garden. On the sward beneath it, thirty years ago, his father was shot in a famous duel with the rakish Prince Mniszek, neighbor and quondam friend.

"What will you say to him, if it is?" he asked.

The Countess considered. In her little world marriages were "arranged," thought out with the help of the Almanach de Gotha and a profound knowledge of the young couple's incomes, debts, acres and ancestors.

"Roman," she said, "is generous and chivalrous. I shouldn't mind helping him with his debts, if he'd only stop gambling."

"Does a man ever stop?"

"Not when it's got into his blood," said Minnie.

"It's in his right enough," rejoined Ian. He gambled, too, but with circumspection, unhampered by passion.

"I wonder what he sees in Vanda," the Countess mused.

"She's a charming girl," remarked Minnie.

Ian went out, his setters following him. An hour later he sought the two women with another telegram, finding them in the rose garden. The Countess walked with a stick, though she was only sixty. Her hair was perfectly white and her face much lined. Perhaps her youth, so full of interests and emotions, had

faded too soon. But she looked the great lady she was, queen of herself and fit to rule Ruvno, with its traditions, its wealth and dignity.

"Here's Joseph now," he announced. "Wants to be met at the afternoon train from Warsaw."

"Which Joseph?" asked Minnie. "You know a dozen."

"Roman's brother."

"What does he want?" asked the Countess.

"Vanda," he returned, a twinkle in his eye.

They walked down the garden together, Ian and Minnie sparring gently, as often happened. But his mother was thinking of Vanda again, for she said at last:

"If I were her, I'd choose Roman. Joe is cold."

"I'm sure they're coming to see us, that's all," said Ian. "They're coming from opposite directions. I'll send a motor for Roman. He's always in such a hurry. Joe can have horses."

And again he left them.

Until August, in the year of strife nineteen hundred and fourteen, you could find no pleasanter country house than Ruvno, Poland. It stood a little way back from the high road between Warsaw and Kutno, slightly on a hill, surrounded by pines and hardy hornbeams which guarded it, like sentinels, from the gaze of passers by. It had stood thus for centuries, ever since another Ian, Lord of Ruvno, built him a great house with the spoils of war against the Turk, laying the foundation of a hard-fighting, hard-living race, good for anything on earth but trade, always ready for a row, out of sheer love for adventure and broken heads. And of adventures they had full share, both in love and war. All the hordes of Europe passed over their land during the centuries; for Poland is Europe's eastern battlefield, as Belgium is her western. And the plows were forever turning up human bones, which lay where they fell; and human treasure, which lay where it was buried, either because the owners failed to find it when peace came again or because they happened to go where neither Turk nor Swede, Russian nor Prussian, could trouble them more.

And so the domestic history of Ruvno, half fortress, half palace, filled many parchment volumes. I am not going to bore you with it; but quite recently, as Ruvno counts time, Napoleon slept there when on his luckless march to Moscow. And he supped at the large oaken table which was carved out of Ruvno oak long before the discovery of America brought mahogany to Poland. And in his clumsy, violent way, he made love to the reigning Countess of Ruvno, toasting her in that Hungarian wine which looks like liquid sunshine and makes your feet like lead. Some of the same vintage still lingered in the cellars when one smaller than Napoleon crossed the Polish borders a hundred years later.

Napoleon, remembering the good cheer, paused here again to take breath

on his homeward flight. But this time there was neither toasting nor courting. The Countess, in solitude, wept for her gallant husband, whose body lay at Beresina, his gay tongue frozen forever, his blue eyes staring up at the stars in the fixed gaze of death. So the great man sat at the dead one's board, silent and sullen, surrounded by the weary, ragged remnants of his staff. Those who were in Ruvno that night said that he paced his room, restless and sleepless, till daybreak. Then he went his way, no longer a conquerer, but a fugitive.

A century later, Ruvno belonged to another widow and her son Ian, ruddy of face and broad in the shoulder. They were both up to date. They spoke English and French, and followed the fashions of western Europe. But their hearts and souls were with Poland, not only because they loved her, but because, too, race is stronger than love and hatred and death itself.

Ian spent most of his time on the Ruvno estate, and his mother's patrimony in Lithuania; but Ruvno was his heart's beloved. The Lithuanian estate was let on a long lease. He had a lively sense of his responsibilities, knowing that two watchful neighbors, Russia and Prussia, were ever working to denationalize the country and stamp out his race. His many acres were well cultivated, the peasants who worked on them well cared for. Though the Russian government forbade Polish schools, he and his mother saw to it that the children on their land learned to read and write their mother tongue. The Agricultural Society that had spread its branches all over Poland, despite opposition from Russian bureaucracy, had no more energetic member than he. Modern machinery and methods were rapidly replacing the old throughout the country, which was prosperous and enterprising. Ian did his share of this good work with intelligence and cheerfulness.

He thoroughly enjoyed his life; was a keen hunter; had no hankering after urban pleasures; knew no debt, confined his distractions to racing, in which he was moderate, and to a very occasional supper party after the opera, in Warsaw, Paris or Vienna.

To his mother he felt bound by a degree of affection and sympathy which rarely survive a son's early childhood. Other women bored him. His name had not been linked with one, of good repute or bad. Indeed, his circumspection with the opposite sex had become a joke among his friends, who teased him about it and searched for some well-hidden passion. But they did not find one, and contented themselves with dubbing him a woman-hater; which he was not. He knew he must marry some day; for what would become of Ruvno without an heir? But as the pleasant years slipped by, he told himself there was still time. And far down in his heart he had always relied upon Vanda.

Did he love her? The question rapped him as he left the rose garden for the paddock. He thought not. He liked to have her in the house, driving with his mother, keeping her company, helping her to entertain visitors during the

shooting season, or going with her to Warsaw for shopping and the play. He knew she was fond of him; accepted her affection as he accepted so many other things which were daily facts in his existence. In the rare moments when he thought about marriage at all he comforted himself with the reflection that she was there, ready for the asking when the inevitable day came. It never crossed his mind that she might refuse. It would be so comfortable, one day, to wed her. Life would be the same as before. His mother would go on living with them; Vanda would wear the family jewels; the rooms that had been his own nurseries would be reopened and refurnished. And in due time little people would play and sleep in them as he and Vanda had done.

He was shy of other girls; they bored him; he never knew what to talk about. And he would have had to woo anybody but Vanda; no girl with any self-respect would marry him without preliminaries in which compliments and attention played a large part. Vanda did not ask to be wooed. They had met daily for years. And she was so suitable; so comely and well-bred, so thoroughly sound in her ideas of life, marriage and society. She would not want to drag him off to Monte Carlo and Paris every year. She loved the country, and Ruvno; knew his life and would not expect him to change it. Another bride might have all kinds of ideas in her head, might not like the place, or his mother, from whom he refused to be parted, whatever happened. Therefore her remarks about the Skarbeks worried him; if she noticed a difference in Vanda, then a difference there must be. He had not noticed it; but then he was particularly interested in some alterations that he was making in the Home Farm and had not paid much attention to her and to Minnie Burton, the English girl who was staying with them. He and Minnie "got on" very well; she was a good horsewoman and a good comrade; rode about with him and Vanda, quite content to talk of whatever work happened to be going on at Ruvno, or not to talk at all. He had been to England a good deal, spent a couple of years at Oxford after leaving Theresarium and made friends with Minnie's two brothers, who were coming to Ruvno for shooting in a month's time. She was to return home with them.

Thus the summer had been passing very pleasantly. Crops were promising, the weather kept fine. Life had never seemed fairer, he and the two girls had agreed that very morning, on their way back to breakfast after an early canter.

And now, the aspect was subtly changed. He looked up at the sky; it was still clear. There would be no rain; his hay was safe. What meant this feeling of vague unrest? Vanda? The idea was absurd. Both brothers could not be coming after her. Roman and Joseph were as different as any two men of one class and race can be. No; they were after horses, or Roman wanted to buy an estate in the neighborhood. He had often spoken of it; all he needed was the cash. Perhaps he had won plenty at Monte Carlo and was coming to spend it. Joseph, with his

business head, was meeting him to see he did not spend foolishly. That was the whole thing in a nutshell. Anyway, they would be here before long.

Near the paddock he met Vanda. He was glad; he wanted to watch her face.

"Not so fast," he called out as she was running past with a nod. "Where are you going?"

"Aunt Natalie. I promised to give her an address and forgot all about it. My filly is better. I've just been there."

"You're very smart to-day," he remarked.

She looked down at her skirts.

"It's a hundred years old. You've seen it dozens of times."

"And very bonny," he added. And so she was. She had pretty brown hair and soft brown eyes, carried herself well and bore the marks of the healthy outdoor life they all led at Ruvno. A sweet wholesome girl, he thought, not for the first time, but with more interest than ever before. He did not guess that under her quiet manner lay a capacity for a deep passion; and pride to quell it.

She blushed at his compliment; he rarely gave her one.

"The Skarbeks are coming," he said, watching her closely. She was frankly pleased, but he noticed she did not blush again.

"Oh, how nice. It's years since they were here together. We can have some long rides." And she left him.

He watched her closely at lunch; but failed to see signs of the change which his mother professed to find in her. And he felt relieved. Nevertheless, he thought about her a good deal during the afternoon; the vague uneasiness of the morning returned. After all, she might find a lover elsewhere, marry him and leave Ruvno forever. He would have to do something to avoid that; and without further delay. He had waited too long. He never doubted that she would marry him. True, he had not made love to her; but they were such good friends, and he had always been fond of her in a quiet, unquestioning way, without passionate discomforts. Yes, he must secure her before another man stole her affections. He went to speak to his mother about it.

He came to this decision whilst riding back from some meadows; but the Countess he found sitting under the chestnuts behind the garden with Minnie and Father Constantine, the chaplain who had lived with them for years and taught Ian his catechism and the Latin declensions. A moment later Vanda joined them. So he put off again. He would wait till the evening, when he always had a quiet chat with his mother, in her dressing-room.

The Skarbeks met in the Countess' sitting-room.

"You here?" was Roman's curt greeting. Ian noted the tone and wondered what they had quarreled about.

Joseph kissed his aunt's hand before replying. They were both fine men,

alike in figure, unlike in feature and temperament; both on the right side of thirty, straight, lissome and as thoroughbred as you please. Roman was dark, generous, lithe; Joseph fair, blue-eyed and cold. Matchmaking mothers were very civil to him; but their daughters liked Roman better.

"I've come from Warsaw," remarked Joseph at his leisure. He looked round the room, presumably for Vanda; but he did not ask for her. Ian knew she was sitting in the garden with Minnie. It was unnatural for her to hold aloof thus; his uneasiness grew.

"I'd no idea you were coming," said Roman hotly. "I ought to have been here sooner." He turned to his aunt. "It's no use mincing words; I've come to ask for Vanda."

"For Vanda!" echoed Ian blankly. Then he turned from them, to compose his face.

"Joe has cone for her, too," pursued Roman. "It's in his face. It's just as well to have it out at once. She must choose for herself."

"Yes," said Ian quietly. "Vanda must make her own choice. She is quite free." Privately, he determined to speak to her himself, as soon as he could escape from the room with decency.

"You followed me," said Roman to his brother.

"No. I thought you were still gambling." Joseph spoke with a sneer. How well Ian remembered it; it used to drive him to fury in their boyish days, and many a fight had it caused between him and the superior Joseph, who could use his fists all the same.

"If I win her I'll never touch a card again," cried Roman.

"You forget your debts," his brother retorted.

"Debts!" fairly shouted the other. "Look here, all of you!"

Out of inner pockets, he drew bulky pocket-books, took banknote after banknote and put them side by side on a table. And when there was no room for them to lie singly he set them three and four deep, till a fortune lay there, in the evening sunlight.

"Look at them! Count them!" he cried in triumph. "Where are my debts now?"

They gazed at the money in silent wonder. Never had they seen so big a harvest from turf or green table. The Countess smiled across at Ian; he said something in a careless undertone. He would not let even her see what was on his mind.

"It's a haul," admitted Joseph. "You must have broken the bank."

"Luck. Six weeks of it. And now I've done with gambling forever."

He crammed the notes away carelessly, as men treat money lightly won. He paced the room, talking.

"I was afraid of it," he admitted. "I wanted to win. But it grew so huge that it became a menace. Luck at play, no luck in love. And now..." he swung round to his brother: "I meet you here."

"It's unfortunate," remarked Joseph.

"Unfortunate? It's Destiny! Oh, you'll have the family on your side; I don't blame 'em. You're a deuced-good match, well off, sober, economical. I'm not. I don't pretend to be." He measured the room with his long stride, and hurled at Joseph: "But I've something you haven't!"

"You?" This with a sneer. Ian felt inclined to punch his head, as in years gone by.

"Me. It's love. You don't know what it means. Men like you–" he jerked his head at Ian–"and Ian there, can't love. You want to keep up the race, that's all. What could you do to prove your love?"

Ian said nothing, though the challenge was for him as well. Was Roman's reproach true? Was this new uneasiness, that fast became pain, love, or but wounded pride?

"I'll ask her to marry me," Joseph was saying. "Offer my name, home, protection and ... and affection."

"Ah ... affection!" and Roman laughed.

"What more can any man offer?" put in Ian.

Roman was at the door now. He threw them a stream of hot words over his shoulder, and left the room. He was going to her.

There was silence after he left. Ian tried to say something, but failed. The brothers were poaching on his preserves; yet he could not find the words to tell them so. And now Roman had gone to her, and again he must wait. What a fool he had been! He was angry with them and furious with himself for being angry. The whole business was a nuisance. But, after all, why should he mind? Sitting on one of the broad window-sills, he lighted a cigarette and tried to calm his thoughts. Some time passed. He heard Joseph and his mother talking in low tones at the far end of the room, and was glad they did not expect him to talk. What was Roman telling Vanda now? He was the sort of man girls always liked. Words would never fail in his wooing. A spendthrift, a gambler, yes; but handsome, full of life, eloquent. There was the rub. He, Ian, had always to search for words when he wanted to speak of things near his heart. Roman, as a lover, surpassed him by untold lengths. He realized that now. And yet Roman, as a husband, could hardly give happiness; but girls don't think of those things till it is too late. And he could not go and tell Vanda so, either. He had had years in which to tell her many things; and he had wasted them. Now, when seconds were of importance, he could not even get her alone.

He shook the ash off his cigarette, watching it fall on to the bed outside;

glanced at the other two, and determined to go to the stables. He had only to slide his legs over the window-sill and be off. They would not notice his departure, and he would be alone, unwatched, free to shake off this sudden malaise and regain his old composure. He wanted solitude; had new thoughts to worry out, vague awakenings which he must stifle. He wanted to be quite honest with himself, to examine his heart, free it of this new burden and go back to the old, quiet life of yesterday, of this morning even.

But he did not move. He knew he would not till Roman came back. Would he come hand-in-hand with Vanda, or alone? He would not come alone. Vanda would take him and there would be a wedding. That meant a lot of fuss. He had put off his own wedding year by year to avoid a pother, and here it came, all the same. And with the same bride, too: only the bridegroom and best man had changed places. Roman was right. Destiny played odd tricks. He would see Vanda go off with another man; give her away to an unconscious rival. Was it going to hurt?

Suddenly the door opened. Roman burst in. He was alone; he addressed Ian.

"Can I have a car, at once?" he asked. His sunburnt face was drawn, his eyes haggard. No need to ask for Vanda's answer. It was written all over him. They rose; the Countess took his hand and said something to him, Ian knew not what. A load had fallen from his heart. Vanda still cared for him. Sweet, loyal little Vanda! He might have known it, and saved himself all that worry.

"But you're not going yet?" he said.

"I am. I'll be in Warsaw to-night; and, by God, I'll never go home again. Will you order the car, old man?"

"If you must go." Ian walked towards the bell that lay on his mother's writing-table. Roman turned to Joseph.

"I put it to her, squarely," he said in hoarse tones. "You've won. She's in the library." And he strode from the room before any of them could speak.

Ian rang the bell and stood by the table, his back to the others. He had heard every word that Roman said and it burnt his brain, if not his heart. So Joseph had won! It was preposterous. Roman as a rival he could bear. But that cold, selfish prig! He could never give a woman happiness. Vanda must be saved from herself. And he would do it.

Mastering his face, he turned round, ready with passionate words to save Vanda from Joseph, to use his authority as head of the family. But the room was

empty.

II

Roman tumbled into the car the moment it was ready and insisted on taking the wheel. Ian gave in, though he knew his cousin for a wild driver at the best of times.

They went off at breakneck speed. The road was clear, for it happened to be Friday night, when Jews are at rest, so that factors, omnibuses and other vehicles which belong to the children of Israel east of the Vistula did not get in the way. On they rushed through the cool, dark night, past fields of whispering corn, ready for cutting; skirting forests of tall trees, racing through little villages where savage dogs, let loose for the night, chased them, barking like the wolves with whom they shared parentage, till lack of breath held them in; past flat country, rich in soil well tilled, past rare towns where no lights shone except for here and there a candle-decked table where Jews hailed the Sabbath in squalid tenements; past a rare wagon of non-Jewish ownership, with the driver fast asleep, his team in the middle of the highway, deaf to hooting and shouting; past, in short, the various sights and sounds of the Polish country-side, where life is simpler than in England and men stick closer to mother earth. Ian loved it all; even the Jews he accepted as part of the picture, though his race was divided from theirs by a deep gulf; he loved the chilly breeze, the stately pine forests, the night birds' cry, the smell of rich earth, all the promise of revolving seasons; the very monotony of the life was dear to him.

Near Sohaczev they dashed into a drove of cattle, on its way to the capital. There was much shouting; the drovers swore by all they could think of that half their fortune was gone. However, after being able to check these statements by the help of lanterns, Ian decided that ten roubles more than covered the damage. Roman's flow of language left the others speechless; he had not opened his mouth since leaving Ruvno, and certainly made up for it when he did. They started off again. The swift, uneven motion over the ill-kept road soothed Ian. He had come partly out of sympathy for Roman, partly to avoid searching eyes at home. He must get accustomed to the new state of things, let the smart of Vanda's engagement wear off, prepare himself to meet Joseph without picking a quarrel with him. Neither could he have faced the usual evening confab with his

mother without betraying himself; and he hated the idea of confession, even to her. He pondered about many things, business, politics, crops and the chase; but he always came back to Vanda. His memory rediscovered charms he had long ceased to note–her soft eyes, the dimples that came into her cheeks when she laughed, her cheerfulness, her nice ways with his mother, her good heart for the poor, her adaptability to *his* house and *his* ways. What a good wife Joseph had won! Then he remembered she was portionless. Her parents had been ruined by a combination of adverse circumstances, so that she had come to Ruvno with little more than the baby clothes she wore and a box full of toys.

He burnt with the thought of Joseph's feelings of self-righteousness at marrying a portionless maid. But he should not get the chance to crow. She should have an outfit to make her new neighbors open their eyes; jewels, sables and linen fit for Ruvno. He meant to insist on this, foresaw mild objections from his mother, who knew all about Joseph's investments. But thank God he could afford to set the girl up in such a way that her groom could not boast. And the wedding should be in keeping; the Archbishop of Warsaw, Metropolitan of Poland, must marry them; Ruvno must entertain the guests royally. More: Joseph should never be able to say he had married a penniless girl. Vanda should have a generous dowry. Here he foresaw more opposition from his mother. But he was not going to let Joe puff himself out over every check he wrote for his bride. For such was Joe's nature; he would do it with a certain refinement; but would drive the truth home all the same. Vanda did not know this, or had forgotten it, being in love. But she would suffer from it later on; and he was determined she should bear as little pain as possible.

Ian's landed property represented a rough sum of twenty million roubles; he had another million invested in sugar refineries, and in a hardware factory, recently started in Warsaw, which was already paying well. His father's debts had been legion. But he had a minority of twenty years and good guardians, and found Ruvno almost clear when he took it over. Now, there was not a rouble's worth of debt on the place. He never spent his entire income. Whenever the chance came, he used to buy up land around Ruvno, adding to its acres and its efficiency. Neighbors wondered that the son was so different from the sire, and declared he would be one of the wealthiest men in those parts before he reached middle age. Not that he cared especially for money. His one aim was to add to Ruvno and keep up its name for good farming and good horses, to entertain generously without ostentation, to have prize cattle and modern machinery. His tastes were simple; a certain fastidiousness saved him from such "affaires" as were constantly getting Roman into trouble, and from pleasures which had ruined his father. Yes: he could afford to give Vanda a handsome dowry, and the thought was like balsam.

Arriving in the capital, Roman drew up before the "*Oaza*" a place where people drank champagne at exorbitant prices and listened to dubious songs and patter, not bereft of wit, but suited for neither the young nor the squeamish. It stood at the corner of the Theatre Square, where the Opera House is, and the Vierzbova, that narrow street which runs thence from the Saxon Square. Ian seldom went to the haunt; but Roman knew every woman in it. One, with little on but a feather boa and a gigantic hat, was screaming a new song at the top of her voice. The audience was meager enough, for the races were over, the heat had set in, and people of pleasure had gone to their country homes, or abroad to drink the waters at Carlsbad and other places where those who live too well hope to patch up battered constitutions for future pleasures. There were a few Russian officers, who made a great deal of noise, a couple of Polish squires, sunburnt and opulent, some of the inevitable Children of Israel, of those who no longer keep the Sabbath nor believe in anybody's God; and many sirens in marvelous hats and plentiful paint.

Roman ordered the supper and drank freely of champagne. He took not the least notice of the entertainment, which went on just above their table, on a small raised platform. Ian wondered why he insisted on being so near it; but to-night he was prepared to give in about everything, as to a spoilt child who has broken its favorite toy. Roman drank, ate and talked, smoking cigarettes all the time.

"What does she see in him? Tell me what she sees in him?" he asked, elbows on the table, cigarette between his lips, glaring with his dark bright eyes at his cousin. "Now–if it had been you..."

Ian became ruddier than ever and bent over his plate. He said nothing.

"I thought of *you* as my rival," pursued the disappointed lover. "A dangerous one, too."

"You needn't have," mumbled Ian, his mouth full of lobster mayonnaise.

"I see that now. But I feared it. You've always been together. It seemed the obvious thing for you to make a match of it. Why, there were bets on you at the club here."

"The devil there were!" cried Ian indignantly.

"Well, we all do that sort of thing. Their gossip worried me. I can't think how you managed not to fall in love with her. I'd have been in love with any woman under the circumstances, let alone her ... why, she's an angel, an..."

He broke off and fumed in silence for some time. Ian finished his lobster and attacked some cold meat. Roman looked as if he expected some remark, so he gave it, huskily:

"The obvious never happens."

"But Joe never came into my head. You could have knocked me down with

a feather when she owned it."

"Me, too," admitted Ian, with more sincerity than he had yet commanded.

"I don't wonder. Of course, I'm a rip. Not worse than most of my fellows. I don't count you.... Can't make you out. You must be a fish." He cast a glance round the room, nodded to a couple of women, signed that he did not want them at his table, ordered a bottle of champagne to be taken over to them, shifted his chair so that his back was towards them, and went on:

"Who isn't? I've had my fling. I was quite ready to settle down. This sort of game disgusts me. I've had enough of it."

"I don't wonder."

"I suppose you people at Ruvno think Joe's a steady old horse," retorted Roman vehemently. "He enjoys life, too. Only he's more careful of appearance than I am."

"Prig!" said Ian savagely.

Roman laughed at the tone. His dark eyes were very bright. These, with his fine head, broad shoulders and open hand, suggested other, less prosaic days, when men gave fuller play to their emotions, and were not ashamed of their feelings. He produced a hundred-rouble note from one of his fat pocket-books and sent it across to the little orchestra.

"Tell them to play my favorites," he told the waiter.

"Don't be a fool," admonished his more careful cousin. "You'll be glad enough of your money before you've done with the Jews." He knew Roman's reckless ways; and disapproved of them. A man nearing thirty had no right to lead the sort of life that concentrated at the *Oaza* between midnight and sunrise. The place was stuffy and gaudy and depressing. He began to feel sorry he had come.

"The devil take my debts," said Roman. "The Jews can wait now." Then he went back to Vanda.

"Do you imagine that Joe's in love with her?" he exclaimed. "Not a bit. He wants to settle down, doesn't need money and thinks her *suitable*. I loathe that word. It sums up all the hypocrisy of our lives." He gulped champagne, wiped his mustache, threw the napkin on the table, and pursued:

"He thinks she'll look well at the head of his table. And it saves trouble to marry her because he's known her all his life. He hasn't got to waste time paying her attention and risk the publicity of a refusal. You can't go near a girl at the races or a dance but everybody knows it. That's not old Joe's plan. He's too safe."

Ian bent over his plate again. Roman had too much insight; he was attributing to Joe the very thoughts that had passed through his own mind that morning. But the words gave him comfort. If Joe was not in love with Vanda, neither was he. Their symptoms were alike. Men in love talked like Roman, acted like him.

So he was saved. His precious armor of male vanity was intact. Thank God, he could face himself and his little world again.

"If I thought she'd be really happy, I'd not care so much," remarked Roman after a short silence.

His cousin looked up in alarm.

"If I doubted it I'd never let him marry her," he muttered.

"What can you do? She's set her heart on him. I don't mean he's going to ill-treat her. He'll be so proud of her that he'll hang on to her till she'll long to be left alone a bit. But she'll find him a bore after a time. She's not used to bores. God! If I had to live with old Joe I'd blow my brains out."

And he talked on; he had the philosophy of life at his tongue's tip; and yet what a muddle he made of his own! He reminded Ian of agricultural experts he knew, drawn from the ranks of ruined landed proprietors, yet ready to give advice to those who prosper on their acres. Gradually, he ceased to pay heed to the flow of words. He was an early riser and his bedtime hour had long passed. And he followed his own train of thought, nodding occasionally at his cousin's eloquence, and trying to get him out of the place.

"The essence of real love," remarked the oracle, as they left for the Hotel Europe at last, "is sacrifice. A man who's not ready for that is no lover."

And again Ian felt comforted.

He stopped two days in town, saw his lawyer anent Vanda's dowry, looked at sables, bought her a diamond pendant, and prepared to leave his cousin. This last much against his will. With his old impetuosity, he was playing heavily at his club, where a few gamblers lingered, detained for lack of funds to take them abroad. They hailed Skarbek's coming with joy, knew all about his fantastic winnings, and set about fleecing him.

"You'd be far happier if you settled down," said Ian as they finished lunch on the day of his departure. He could not understand any full-grown man caring to live from day to day. For him, happiness lay in the even road, a steady income, regular employment and an entire absence of excitement.

"Settle down?" echoed the other. "On what?"

"You've that money you won at Monte Carlo. Bank it and let me tackle your Jews."

Roman laughed bitterly.

"Ten thousand roubles of that money is in other men's pockets," and he named two who lived upon their earnings at the green table. "They're off to Ostend this evening."

"You're a damned fool," was his cousin's verdict.

"I know it. But who would gain by my being wise?"

Ian looked him straight in the eyes. Roman noticed how clear and honest

they were, with their tale of outdoor life, their gaze of the man who has found himself and keeps his house in order. Yet there was nothing priggish about him. He enjoyed life thoroughly. It was not the life of champagne suppers and high stakes; but he took his pint of Veuve Clicquot and played his game, conformed to the customs of his class. The difference was that such pleasures were incidents for him; for Roman they had become necessities.

"You know perfectly well that your Prussian government and my Russian one like to see us Poles squander our lives and money," retorted the squire.

"They do," agreed the gambler.

Ian saw his chance and followed it up, speaking earnestly, his habitual shyness undermost for the moment.

"They like to get us off the land because that is the rock bottom of national existence," he said. "Lots of people forget it. England is forgetting it. Every time I go there I see it clearer. But Prussia hasn't forgotten it for a moment these last hundred years. And she's taught the Russians something about it, too."

"I never had any land," protested Roman. "Joe got it, and has kept it. I'll say that for him."

"You can buy land."

"Not under Prussian law."

"Become a Russian subject."

"Easier said than done."

"I'll help you," Ian said eagerly. "Do you remember Kuklin?"

"That little place near Ruvno?"

"Yes. It's for sale." He did not add that the owner had ruined himself in places like the *Oaza*. "The land's first class. The house is a hovel. But it's only five versts from us and you can stop at Ruvno till you've built something fit to live in. I'll give you the materials and help you with the labor. The chief outbuildings are brick and in good condition. The squire is a good farmer when he remembers to stop at home. It's a bargain."

Roman was interested.

"I suppose the Jews will buy it."

"Not if I know it. I was going to buy it myself. But you take it. I'll let you have the money. Come, Roman, here's your chance."

"You mean you'd advance me the cash? Without security?"

"I'll make you a present of Kuklin."

Roman's handsome face filled with astonishment. Though not a mean man, Ian had the reputation of being exceedingly careful. He gave freely to causes which he thought furthered the prosperity of his country; but was wary of giving for the sake of giving, or for the popularity that comes to the open-handed. Roman knew him well; he realized that this offer meant more than cousinship;

it meant affection and a firm belief that he would settle down and "make good." He was touched, and said so in his ardent way.

"So you're willing? That's right. I'll go to Kuklin tomorrow and wire when you can see it." The other's face clouded, so he added hastily: "You needn't come to Ruvno. I'll meet you at the station, the owner will give us something to eat and I'll motor you back here. We'll have to settle with the Jews before you actually buy, or you'll get no terms from them. I'll go to Posen with you."

"Old man, you're the best friend I ever had," cried Roman, wringing his hand. "I can't tell you how I feel about it. But..."

"What 'but'?"

"I don't believe I could bury myself in the country–now. With Vanda it would have been different. Can't you understand?"

"No, I can't." He was disappointed. He had never felt lonely in his life, never knew the yearning after hot, brightly lighted restaurants filled with men and women on excitement bent.

"You won't want to come to Warsaw," he argued. "You don't know how land draws you. You'll have to drag yourself here when you've some special business and hurry back as quick as can be."

Roman doubted it, but gave up the argument. They parted on the understanding that he should telegraph when he had made up his mind.

Though he found Joseph still at Ruvno Ian showed a cheerful face and calm exterior. He felt completely master of himself again and talked freely of the coming marriage. The Countess was full of it.

"I can't understand what Vanda sees in him," she remarked during their evening chat "He's more selfish than ever. He never does a thing she wants unless he happens to want it, too. I suppose that's why she is so devoted."

Ian observed, and found that his mother was right. Not that he saw much of the happy pair. He only met them at meals, and delegated his mother to sound Joseph about the marriage settlement. He won his argument with her about that, too. But the thing had yet to be discussed and he put it off, not wanting to see Joseph alone if he could help it. There was time for that. Meanwhile, the estate kept him busy. But the marriage date was settled for three months hence. That was his work. He would have had it earlier, but the Countess thought it looked too hasty.

Joseph was quite satisfied to wait. He wanted to do up his country house, and furnishing took time. He did not consult Vanda about the furniture. He had ideas of his own and meant to carry them out. Yet he seemed proud of the girl and pleased to have won her; the rest of the family admitted that. What annoyed them was his boundless self-satisfaction. She would be his in the same way as his beautiful estate in Eastern Prussia, as his horses, or his sound investments.

"She is his chattel," was Ian's verdict one evening when alone with his mother. She gave him a sidelong look, but said nothing for the moment. Later on she mooted matrimony to him.

"It is high time you settled down," she said. "It is a great mistake for people to put off marriage too long. They lose courage as they grow older."

"Give me another year of liberty," he pleaded, laughing. "I'm not thirty-five yet. By next year I'll have the new farm buildings finished and the new forest planted. Then you shall find me a wife."

"I've one for you already," she said, caressing his face with her fine hazel eyes.

"What a matchmaker! Tell me the worst. Who is it."

She hesitated before saying: "Minnie Burton," and watched him closely.

"Minnie?" This in surprise. He had never thought of her. Then: "But she is a foreigner."

"But she is fond of Poland and of us. She's well bred, well connected, good-looking."

"A heretic."

"That might be changed."

He took alarm at this. There was nothing more hateful to his thoughts, just then, than marriage with anybody–but Vanda. And she had deserted him.

"I hope you've not been 'sounding' her, as you call it," he cried in alarm.

"No. Don't be afraid. But bear her in mind. She's a dear girl. She'll come back to us next year. I'd like to chaperon her to Nice in the winter."

"I'm not going to lose my shooting," he said firmly.

"You could run over there for a week or so. However, there's no hurry. Let's get Vanda safely settled first." And wisely, she dropped the subject. She knew all about his disappointment, and meant to tell him so one day. Meanwhile she would throw him and Minnie together as much as possible. But there was plenty of time.

The following evening they were finishing dinner when a servant handed Joseph a telegram. Thinking it one of many that had arrived since his engagement, he opened it carelessly.

"Who is it this time?" asked Vanda.

He did not answer, but read the missive twice, his face changing. She took alarm.

"It's bad news?"

He took no notice. She peered over his shoulder. Everybody was waiting for him to speak.

"It's in German," she announced to the expectant table. "Do tell us, Joe."

She put out her hand for the telegram, but he gave it to Ian instead. She sat

down again, looking snubbed.

"Read that," he said. Ian obeyed, aloud, for Vanda's sake, and in English, for Minnie's.

"'The Head of this Military District orders your immediate return, that you may report at headquarters.'" He looked up, puzzled. "It's signed by your manager. What does it mean?"

"Mobilization," answered the Countess promptly. They looked at her in surprise. She was the only member of the household who had read the last batch of papers from Warsaw.

Frowning, Ian reread the telegram. There was silence round the table. Joseph, like Roman, was a German subject. Eastern Prussia, where he lived, belonged to Poland till Frederick the Great snatched it from the Polish Republic, weakened by internal strife. And ever since that sad day the Prussians have done all they know to hound the Poles off their land. But the owners stood firm from the first, helping one another to keep every acre they possessed from the German colonists, who have their government's backing in money and legislation. It is considered a disgrace for a Pole to sell his land in Prussia or the Grand Duchy of Poland, because Prussian law forbids a Pole to buy it. But a Polish squire or peasant in financial difficulties can always get a more fortunate compatriot to help him, so that he need not sell.

"I've got to go," remarked Joseph gloomily.

Ian's thoughts ran ahead. Joseph would be away for some time; perhaps for months. The wedding would have to be postponed. Meanwhile, he and Vanda would be meeting hourly as in the old days, yet with the difference that she was no longer free. At this moment he did not imagine that Prussia's mobilization could affect his life. The thought that tempted him was that he could undo Joseph's wooing, win her in his absence. Then honor's voice intervened and he put temptation from him. Another thought came to his aid. He would get his mother to send her to England with Minnie Burton. When Joseph was ready to wed, she could come back. Not till then.

He looked at her. Her face was no longer bright, she gave her lover a long, sad gaze. Then he glanced at Joe over the broad table, handsome with plate and flowers, covered with the remains of a well-served, well-cooked meal. There was nothing supercilious about him now. He was frankly downcast.

"It's for Roman, too," he observed.

"I'll tell him," said Ian. The idea of Roman's going back to Prussia annoyed him. He would not be able to finish the Kuklin business. And he had set his heart on having his wayward, impulsive cousin near by. They had always been great friends; but since the affair with Vanda he found something very comforting in his company.

Everybody began to talk about the telegram and its probable import. Newspapers were opened and consulted, only to be thrown aside in disgust. They said so little. Father Constantine and the Countess argued things out according to their ideas of the political situation, whilst Joseph and Vanda had a final talk together. Ian saw his duty was to amuse Minnie Burton, and he did it with thoughts elsewhere. Joseph left the house at two in the morning to catch the night express from Warsaw to Posen. They all waited up with him; their farewells were cheerful. He would soon be back. Meanwhile, he could set the workmen at his house. Ian watched Vanda as they parted. She was sad, but held herself bravely. He liked that. He noticed, too, that Joseph was unusually demonstrative. He knew he ought to be glad of it, for her sake. But it angered him all the same. In a group at the open door they watched the car go down the straight avenue and turn into the road. On the way Joseph would have to knock up a local petty official and get his passport viséd. But he saw no difficulties; nobody dreamed of war just then, not outside the German Empire. When he had gone they went to bed, sleepy and unconcerned.

Ian motored to Warsaw for lunch. The streets were as deserted as usual at that time of year, except for a sprinkling of troops. But everybody was discussing the possibility of Russia's fighting to help Serbia. How could the big Slav brother leave the weak one to be strangled? He found Roman at the Europe, eating iced soup, and delivered his message.

"What did old Joe do?" he asked. The other told him.

"Went off like a lamb? I thought as much," and he laughed scornfully.

"And you?"

"I'm no friend of the Kaiser's."

"But he may win," and Ian lowered his voice, for a party of Russian officers sat at the next table. "He'll make it pretty awkward for Polish deserters if he does."

At this stage Ian had no more dislike for the Kaiser's army than for the Tsar's. They were both the hereditary enemies of his race. He was glad to think that he, at any rate, could keep aloof from the quarrel. Russia has enough men without taking only sons and had never called him to serve. He was no more obtuse that bright July day than thousands of men in the British Empire, in France, or in Belgium. Perhaps he had a greater respect for Prussia's efficiency and fighting spirit; but this vaguely, as of a fact that could not touch him.

Not so Roman Skarbek. With that odd insight you sometimes find in men who never get the practical hang of life he peered into the future as few, alas, peered then. Ian remembered his words long afterwards, in the warm, humming room, his eyes dim and dreamy with thought.

"He won't win," he said. "At least, not in the end. But he will at first, and

let Hell loose on Europe. He'll apply all the Prussian methods of persecution on other nations that he and his cursed breed have tried on us Poles for the past century. That will send the world against him. *We* know what Prussianism means; the world doesn't. But it will before he's beaten. What he'll do to me for deserting won't matter. The only deuced thing that matters is to stop Prussianism from spreading all over the world."

"You'll find it awkward here with a German passport, if Russia does go to war."

"I've not haunted the *Oaza* and the club for nothing. I expect I know more influential Russians than you do."

"I wish you would become a Russian subject," said the other, thinking of Kuklin. "I'd help you."

"Thanks awfully. I'll ask you to, if I can't manage it myself."

"Oh, the whole thing will blow over. Why, there's always a scare about this time. The papers made it to have something to write about." And they talked of other things, and of Vanda. Roman asked a dozen questions about her; and he perforce must answer.

He took home the gossip of the town; they talked politics all the evening. Minnie, who had been in St. Petersburg with her elder brother when he was Military Attaché to the British Embassy, told them with confidence born of little knowledge that *if* the Germans were mad enough to fight, the Russians would be in Berlin by Christmas. Her host, knowing Russian ways better than she, doubted her. Hence came animated talk. Yet none of them seriously thought the storm was near. Least of all Ian, who tried to cheer Vanda for the temporary loss of her lover by planning a new paddock which must be ready before the wedding. Never did he feel more secure in his quiet life and snug possession than when, bound for bed, he crossed the large hall, with its vaulted roof painted in Gothic blue with faded gilt stars, and its antler-covered walls. True, there was still a vestige of that uneasy feeling which he unwillingly put down to Vanda. But he had plenty to occupy him till Joe came back; then for a speedy marriage–and oblivion.

III

After much discussion, Father Constantine decided to seek relief for his rheuma-

tism at Ciechocinek, a place which lies nearer the Prussian frontier than Ruvno, on the main line between Warsaw and Berlin. He felt too old to take a long journey abroad, and hated the idea of some fashionable place in Austria or Germany. Ciechocinek was quiet, if primitive, and near at hand. He started off in state a couple of days after Ian's flying visit to Warsaw, in one of Ian's motors, the family at the front door to wish him a pleasant journey. There was as much bustle when the old chaplain went away–which rarely happened–as though the whole household were leaving. Everybody carried something to the car for him; everybody heard over and over again what the two canvas-covered portmanteaux held and knew their owner had packed and unpacked them half-a-dozen times within the week, in the agony of indecision and the search for some necessary garment that had been put at the bottom. Nothing would induce him to let a servant pack them. Besides the portmanteaux he carried several loose packages; to wit, three long loaves of home-made bread, because any other kind gave him indigestion; a small collection of home-smoked ham, sausage and tongue to take in the evening with his glass of weak tea (Ciechocinek sausages were all very well, but Father Constantine would sooner have gone without than have eaten them). And, for his morning tea, the housekeeper had packed up a large *baba* or cake, whose very name makes one's mouth water in days of dark flour and scarce eggs. There was a little basket containing his lunch, for he eschewed restaurant cars and preferred cold chicken and fresh bread and butter to the best meal to be had at railway stations. I had almost forgotten the parcel of butter which he carried to his cure, too; it was firm and fresh and creamy, food fit for the gods, for he would not eat the watery, saltish rubbish which, so he declared, the hotel-keeper in Ciechocinek provided. At the last moment, when he was in the midst of his good-byes, a maid came hurrying along with a heavy square parcel. It contained linen sheets. The baths at the cure place, so Father Constantine declared, were frequented by many people whom he thought none too clean. And he had no faith in the attendant's scrubbing. So he had a sheet spread in the bath before it was filled with the muddy substance that drew out his pains. Then there were wraps and pillows and books for the journey, till you would have thought the good old man was to travel for days, instead of hours. Only a generously proportioned Russian railway carriage would have taken so many bundles on the racks. For Father Constantine never trusted his precious portmanteaux to the luggage van. He was firmly convinced that highway robbers would have learned of his coming, laid wait and robbed him of his baggage whilst he dozed. He invariably counted the sum total of his packets each time the train stopped, when he awoke and glared suspiciously at new-comers. But everybody at Ruvno took his little ways with good humor; he had been there so long that he was an institution. They loved his bright eyes and sharp tongue; they knew his heart was in the right

place, and knew all his anecdotes so well that they could think of other things whilst he told them, and yet, by force of habit, make the right remark when he had finished. Ian was devoted to him; would never have thought of going off, on his mid-morning round until he had departed. He asked to be allowed to go with him as far as the station; in fact, the priest expected this offer from the sturdy squire whom he had spanked and taught in by-gone years. But he would never accept it. He disliked being seen off. It looked as though he was no longer capable of buying his own ticket or finding a porter. But the little comedy had to be enacted all the same.

"Father, I'm going to the station," Ian would say on these occasions, when the last package was stowed away and the housekeeper had counted them at least twice.

The priest held up his hands in mock horror. He was small and rather shrunken. His nose was hooked and his scant hair white. He had seen a good deal of trouble in his day; was in Siberia for five years in his youth for defending his church against a sotnia of Cossacks in 1864, and owed his misshapen ears to frostbite which he got on the terrible journey, made on foot in those days. But these things were a memory, and life was peaceful enough now.

"No, my child," he said. "Think of the packages. By the way, where's the *baba*? Zosia! where did you put the *baba*?"

"It's under the seat," said the Countess from the steps. "I saw her put it there. You'd better let Ianek go with you. He'll enjoy it."

"No, no, Countess. Thank you all the same. He'd crush the bread or sit on the butter when we begin to bump about on the bad part of the road. I'll get on by myself. The old horse isn't done yet. Not by a long way. God bless you all. Farewell!"

Making the sign of the cross, he wrapped the yellow dust-cloak round him. Ian gave the word to start and off he went.

The three women strolled over to the chestnuts, glad of the shade that warm morning, and Ian went to where men were busy laying out his new paddock. He gave some directions there, had gone over the stables and was waiting for his horse to be saddled for a visit to some wheat fields, reported damaged by a shower of early-morning hail, when the familiar hoot of his motor made him look up in surprise. He had given the driver orders to wait for the papers from Warsaw, and knew he could not have done it in so short a time. But surprise grew when, as the car drew nearer, he saw Father Constantine's dust-cloak. He waved to them to drive to the stables instead of round by the avenue and the house.

"What has happened?" he asked as they pulled up. "You can't have lost the train. It's not due for an hour yet."

"There is no train," announced the priest. "The Muscovites are mobilizing

troops. We're cut off from everywhere. I might have saved myself the trouble of packing."

"But there's worse than that, my lord Count," put in Bartek, the young chauffeur, who had been born on the land and had served first as stove-tender, then as gun-cleaner before being trained as a mechanic. "The tales they're telling at the station made my hair stand on end."

"What tales?" asked Ian.

"Jewish lies," snapped the priest.

Ian turned to the driver, who said:

"The Prussians have crossed the frontier and are in Kalisz."

"Don't you believe it, Ian," put in Father Constantine. "The Jews will say anything to scare honest Christians."

"And please, my lord Count," pursued Bartek the driver, "they are murdering men and women and children there. First they took a lot of money, gold, too, from the town, as a bribe to let the people alone. Then when they'd got the money they went up on that hill that stands over the town. And when the people thought they were safe on account of the gold they had given to the Prussian Colonel, that very officer came down into the town again, shut the people in their houses and shot at them through the windows, like rats in a trap."

"The Prussians so near us?" murmured Ian, looking from one to the other. "It's incredible. What are the Russians doing? There were several regiments in Kalisz."

"They retired before the Prussians came," answered Bartek, who had kept his ears open at the station.

"Incredible!" echoed the priest. "It's impossible. They wouldn't dare to do it."

The boy produced a crumpled newspaper from one of his pockets and handed it to Ian.

"The ticket man gave it to me," he explained. "One of the recruits brought it in a train from Warsaw. He says it tells what the Prussians are doing in some foreign part, I forget what it's called, but it's smaller than our country, and they've ravished the maids and murdered the children and done such things that haven't been done in Poland since the Turks were here. And they say they'll do the same thing to us if they get any further."

"You never told me you'd a paper," cried the priest. "What does it say, Ianek."

And Ian read the first story of Belgium's martyrdom.

"It's some trick to sell the paper," was Father Constantine's remark, when he had done.

"I hope so." Ian glanced at the head of the paper. It was the *Kurjer Warszawski*, which would hardly have printed such news without reason. He reread

the account, to himself this time, whilst the old priest sat back in the car and piously called upon God to know if it were true. Some minutes passed. Ian read and reread the news, unbelievingly at first, then with growing conviction. In the late-news column was a telegram from London, saying that England would probably declare war on Germany.

"There must be something in it," he said. "If England is going to war, Belgium has been invaded." He jumped into the car and they drove up to the house.

His mother and the two girls he found in the Countess' sitting-room. Zosia, the housekeeper, was standing there, sobbing bitterly and cursing the Prussians through her tears. In the large French window, which stood open, was a ragged, dusty, fear-stricken Jew, of the poorest description, one of the dark masses who live by running errands for their wealthier brethren; the hewers of wood and drawers of water of their own race; happy to lend a stray rouble in usury to some agricultural laborer who has fallen on evil days.

From this miserable man's trembling lips he heard much the same story as Bartek had learned at the station. But in addition the Jew brought news that Zosia's sister, who lived in Kalisz, married to a prosperous cartwright, had been murdered by the Prussians.

Ian never forgot the impression this made upon him. Later on, he grew more callous, saw and heard so many horrors, proved the Kaiser's army capable of anything. But the thought that Zosia's sister, a girl who had grown up at Ruvno and served his mother as maid before her marriage, had been assassinated in cold blood made his own boil. He was not a man to use many words. He made no effort to express the thoughts and feelings that rose in him. He did not speak for some time. Then he turned to his mother.

"You women must go to Moscow at once," he said. "God knows, they may soon be here at the rate they are coming on."

He spoke in a tone of authority he rarely used with her. She went to the window and looked into her beloved rose garden, soon to be cut into trenches and trampled by soldiers' feet. But on that morning it was a beautiful spot, fair with the work and art of many generations of skilled gardeners and gentle mistresses. A peacock spread his tail in the sun; Ian's two favorite dogs whined to him to go out to them; the air was very sweet with the odor of roses and pine needles. A big red butterfly floated past her into the room. She could scarcely believe that only a few miles away war raged; and yet, here was Zosia sobbing her heart out, here stood the Jewish messenger, who had come to say that the dead woman's husband and children were on their way to Ruvno as refugees, leaving all they possessed behind them, traveling on foot, with unspeakable bitterness and grief in their hearts.

She turned to her son, smiling a little. They lived very near to one another

and she loved him better than anything in the world, better than she had loved his father, for whom she suffered such pain.

"And you?" she asked.

"I shall volunteer," he answered simply.

He had not consciously thought about it before. The words came without his knowing exactly why. He knew that Russia had plenty of men without him; he bore that country no love, having had to suffer many humiliations from her since his babyhood. Every day he had to fight Russian malevolence in some shape or form. But he knew that the troops now speeding to stop the Prussian advance were on the right side. He remembered Roman's words: "The only deuced thing that matters is to stop Prussianism from spreading."

His mother gave him a frightened look, bit her lip, and said nothing.

"You're right, my child," said Father Constantine, who, dust-cloak and all, was sitting in a chair several times too big for him. In his hand he held one of the many packets Zosia had prepared for his journey. He had forgotten about them. His old heart was filled with a terrible, helpless anger against the human beasts who had brought such death into the country.

The Countess put her hands on Ian's shoulder and kissed him, standing on tip-toe to reach his honest, sunburnt face.

"And I," she said, "will stop here with our people."

He tried to dissuade her, reminding her of what was happening a few miles away. But she was firm. I don't believe he thought she would give in. He did his duty in trying to make her move; but his own instinct was to stick to Ruvno till it was burned over their heads.

"If we leave the place goodness knows what would happen," she went on. "If we are shelled we can live in the cellars. That's what they were built for. If Ruvno goes, I may as well go with it."

"It is the simplest way, and the simplest is generally the best way," said Vanda. She had not spoken since Zosia burst into the room with her terrible story. Ian looked at her face, which had grown pale. He had forgotten her for the moment. Now he remembered that the man she was to marry had gone home and must fight on the other side, or be shot for a deserter. Their eyes met: they understood each other; both had the same thought. And it flew round the room to the others, for they all looked at her, wondering what she felt about it. She covered her face with her hands. Anxious to draw attention away from her, he turned to Minnie Burton.

"And you," he said, "must come with me to Warsaw, at once. I will see your Consul and send you home the quickest way."

Minnie gave a little laugh. She was a fair, fresh-colored girl, with steady brown eyes and a frank manner. She expected them to talk of sending her home

and had already made up her mind not to leave Ruvno whilst they remained. Three years ago, her soldier brother brought Ian home for a week-end. They were renting a little place in Leicestershire for the winter, and he hunted with them. She liked him at once. He was the first foreigner she had met who did not overwhelm her with silly compliments. He was more interesting than most of her brother's friends, who developed their muscles, but neglected their minds. And he liked the things she liked, the country, violent exercise, horses; appeared much pleased with English country life and arranged for her to meet his mother and Vanda. So the two families became very friendly. Then old General Burton died, the home was broken up and Minnie left more or less alone in the world, for both brothers were abroad, one, a sailor, and the other with his regiment in India. She had been foolishly happy at Ruvno, she reflected, and allowed friendship with Ian to ripen into one-sided love. She was not one of those women who will renounce a husband rather than marry a foreigner, and prefer to bear no children rather than see them grow up to citizens of another state than England. She longed to "settle down," though she never admitted it and gave acquaintances to understand that she thoroughly enjoyed her present way of living. Ian was free; he liked her. She saw no reason why he should not one day love her as she loved him. Though the Countess had not dropped a word about her own thoughts in the matter, Minnie felt sure she would not object to her son's marrying a comely young Englishwoman with a tidy fortune and good connections. There was one great barrier–the difference in their faith; but Minnie had not thought about that seriously. Her mind dwelt more on Ian the possible spouse than on Ian the Roman Catholic. In his company she had enjoyed many a canter across country, many a chat and not a few friendly discussions. And her heart had succumbed. True, there were times when she suspected him of being a little cold by nature; a little prosaic, even for her, who would have been annoyed with a lover of Roman Skarbek's type. She did not guess he felt so comfortable as a bachelor that he thought of matrimony as an unpleasant plunge, to be taken as late as could be. All this seems calculating and unmaidenlike put on paper; but it was not nearly so clear in her brain; till this fateful morning of bad news from Kalisz her plans had been vague; her heart alone busy. She would have been well content to live in Ruvno forever. And here was sudden danger of her leaving. Ian might marry another girl before they could meet again. Though no husband-angler and too proud to set her cap at any man she felt that she must stop under his roof, or her romance would be ruined. Rapidly, she reviewed heart and conscience. The first spoke all too plainly; as to the second, she had no near family beyond her two brothers, one on the high seas, the other, presumably, to fight in Belgium. Her only duties, if she went home all the way through Russia or Roumania or Greece, would be to help refugees and do her unskilled best with wounded. But

here were both to succor. She was nearer that kind of suffering than she could be at home. And even though Ian joined the army–she glanced at his sturdy figure and reflected on his thirty-four summers with the comforting doubt as to whether Russia wanted him–she would be in touch with him at Ruvno, and of use to his mother, whom she liked sincerely.

She did not answer him, but turned to the Countess.

"I'll stop here with you," she said with flaming cheeks.

"But, my dear child, think of the risks," said her hostess, by no means unwilling, but anxious to give her a fair chance of escaping from such a dangerous place.

Here Father Constantine chimed in. His bird-like eyes saw a great deal and he shuddered at the thought of Ian's marrying a heretic. He had often wondered of late when those two brothers of hers were coming to take her away. And here was a good opportunity to get rid of her at once.

"You cannot stay here, Mademoiselle." He spoke French, not trusting his halting English in so important a matter. "The Germans will be exceedingly cruel to the English. I know how they hate you. I have been in Germany many times, for my rheumatism. If they find you here in Ruvno they will be capable of doing unspeakable things to you and bad things to us, for having you here." He turned to the Countess, nursing his bundle of sausages, a shriveled, eager figure in his linen dust-cloak and his air of the family confidant and confessor. "Madame, think of the responsibility. Imagine your terrible remorse if anything happened to Mademoiselle."

"The same things might just as well happen to me if I left this minute," protested Minnie, determined to fight for her cause. "The steamer might be captured by the Germans, England might be invaded. Of course, I hope it won't, but my brothers say the government have never bothered to prepare for this. I may not even be able to reach home. Father Constantine could not get to his cure at that place with the unpronounceable name. And it's lots nearer than England."

"That's true," agreed the Countess, who knew all about her chaplain's dread of heretics. Besides, she was loth to lose Minnie. Apart from her affection for the girl and her reluctance to send her off on a long journey, dark with unknown perils, she thought of Ian. Supposing they were burned out of house and home, as seemed more than likely, it would be a comfort to her to know that he could settle in England with Minnie to look after him till, one vague day, the Germans were beaten. She told herself that she would never survive the ruin of her home. It was almost as great a part of her existence as Ian himself. No: she did not want to part with Minnie; Minnie would look after him when she was no more. She smiled across at Father Constantine.

"You see," she said, "we can always send her away when danger is really

near. In the meantime, let us wait till the trains are running again."

Here Ian intervened. He had been questioning the Jew about Kalisz, without getting any clear statements from his poor, muddled brain.

"We can't let Minnie run such risks. It's bad enough for us Poles, who live in a country which is always a charnel house when war comes. But why should she get mixed up in it?"

Minnie's heart sank. He was so very matter of fact. But she would not give in.

"Why? For lots of reasons. I'd be all alone if I did reach home. You know the boys will be fighting."

"England hasn't declared war yet," said Father Constantine, handing his sausages over to Zosia. He had just remembered they were in his lap. "She may remain neutral."

"She won't!" cried Minnie hotly. "If that were possible I'd change my nationality!"

Father Constantine made a hopeless little gesture and let Zosia help him off with his execrable dust-cloak, watching the Countess furtively the while. He felt very much ashamed of having neglected to remove it in the hall. It was not only a breach of good manners, but a sign of his extreme agitation.

"Take it away at once!" he whispered to poor Zosia. She went off with it and the sausages, to weep on the ample bosom of old Barysia, Ian's long-since-pensioned nurse.

Thinking she had settled the priest, Minnie turned to her host.

"If you go away to fight with the Russians I mean to look after the Countess–and don't imagine I'm going to leave Poland and my Polish friends just because you're all in trouble!"

This touched them all, even the priest. The Countess was won over before, but Ian still meant to get her away that evening. Vanda would stop with his mother. The only feeling he had for Minnie just then was fear her brothers would blame him for keeping her.

The matter was partially settled by a couple of young Russians, whom a servant announced as waiting for Ian in the library. He hurried out to see them and did not return for some time. The others eagerly asked his news.

"It's true about Kalisz," he said. "But the Russians are sending troops up there as fast as they can. Incidentally, they are requisitioning all the cars and most of my horses."

"Cars! Then no Warsaw for me to-night," said Minnie.

Ian gave her an odd look. She rather annoyed him that morning, he knew not why.

"No," he retorted. "And you don't seem to wonder how I'm going to get in

the crops if all my men are called to the colors and my cattle are taken off."

"Oh, I didn't think of that," she said, repentant.

"Well, I must get back. Mother, we'll have to have these two young Russians to lunch. They're not very presentable ... but it's war-time."

He hurried put, leaving Minnie in contrition. She had ruffled him when she wanted to please him above all things. Father Constantine could not believe his ears. Social intercourse between Russians and Poles was exceedingly restricted. A few tufthunters and the descendants of those men who had winked at Russia's share in Poland's three partitions kept up a certain amount of relationship with the Russian Government; went to the official receptions given by the Governor General of Warsaw, who was also Commander of the troops stationed in Poland. Whilst in office he was lodged at the Royal Palace in Warsaw, once the winter home of Poland's kings. But these were the very few, as few were the members of old Polish families who had charges at the Imperial Court of Russia. The vast majority of Poles, rich and poor, aristocratic and humble, lived their lives apart from the Russian Bureaucrats in their midst, who fattened on the country, reaping a harvest in peculation, drawing extra pay whilst there, on the lying legend that they carried their lives in their hands and slept with revolvers under their pillows for fear Polish insurgents should murder them in the night. They knew perfectly well that the Poles had long since ceased to dream of independence won by rebellion; that they had learned the lessons of eighteen sixty-three and four. But they made alarming reports to St. Petersburg to enhance the value of their own services. The Poles knew that, at least for the time being, their one way of resisting Russification was to develop the agricultural and commercial resources of their country as much as possible, despite their conqueror's efforts; to preserve their native customs in spite of persecution; to teach their native language despite restriction and to cling to their national faith despite persecution from the Holy Synod and the indifference of Rome, who looked with dread upon Russia and dared not protest. But since the Russians in their midst were there to suppress all signs of their national life, the Poles shunned intercourse with them as much as possible; those who did not were marked men. Ruvno had never shown the least inclination to mix with Russians. Both Ian and his father before him declined a charge at the Imperial Court; it was an unwritten law in the family, as in so many others, that whilst the men had to learn a little Russian in order to transact necessary business, the women must not know a word. This rule has done more to preserve the Polish language in humble homes and in great than anything else.

So you can understand Father Constantine's surprise when he heard Ian say that two Muscovites, as they are generally called in Poland, were to sit at his patron's table. Nobody had fought harder, in his modest way, against the

Russification of his country than the old priest. He was apt to see but Russian faults, just as the Russians had eyes only for Polish shortcomings. Had such a thing happened a week ago he would have expressed his displeasure at the sudden crumbling up of Ruvno traditions and excused himself from the meal. But he thought things over for a minute and remarked to the silent room:

"Well, the Russians are fighting on the right side *this* time."

In his tone and the gesture of his thin hands were much eloquence, and a hint that he had wiped his account against Russia off the slate; that the sufferings of Siberian exile were to rankle no more. From that day forth they never heard him say a hard word against Russians, never caught him speaking of them as Muscovites, a term of hatred and contempt, but as Russians, children of the big land of Rus, fighting in a big struggle for the good cause of humanity.

The Countess said nothing for a moment. She had always avoided Russians, knew nothing of their language, treated those whom evil chance threw in her way with dignified civility, which was meant to make them feel that they were barbarians and she of an old civilization. But she was ready to call Russia an acquaintance, a possible friend in the near future, if they only kept their word to fight the Prussians who were killing defenseless women and children in Kalisz and Belgium. Ian had described the two visitors as "not very presentable." She knew what he meant. She had seen dozens of Russian officers who were not presentable, in the streets of Warsaw and Plock; at the races, at restaurants, in trains. They were noisy and none too clean; they spoke nothing but Russian and probably put their knives in their mouths. They would smell of pitch. She never quite understood why Russians of this type smelt of pitch, but the fact remained. Ian said it was something to do with the tanning of their shoe-leather. Perhaps it was. Anyway, it was not quite the kind of smell she cared to have at her table or in her sitting-room. And yes, they would expect some of the strong, raw vodka which peasants drink. However, she had always been ready to take a sporting chance on the sudden events of life, and said cheerfully:

"I expect we shall have more of them before the war is over. So the sooner you and I pick up a few Russian words, Vanda, the better for us."

Vanda did not answer. She was thinking of Joseph, who had gone to fight with the race that had violated Belgium and slaughtered the children of Kalisz.

Minnie only nodded. Her thoughts were for Ian. She felt she had said too

much that morning and was regretting it.

IV

No need to dwell upon Ian's efforts to enlist as a volunteer in the Tsar's army. Thousands and thousands of loyal Britons were being snubbed by their own government in the same way just then. Briton's rulers had even less excuse for their behavior than Russia, who at least had a large standing army to draw upon.

Russia needed no men, he was told. Perhaps, after many years, she would call on men over thirty to help her. But then, the war would be over in a few months. After being refused by the officer in charge of the military dépôt at Kutno, he went to Warsaw, hoping to find Roman, who knew a few Russians and might help him. But he learned at the Hotel Europe that the impetuous young man had left for St. Petersburg several days ago and omitted to say when he was coming back. Ian soon found out that his only chance of fighting would be with the Cossacks, to whom they were sending volunteers for the cavalry. To those whom he begged for admission he pointed out that he could ride straight and shoot straight, was sound as a nut and willing to do anything. One grizzled old Cossack colonel, reared on mare's milk, bred in the saddle, with not a spare ounce of flesh on his bones, gave his ample figure a keen and contemptuous glance.

"To the devil with riding gentlemen squires!" were his words, spoken in that strange Russian of the Don; but his tone said: "To the devil with all Poles!" He repeated his glance and asked:

"Can you ride without your saddle now?"

"I can."

"And without your bridle?"

"Yes."

The gruff warrior sought his eyes, which firmly met the gaze and with hostility, too; none have hated one another more bitterly for centuries than Pole and Cossack.

"And spring on the mare's back when she's galloping?"

"I've not done that lately," admitted the squire.

"H'm. I thought not from your belly. You can shoot, you say. Bears, perhaps?"

"Bears, yes. And quail on the wing. And wild fowl at dawn. And men, too,

when they insult me," retorted Ian, his temper fast slipping out of control.

The Cossack grinned. This sort of talk he liked. He had wondered whether the Pole would give as good as he got. His manner thawed slightly, as he said:

"Well, you've the pigeon-colored eyes of men who shoot straight. But you're too fat for a Cossack, and too old."

"You're fifty if you're a day," said Ian.

"Wrong for you. I'm only forty-five. But I've had a hard life, which I'm used to. You, my gentleman, have always had a soft bed to sleep on and rich food to feed on. That's why your stomach is too big for your years."

Ian suddenly felt very much ashamed of his spare flesh. Over and over again he had promised himself he would go to Marienbad and get rid of it. But that was out of the question now. So he said eagerly:

"I'll get thin soon enough campaigning. Look here, Colonel, you and I bear no love to one another. We've a good many old scores to pay off."

"You're right about that," admitted the other with a grin. "And the fault's not always been on the Cossack side, either."

"But just now we've got to beat the Prussians," argued Ian. "And you'll want all the men you can get to do it. I've been in their country and know it."

The Cossack gave a hoarse guffaw.

"Russia has enough sons to beat the world," he cried. "We'll be in Berlin before the New Year and I'll promise you my men won't leave much of their fine shops and their light beer. And on my way I'll call in on your house and give you some loot to prove it. Meanwhile, do you go home and look after your lady mother and your peasants."

This, delivered in the various accents of the Holy Russian Empire, and in varying tones, according to the state of culture of the particular officer who gave it, was the answer which greeted Ian everywhere he went. He was too old and too heavy. Bitter thought, when he felt young, strong, enthusiastic and capable as any Cossack of holding his own with horse and gun. There were, he was told, plenty of younger, fitter men than he. The Prussians would be utterly destroyed without his help. His grain, his horses and his peasants were worth more than his blood.

This was the result of two days' begging, waiting in ante-rooms, listening to more or less personal remarks, rubbing shoulders with men who were his enemies of centuries and who were, he thought, childishly optimistic about the war. As he told the Cossack of the Don, he knew Prussia. And he dreaded to think of how many towns would be captured, how many women and children butchered, before Berlin loot found its way to Ruvno....

There was nothing to be done but go home and follow the old colonel's advice. No need to add that everybody in Ruvno, and the women especially, wel-

comed him with fervor and relief. He made preparations for the war, laying in a large stock of grain, potatoes and other provisions which would keep. He feared a food shortage before long. Ruvno had good cellars, vaulted and spacious. They had been built in a time when people quarreled with their neighbors even more violently than they do nowadays, and laid siege to one another's houses. They were swept and aired under Zosia's and Martin's supervision. Then Ian had most of his stores bricked up in them, as his forbears did with their good wines, entering the list in their cellar-book and only opening the best vintage for weddings, christenings, funerals or the celebration of some great victory, according to the period of history. The Ruvno cellar-book went back to 1539, and he was very proud of it.

He worked hard during these days of preparation, seeking to relieve the smart of refusal. Too old and too fat; what a thing to have on his mind! He confided his feelings to nobody, not even to the Countess, who was busy housing refugees and improvising a hospital. Minnie he had forgotten; Vanda he avoided. Between them rose the figure of Joseph, in his Prussian helmet and gray service coat. *He* was with their enemies. Both felt the moment must come when they would open their passionate thoughts to each other about him; and both tacitly postponed it. Meanwhile, Vanda helped her aunt and Minnie to prepare wards and nurseries for the wounded and homeless.

He kept several people busy for the next few days, getting in his supplies from his various farms and entering them, not in the old cellar-book, but on a piece of strong paper, showing exactly how the household could reach various stores bricked up in different parts of the cellars, which covered as much ground as the big rambling house itself.

This done, he had to decide where to hide the list, so that, supposing Muscovites or Prussians made search for food, they would not find it. For he had little confidence in Russian troops either. A hungry warrior has no scruples as to whom he robs. Experience had taught him that, of the two kinds of oppression against his race, the Prussian was worse than the Russian; it had more method, persistency and callousness, beating anything the Russian could do, because the Russian is not orderly, nor has he a long memory. Ian knew, too, what rumors were afloat; that petty Russian bureaucrats were saying that the Poles would side with the invaders and Polish recruits refuse to fight. Such talk, though a tissue of lies, might put Russian troops against Polish houses. So he made up his mind to hide the food list and ... his family jewels. He wanted to send the latter to Moscow with the plate and pictures; but his mother refused to let them go.

"We may want them," she argued. "I hope we sha'n't; but you never know. They will enable us to live and to help others live for the rest of our lives if we have to bolt."

Ian had never thought of the possibility of leaving Ruvno. Privately, he meant to stop there even if the Germans came. Only thus would he be able to save his property. He had already heard enough tales of the neighborhood to know that an empty house is soon a smoking ruin and an abandoned farm appropriated by somebody else. He would send his mother and Vanda away and see things through alone. Minnie he would get rid of beforehand. But there was no reason why he should not humor his mother in this matter of the jewels. Time enough to tell the truth when real danger came. So he said nothing. Father Constantine suggested putting them in the chapel, under a stone which they would take out of the floor and replace so that nobody would be any the wiser.

"Prussians don't respect churches," said the Countess.

"And suppose the chapel should get burnt," remarked Vanda.

Father Constantine shuddered at the thought. He loved the little chapel better than any part of Poland, and this is saying a great deal.

"The only place is where everybody goes," said Vanda.

"The horse pond," suggested Ian jokingly.

"Yes," she rejoined seriously, "I vote for the horse pond."

"And ruin the jewels," protested her aunt.

"Vanda is right," said Ian. "All the soldiers who come use the horse pond. They won't think of looking for loot there. We should have to dig on the side furthest from the paddock wall, as that may be destroyed."

"Yes," said Vanda, "something like that."

"A brilliant idea," said Ian, "but it has a great drawback."

"Which is?"

"How are you going to dig it up if we want to bolt? All the soldiers in the place would see and there's an end to the jewels."

Nobody said anything for a moment; they were floored. Father Constantine spoke first.

"There is the high-road," he said in a detached way he had.

"Well?" said Ian.

"The troops won't make trenches in that, because it forms one of the lines of communication between Warsaw and Prussia. If we make a hole, lined with cement and moss, put some sausages over the jewels, with hard earth between, they ought to be safe. For anybody who found the sausages wouldn't go further down. We mustn't choose a spot near trees, for they will get felled and the ground torn up around them."

"There are two versts without trees, after you pass the windmills," said Vanda.

"And no peasants about to pry on you," added Ian.

So the Ruvno jewels were taken out of their caskets and sewn into water-

proof bags. The girls helped the Countess to make them, for none of the servants, not even Martin, the old butler, knew anything of the plan. He was to be trusted, but Ian and his mother agreed it was better not to let him know; he could then quite truthfully spread the report that the jewels had gone with the plate. For so he and the upper servants were told. In the washleather bags they put very fine sawdust, too.

Ian and the old priest dug the hole and lined it with cement, taking advantage of the bright moon to do it. Then the jewels were put in. They had a discussion about putting pearls there, but could not ask an expert, being cut off from Warsaw again. Ian said the damp might spoil them; his mother that she would rather the damp had them than think they were round the fat neck of some German *frau*; so they made the bag as thick as possible and put the most valuable pearls into a small thermos flask which Ian found among his hunting tackle. You must remember that the nearest jeweler's shop was twenty versts from Ruvno and might have been a thousand for all the good it was, since the Germans were there and the Russian troops between it and them. So they had to manage with the primitive things they found at home. Besides, as Father Constantine said, their object was to have the stones packed in as small a compass as possible, because if they wanted them at all during the war it would be to escape with.

Whilst preparing one hole they decided it would be better to divide the treasure into two parts, so that if for some reason or other they could not safely get to one they would have some chance with the other. So Ian and Father Constantine set to work on another hole, on the road to the east of the house, whereas the first was on the west, for so goes the road from Warsaw to Plovk, and thence follows the river Vistula into Prussia. They had to work quickly, for the moon was on the wane, and they could not be seen digging by the wayside at night. Even as it was, they were often interrupted by troops and supplies passing. One night, just as they were about to cement the second hole, a *sotnia* of Cossacks took it into their heads to bivouac near the secret spot, so they hastily covered it up and slunk home again, carrying the little sack of cement on their backs. They looked back and saw two Cossacks searching on the very spot where they had been working. This showed how careful they must be. At last, however, the two holes were filled with straw and moss, then the bags with the jewels, with earth beaten down, potatoes, sausages and more loose rubbish. The jewels were well at the bottom and several layers away from the food. This done, the women were taken–after dark–to the spots until they knew exactly where to find the treasure; and each learned by heart how many paces one hole was from the ditch and the other from the bend in the road that came a few hundred yards after you passed the windmill. *That* has been shot down long ago; but they had all passed the

place and visited the spot so often that they could find the treasure blindfolded. The two men covered up the tops so well that none could tell the ground had been disturbed twenty-four hours after they had finished.

So much for the jewels. They now had to find a place for the little plan that would enable them to get food supplies. There was not so much secrecy about this, there could not be, for both the butler and housekeeper had to know where to get things. By this time they had heard quite enough about the soldiers to be sure that if they were hungry and thought there was food about they would try to get it. But the Grand Duke Nicolai Nicolawitch had his troops well in hand; only the Prussians ordered their men to loot as much as they pleased; and who could tell how soon they might come?

Ian had ordered a good stock of foodstuffs to be left in the huge storeroom, to satisfy any looters that that was all they had. If that went, they could fall back on bricked-up supplies; if it were let alone, so much the better. But the stores in the cellar had been bricked up in six different parts; the place underneath the house was a labyrinth of passages and small cellars. Ian was for destroying the written list when they had learnt the geography of the food, and knew the Prussians were upon them. Till then, it might be kept in the chapel; for they knew that the Russians, even the most savage of the Cossacks, would respect holy ground. Vanda said nothing, but learnt the contents off by heart, going down into the cellars with Zosia and Martin, plan in hand, till they all three soon knew where everything was bricked up. This set Minnie to work, for Vanda, who seemed to her childish in far-off days of peace, had developed nowadays. Little by little she, too, learned the mystery of the cellars; so another detail, and a most important one, as things turned out, was mastered. In the storeroom were lists of the food put there, nailed inside the huge cupboards and headed: "Complete List of Foodstuffs in Hand." This little trick was an idea of Ian's. Later on, when it seemed certain they could not escape a visit from William's troops, he had the old Tokay unbricked and put in one of the open cellars. Minnie asked him why he was going to give them such good wine.

"Because they know it is here," he answered. "I don't want them to set about looking for it. Some old German professor called once with introductions and asked if he might see the cellar-book. Like an ass, I let him. His essay came out in some German review with extracts from my cellar-book."

Meanwhile, all the able-bodied men, except only sons and supporters of widows, had been called to the colors. Before going off, the men trooped into the hall, kissed the Countess' hand and had her blessing and her promise that neither wife nor child should want so long as Ruvno could help them. And Father Constantine, who had taught them all their catechism and their prayers, said a prayer. And then they marched away, singing hymns which have been

heard on every battlefield in which Poles took part since Christianity came into Poland, and swinging their sturdy arms; for so the Russians teach their soldiers to march....

They went down the shady avenue and along the hot, dusty road to the dépôt, five miles off. And at their head rode Ian and Father Constantine, to give them a send-off. Long after they were out of sight the three women could hear their voices, the men singing in unison, and the wives or sweethearts, who could keep up with them by running alongside, chiming in with their shrill tones; and Minnie thanked God that Ian, if he was to die, would die with her in his beloved Ruvno....

And as she watched them disappear into the fields of death and glory a great sadness came over her; for she knew that between yesterday and all the days to come in her life lay a deep abyss; that life itself would never be the same again; that a scale of pleasant illusions had fallen from her eyes and she must now face hard, unwelcome facts and live a fuller, sterner life than she had ever dreamed of; and the thought that the old order had left them all, on this great battlefield, forever, made her feel that she had lost somebody very very dear to her; and so the tears came into her eyes, though she tried very hard to swallow them.

As the voices died in the distance, they heard a long, dull roar. She looked at the Countess, who was fighting her tears, too.

"Heavy guns," she remarked. "In the Kalisz direction."

Their new life had begun.

V

Father Constantine had never much of an opinion about the Kaiser and his eldest son. A couple of years before the war he was obliged to take a cure for his old bones in a little town on the Baltic, where the humble folk are still Poles and Catholics. He looked upon the Crown Prince's face many times, for the Kaiser had banished him to the little town, where he swaggered in his blue and silver uniform, leering at the pretty women and sneering at the old ones. And he noted that those eyes were full of evil, though he little dreamed it was God's will to give his wicked passions play in Belgium and France. All the Prussians in that town used to cringe to him; but Father Constantine took no notice, so that at

last a Prussian subaltern, in a gorgeous uniform like his master's stopped him in the street and said he would be punished if he continued to ignore the Crown Prince when he passed him. But the old man never did salute the Crown Prince, because he knew how he and his father persecuted little Polish children, having them flogged for not saying their prayers in German, and dragging them from the steps of the altar at their first communion, to prison. He told this to the gaudy officer, whose Teutonic blue eyes blazed with rage. He quite expected to be arrested or at least taken back to the Russian frontier by a couple of German policemen. But nothing happened: they left him alone. But Father Constantine thought they might meet again, for war brings people together in a curious way; and if the Crown Prince should come to Ruvno he was ready to tell him what he thought of his evil actions, even if he were hanged for it. Once in his life, at least, said Father Constantine, he should hear the truth about himself, for he was always surrounded by parasites and sycophants, who praised everything he did.

Father Constantine not only talked about these things but set them in his diary; his old head could not keep its thoughts on one thing, even on paper, and he found how hard it was to pick out the most important things he had seen in two months' war, having learned the habit of wandering on in his diary about all kinds of matters. But he felt lonely without it; and hoped, too, that one day he might be the humble means of telling the world what happened in a country house in Poland during the Great War. Besides, he argued, when some foreigner realizes what Poland bears, he, whether he were French, English or American, would understand that Poland, having endured so much, must be saved, because it is against the laws of God and man to tear a country into three parts and put each under foreign domination, making father fight against son, brother against brother.

Ever since Ian and he had left the Ruvno men at the Kutno dépôt, he had heard the ceaseless roar of heavy guns day and night. By night he saw them flash around when walking out by the windmill for a little fresh air after leaving the wards. He saw the come and go of large armies and small detachments, of baggage trains, artillery, field hospitals, of war accessories whose very names he ignored but which he declared Beelzebub alone could have conceived. The Countess had given rest, shelter and food to Cossacks of the Urals, who think horse flesh better than capon, and to wild Siberians, who look as shaggy as their little horses and who are infidels, but whom no hardships can dishearten. They slept outside, or in the farm stables. And a pretty mess they made. Poor Ian used strong words when he saw what the first batch had done; but he grew used to it. In the house they had fops of the Imperial Bodyguard, who threw away the soft life of Petrograd, a very wicked city, so the priest said, to sleep in ditches and eat tinned meat. And they were quite cheerful about it, for some came back

wounded, and the old priest talked to them. It shocked him to rub shoulders with all these Russians at first. But they were friendly and would vow with strange oaths that Poland must regain her liberty after the war. Sometimes he wondered if he would be there to see that glorious day, or if Ruvno would be standing by then. Even now, poor Ian was half ruined, after only two months of war. His forests, once the pride of Ruvno, had either been cut down for military purposes or burned by shell fire. So far, those near the house were spared; but they were not of great value; it broke his heart to see the stumps and scorched trunks for versts around, and the priest's, too. He had watched some of these forests being planted, years before Ian was born or thought of. They had been tended with great care and grew into the best timber in that part of Poland. Even the Tsar's forests, which began near Ruvno's boundary, were no better. One morning, an old Jewish factor who used to do errands for the house when there was a town they could send to, came up–God knows how these Jews got about–and told them that the Prussians had cut down two hundred square versts of the Tsar's forest land north of Plock and sent the lumber down the Vistula into Prussia. Ian expected they would do the same with his property when they had the chance.

The autumn crops, especially potatoes, suffered terribly from the movements of so many troops, though Ian had to own that the Grand Duke saw that they were spared as much as possible. But even he could not be everywhere at once, nor think of an acre of sugar beet when he wanted to drive back the Prussians. Father Constantine dreaded the Cossacks. He saw them at work in 1863, though he had no record of it in his diary, because they burned down his home and all it contained in the spring of 1864. However, these were old doings, and many Russians who passed through Ruvno told him they regretted what happened then as deeply as he did. Ian managed to gather in a good deal of the Ruvno grain, but the peasants in most of the villages round had not enough potatoes to keep body and soul together during the winter.

One afternoon late in September, the priest was in the home-forest burying a Polish sapper who had died of wounds the night before. He had just planted the wooden Cross in the sapper's grave when he saw a big, dirty Cossack coming towards him. This man had a reddish beard, his shaggy cap and high boots smelt of earth, pitch and a rough life. He had seen many like him and knew the look of a man who has been fighting from that of one who is only going to fight. He could not define the difference, but it was there, stamped in their faces. Mud stuck to him, though it was not the mud which said this Cossack had come from the battle line. What with dirt and sunburn he was as black as the pieces of oak Ian had pulled from the river, where it lay for centuries, to make house wainscot of.

"Good-day, priest," he began. Father Constantine noted that he had the

good manners to speak Polish.

"Good-day, my son." His merry eyes belied his savage-looking red beard. There was something familiar about him, too. "I've seen you before; but where?"

"Ah–where?" he guffawed, and sat on the grave, thereby smoothing the parts that lazy Vitold had left all knobbed. Father Constantine felt for his glasses, remembered that he had left them on the window-sill in the sacristy, and peered at the new-comer helplessly. If any man had told him three months earlier, that he would be quietly watching a Cossack seated on a Catholic's grave and splitting his sides, Father Constantine would have called that man a liar. But war, as he admitted, changes even an old man's point of view, especially if he happen to be in the thick of it.

"If you have something to laugh at, tell it me," he said, tired of seeing the stranger enjoy a joke he knew nothing of.

"Laugh!" he cried. "Why, I could laugh for a week, just to see Ruvno again. And you not knowing me, after all the wallopings you've given me, too."

This made Father Constantine think. He did thrash a Cossack once, but it was in 1863, and this man was young.

"Not in 1863?" he asked doubtfully.

"No–more like '93," and the Cossack laughed again.

"I've only walloped village boys lately. And we'd no Cossacks in these parts before the war."

"How about Ian?" he asked.

"Count Ian, you mean," said the Father with dignity. He hated these democratic ways the Russian soldiers had of saying "thee" and "thou" to everybody.

"And Roman Skarbek," he went on, unabashed.

"Skarbek?"

"Don't you remember how you walloped us when we ate up all the cherries Aunt Natalie's housekeeper had thrown out of the vodka bottle? Lord, how drunk we were!" and he grinned, being tired of laughing, I suppose.

Then the priest remembered the story and recognized him. It was Roman Skarbek himself, the young man who won a fortune at Monte Carlo but could not win Vanda.

"What do you mean, coming here dressed like a savage?" he asked angrily, for it annoyed him that the trick had succeeded, all through his having left his glasses in the sacristy. "Don't you know what's due to a Pole and a Christian?"

"Aren't Cossacks Christians?" retorted Roman in that pleasant way which always made the Father forgive his boyish deviltries sooner that he ought. "Come, Father, be just."

"Well," he admitted, "some of them are. But why be a Cossack when you can help it?"

"Can't help it. Being a volunteer, they made me a Cossack."

"Before this war I detested the very sight of their tall caps and with good reason," said the Father. "But such is the power of Prussian brutality that Poles now fight side by side with wild children of the steppes to drive the soldier of the anti-Christ out of our country. Where have you been?"

"In Masuria," and Roman told him some of his experiences, adding that he had come to Ruvno with Rennenkampf, for a few hours.

"Well, I'm glad you've killed a few Germans. But you had better cut off that red beard before you go to the Countess."

As he got on his feet the priest was glad to see he had finished Vitold's work with the sods. He liked the graves to look neat.

"Aunt won't mind the beard. Let's go to her."

He whistled to his horse, which was browsing near by, and walked towards the house. He asked about Vanda, whether she was anxious for Joseph, how she looked, what she was doing. The priest answered truthfully, though it made him sorry to see the shadow come into Roman's face when he realized that she thought still of Joseph with great love.

"And yet, she hates the Prussians, and he is fighting with them, I suppose," he remarked, hotly.

The Father, almost as hotly, explained that, as he knew, several thousands more Poles were with the Prussian armies, through no fault of their own but because they had the bad fortune to be German and Austrian subjects. Roman agreed that many could not cut away from Germany, but Joseph had gone back when ordered.

"Like one of the herd all Germans are," he added.

As they passed the windmill, that stood just before you turn into the high road on the way to Ruvno from the forest, Szmul, a Jewish factor, stopped them. His cunning eyes shone with excitement.

"Oh, have you heard that great things are happening in Ruvno?" he cried, spreading out his hands in the way Jews have and twisting his mouth about.

"What things?" asked the priest. "Have they driven the Prussians out of Kalisz?"

"No, the Prussians are still at Kalisz. But the great General Rennenkampf has deigned to come to Ruvno."

"We know that."

He looked disappointed, because he took pride in carrying gossip from one village to another. And the Jews always knew the latest news and spread it like wildfire.

"Anything more?" asked Roman.

Szmul made him a deep reverence. You would have thought this dirty-

looking man in Cossack uniform was the Grand Duke at least; but that was Szmul's way.

"Oh–yes, General," Szmul knew he was only a lieutenant. "And I'm sure neither of you know it." He threw his arms about, so Father Constantine told him they were in a hurry.

"Well, look over there." He pointed westwards, where the blackened stumps of a forest bordered one of Ian's fish-ponds.

"Well, there's nothing new there. Be quick and tell your news if you have any, for we're off to the house."

"Out there, by the fish-pond, they've caught a spy," he said importantly. "He refuses to say who he is. He was caught cutting wires, and burning the toes of Jewish children."

"He may have been cutting wires but he wasn't burning Jewish children's toes," said Father Constantine sternly. "The Prussians have sins enough on their heads without you inventing more. You know as well as I do that there are no children, Jew or Catholic, within two versts of those fish-ponds."

"But," he protested, "they have caught a spy, and if he wasn't roasting the toes of Jewish children it's only because he hadn't the chance. I saw him being taken into the big house, and they say His Excellency General Rennenkampf is going to shoot him with his own hands to-morrow morning. He'd be shot now, only they hope to find out more about the enemy if they keep him a bit."

"Rennenkampf won't shoot him, but I hope to," said Roman as they passed on.

He and the priest parted outside the gates, one to vespers, the other to seek the Countess and Ian. Father Constantine excused himself from the Countess' table that evening; he preferred to eat in his room when Great Russians were in the house. Besides, he had much to do and knew the General liked to sit over his meals. On his way to the Countess' boudoir, which was used as an office in connection with the little hospital, he met Roman again.

"That Jew was right, Father," he threw over his shoulder. "The spy is here, and my men are to have the shooting of him to-morrow at daybreak."

Father Constantine had a busy hour with Ian's agent, a surgeon and some refugees who came in from a village ten versts off. All these people now walked in and out of the Countess' boudoir, once a sacred spot, as if it were a mill. He and the agent had disposed of the last fugitive and he was going up to the wards when a Russian corporal blundered in.

"What do you want in here?" he asked sharply. It annoyed him to see these louts use his patroness' room as a passage.

He said something in Russian; Father Constantine had made a point, all his life, not to speak that language, but he understood that an officer upstairs had

asked for a priest.

"Tell him I'll see him to-morrow."

The man saluted, grinned and said:

"He will be dead to-morrow."

Then the priest remembered the spy they had caught: it was he. The wards would have to wait. He sent a message up to Vanda and told the soldier to take him to the condemned man.

They made their way through the broad passages and landings which were blocked with wounded waiting for treatment, and up a winding stair which led to the turret. It was silent as the tomb till they disturbed an owl and some rats, and almost as dark. Father Constantine had not been up there since Ian was a boy and kept pets which could not stop outside in the winter. He remembered one winter when Roman and Joseph kept a young dog fox up there in the hopes of taming it. But it was never even friendly and when the first signs of spring came through the chinks of its prison, it gnawed the staple from its chain and made off into the fields. He felt glad that this Prussian prisoner would not get away so easily.

Two sentries stood at the top. They unlocked the door at a sign from the corporal and let him into the turret chamber.

It was small and dirty. A straw mattress lay upon the unswept floor; and some broken food. An old packing-case served as table. A candle, thrust into the neck of an empty champagne bottle, gave a feeble light and aft air of sordid debauchery, out of keeping with the place and circumstances. The prisoner sat on one end of the packing-case, his back to the door. He was writing the last letter of his life, and so intent that he took no notice of their entrance.

The priest dismissed his guide with a nod. He saluted, went out, and shut the door noisily after him: and still the man did not turn round. This was all very well, but Father Constantine was wanted below, in the wards, where others were under sentence of death, though not at the hands of Rennenkampf.

"You asked for a priest," he began in his mother tongue, though he knew German, too.

The prisoner rose and faced him. As the old man looked upon him his heart stood still in fear and his knees shook.

"Mother of God! Joseph Skarbek!" he gasped.

And he must die as a spy!

And his own brother was to shoot him!

These thoughts rushed across his brain. They stood looking at each other, both speechless. Joseph Skarbek, whom he had taught and scolded and loved with Ian and Roman, who was to marry Vanda, had come to Ruvno, not to claim his bride, but to spy. When he found tongue it was for reproach.

"How dare you come here like this?" he cried angrily, because great fear always made him furious, and he was aghast at the tragedy which had thus fallen upon his dear ones. His next thought was that none of them, neither Roman, the Countess, Ian nor Vanda must know this hideous secret, up in the turret chamber. He must find Rennenkampf, tell him the tale, plead with him that this prisoner be shot, if die he must, by another man's orders, and not Roman's. There was no time to be lost.

"Wait," he said. "I'll be back soon."

Joseph grasped his arm as he made for the door, and he saw how haggard his face was and how wild his eyes. Calm, self-contained Joseph had vanished; he was the incarnation of tragedy.

"For the love of God don't tell them," he muttered huskily.

"I'm not mad."

"Then where are you going?"

"To the chapel–for the Sacred Vessels."

He hastily prayed God to forgive him for using His Vessels to hide the truth; but could not tell the boy the real reason for his sudden departure. Outside, he had to explain to the sentries, who said they supposed it would be all right, only he must bring a permit if he wanted to go into the room again.

It took him some time to find an officer, who said that Rennenkampf had left Ruvno half an hour ago.

"But somebody must be in charge," he said, for the place swarmed with troops.

"I am," he snapped. He was a hard-faced, battered-looking man, hated the Poles and believed every Catholic priest a Jesuit, bent on his neighbor's destruction for the benefit of his Order. Father Constantine stated his case, after he had promised to respect the confidence. He yawned through most of the story; but when he heard that Roman Skarbek had been ordered to shoot his own brother, his narrow eyes flashed with rage.

"A Pole has no business to fight against us!" he cried.

"Colonel, there are several million Poles in Germany and Austria not through any fault of..."

He stamped his feet.

"Don't argue, priest! I won't have it. This Polish Count could have blown his brains out when they told him to fight us–and spy on us. I'll make an example of him. Eh, God, I will!"

"You gave me your word of honor to respect my secret," said the other, looking into the depths of his narrow eyes till he had to drop them. He thought for a moment.

"True," he growled. "I did give you my honorable word. But I will not

cancel General Rennenkampf's order. This young volunteer will take his men out to shoot his traitor brother. It will be a lesson to him, and to all Poles."

And all eloquence was without avail, though Father Constantine pleaded earnestly with him. But war had turned this already hard man into adamant.

"No and no, and yet once more no!" he said with a calm that was worse than his rage. He even grumbled at a request for a pass to show the two guards; but gave it at last.

As the priest left he met the Countess and she kept him some time. Then he had to go to the chapel. As he felt his way up the turret stairs, determined to stop with Joseph till the end, he heard steps behind. Somebody was coming up with an electric torch; he waited, rather than bruise his shins in the dark.

"Who's there?" His heart sank; it was Roman's voice.

"Go back!" he ordered. "I forbid you to come up here."

But he came up, put his arm around the old man and helped him up the stairs. "I know all," he said.

"All about what?"–this hoping against hope that Roman meant something else.

"About Joe, up in there."

"That narrow-eyed Muscovite told you. I suppose he scrupled not to break word to a priest."

The only thing left was to try and comfort these poor brothers. Whilst in the chapel, he had nursed hopes of saving Roman from the agony of seeing Joseph die. Now, all was lost; his brain was in a whirl and he felt, for the hundredth time since August, that old age is a terrible thing when you want to help the young and strong.

Roman went into the turret chamber first. He did not rush to his brother and weep; what he said was:

"You're writing to Her."

Joseph looked up at the familiar voice.

"Roman!" was all he said; but his haggard face flushed from ear to ear.

"Yes." He touched his Cossack's clothes. "I am on the other side." And it seemed to the priest that this impulsive and turbulent young man had put Poland's greatest sorrow into those few simple words–brother fighting against brother, flesh against flesh, not of free will, but because a wicked old cynic called Frederick and an ambitious German wanton who usurped the Russian throne divided Poland between them more than a century ago.

"On the other side," repeated Joseph bitterly. He, too, was suffering.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked, showing them a square of dirty white doth sewn on to the front of his tunic.

"No."

"The Prussian way of branding Polish conscripts. Easier to shoot us if we try to desert."

"Such is the way of Prussians," said Father Constantine. They stood there looking at one another as though they were three strangers at a loss for something to say. Father Constantine put the Sacred Vessels on the floor and waited. Joseph, he reflected, had all night in which to make his peace with God, Who understands these tribulations, and why they are laid upon us. As for himself, he felt very old and of small account by the side of these stalwart boys, each worth ten of a worn-out priest too infirm to fight, and fit only to watch the young and the stalwart die before their time. Joseph spoke first; his thoughts still ran upon Vanda.

"You'll be able to marry her now," he remarked hoarsely. "Make her happy."

"I'll do my best," said Roman.

At the time Father Constantine knew not what he meant, for years dull the mind as well as the eye. He looked so peaceful despite the overhanging sorrow, that he began to wonder if the boy thought the prize of winning Vanda was worth all this.

Joseph took up his sheet of paper and tried to dry the ink at the candle flame. The priest noticed there was a fresh wound on his wrist.

"Let me see your hand," he said.

"It doesn't matter–now." He smiled nervously. Then: "Do *they* know I'm here?"

"No," answered Roman. "They must never know."

"Never." Another pause: the candle scorched his raw wound, and he muttered something.

"How did you know?" he asked Roman.

"Never mind how." He went near his brother, much reproach in his voice. "Oh, why did you do it, Joe? What in the world induced you to put on this?" He tugged angrily at the Prussian uniform.

"Because there, in Germany, we were a herd ... and I little thought what this war was going to be." Then he turned to the priest, lowering his voice. "And I know, too, in the bottom of my heart, that I went with the herd because it seemed better to die fighting than to be shot for not going on. Oh, the misery of it all!"

"My child, God is merciful."

"I have explained what I could, as clearly as I can, here," he went on, more quietly. "To Vanda."

"But explain it now, to me," his brother insisted.

Joseph sighed. "It is too long and too late. See that she gets this without knowing I have been here." He swallowed a lump in his throat and went on: "I did what I thought best." He looked round the little room, and his voice broke.

"To spend my last night here, a prisoner, in Ian's house, so near her and yet so..." His voice refused to come.

Roman was pacing the floor in that impatient way he had. Suddenly he stopped, and said with decision:

"There's not a moment to lose!"

"I have the night before me," remarked Joseph, looking first at the Sacred Vessels, then at the priest "We must wait till midnight, in any case."

"I don't mean that," said Roman. "You must escape." He had lowered his voice: they talked in whispers now. Joseph's eyes were alight with sudden hope.

"Yes, but how?" asked Father Constantine.

"We change clothes," answered Roman, and he began to undress. "You and the Father leave the room together, Joe dressed in my things. In the dark the men won't know it isn't me. Go down to the chapel together." He handed his high Russian boots to Joseph, who was taking off his own, somewhat reluctantly.

"Well, but how about you?" he objected.

"Never mind me. Father Constantine will hide you in the chapel."

"I know of a place where nobody will think to look for him," said the priest.

"But what are you going to do?" asked Joseph, still at his first boot.

"Wait till the men outside have fallen asleep. Then I take off that Prussian uniform you've got on and sneak past them. I know every corner of this place, which they don't."

Joseph was not satisfied. "You'll be locked in," he objected. Roman pulled out some nippers.

"I've got these. The lock is old. So hurry up, or we'll have the men in, wondering why Father Constantine is still here. I wouldn't plan this if it wasn't safe."

Joseph obeyed.

"How long am I to keep him in the chapel?" asked the priest.

"Till the rest of the Russians leave. We're off at dawn to-morrow. Ian can keep him quiet in one of the cellars for a day or two till the spy affair blows over, then you must go and fight for us. Promise?"

"I promise," answered Joseph. Roman did not seem satisfied.

"Swear it," he insisted, holding up his fingers.

Joseph swore; then they embraced, in the Polish way.

"That's right," said Roman, smiling and happy again. "I thought we'd find some way out of this muddle." He glanced at Father Constantine. It took some time to persuade Joseph that Roman would get out all right. Indeed, the priest, too, had fears about it; guards, he said, sleep with their eyes open. But Roman was so enthusiastic and hopeful, so thoroughly master of the situation that he inspired the others with his optimism. Besides, the priest knew he was thinking

of to-morrow morning; and the power of the secret they shared overcame his objections.

They changed clothes at last, Joseph putting the Cossack's cap well over his eyes. Then they embraced again. Joseph began to talk of gratitude; but Roman cut him short.

"I'll see you soon, I hope. Meanwhile, marry Vanda and fight for us."

"I will. Oh, Roman, you're heaping coals of fire on my head."

"Fiddlesticks! Now, be off, and show a brazen face."

Roman had put on the Prussian clothes far quicker than Joseph had taken them off, and before the others left, threw himself on the straw mattress, his back to the door. The brothers were much the same height and build, and Roman had shaved his red beard before sitting down to supper with the Countess and Rennenkampf that night. His face was darker than Joseph's, though he had washed; but the light was so bad and the guards so indifferent and unsuspecting that Father Constantine felt almost easy in his mind when a sentry looked in as he let them out.

"He's got his passport," he remarked, nodding towards the mattress. "German swine."

He saluted Joseph, who strode downstairs, clanking his spurs and carrying himself as straight as you please. In one of the corridors they passed a cornet, who called out to him; but he strode on, muttering something between his teeth. Father Constantine noticed that the subaltern was going up to the turret. After his visit the sentries would probably doze. Roman knew what he was doing, anyway.

It was nearly three when, at last, the priest threw himself into a chair in the sacristy. He could not leave the chapel precincts while Joseph lay hiding there. Not that he hoped to be any good, supposing that the Russians took it into their heads to look there for their quarry; but he felt he would be in a fever of apprehension if he went to his rooms. With some trouble and many precautions he had managed to hide Joseph under the altar of a side chapel, dedicated to the Mother of God of Czenstochova. The altar was there temporarily, the Countess having ordered a marble one last time she was in Rome; the war had stopped its arrival, and only the other day she had said how sorry she was not to get it sooner. And now, it looked as if the wooden altar was to save Joseph's life. Its back was hollow, and there he hid.

The priest could not sleep, tired though he felt. His mind was full of trouble. Suddenly, he remembered that the narrow-eyed Muscovite knew the story of Joseph's arrest and would suspect him when he heard of the escape, would search the chapel. But then he comforted himself with the thought that even *he* would not order his men to pull out an altar. He was not a Prussian. After that, he

began to worry about Roman. How could he get past those guards? The more he thought about it the clearer it seemed that he had run his head into certain danger. Not only would he be caught, but all his dear ones would be dragged into the trouble; that Muscovite would punish every inmate of Ruvno in his rage. Such were his thoughts as night gradually left the sacristy.

At last he fell into a troubled doze. He was awakened by the sound of musket shots coming through the open window. With vague fears he hurried into the garden. A young subaltern was enjoying the last of the Countess' roses; all was quiet.

"Reminds me of Monte Carlo," he remarked.

"What were those shots?"

He turned his head towards a tall pine, where smoke, blue in the air, still lingered.

"Only a German." He plucked a large red rose, heavy with dew, saluted and walked off, whistling.

With shaking knees the old man staggered to the stretch of sward upon which Prince Mniszek killed Ian's father, years ago. Under the pine lay a huddled form. Somebody had thrown a blanket over it. He drew it aside and knelt before the body. The film of death had covered his eyes. His wounds were horrible. But it was Roman, dressed in the Prussian uniform, the one white patch of cloth stained with blood....

Had he been caught? Did he, when he sent Joseph down, know that this was the only way to save him? Or did the thought of Vanda's happiness urge his sacrifice? The priest remembered his anxiety that Joseph should promise to fight against Prussia, his insistence for a solemn oath. Did he think that, since one of them must die, better he, rather than the man Vanda loved? Who shall look into his heart, one of the bravest and truest that ever beat? Father Constantine puzzled his brains many times, but found no answer. And he could not ask anybody to help, because he alone knew that Roman Skarbek, and no Prussian spy, lay under the pine tree in the rose garden.

He never even found that subaltern, who must have gone off while he was weeping over Roman's remains. A couple of soldiers came up to take them away. He could not bear the thought of their burying him in a ditch, wanted him to lie amongst the trees and the other soldiers, where he had been the day before, laughing and joyous because he found Ruvno safe in the midst of the storm.

"Leave him to me. He was a Catholic," he pleaded. They looked at each other.

"We've orders to bury him."

"Then take him over there," he pointed to the home forest.

"Too far," said one. "We're off this minute."

As they dug a hasty grave for him he went for Holy Water, and gave him Christian burial. And much later, when he could control his face, he told the Countess that the German who had been shot in the Garden was a Catholic; so they put up one of the wooden Crosses such as you can see by the thousand in Poland to-day. And when there was nobody about he used to pray for his soul. And sometimes, in the very early morning, he would take the portable altar out there, and say a Mass for Roman Skarbek.

And because the burden of his secret was worse than his heart could bear, he sat up all night when the household thought him asleep and set it down in his diary.

VI

Ian, on waking that morning, found that all the Cossacks had left. He went in to breakfast, feeling a little hurt with his cousin, Roman. He might at least have shouted a farewell through the window.

"Has anybody seen Roman this morning?" he asked the rest of the family as they met for the morning meal.

"He came in last night for a moment, after supper," said the Countess. "But I was going to the wards and we did not talk. He said some officer had sent for him."

"He was going to shoot a spy at daybreak," said Minnie. Vanda was silent. She had not seen him at all, had kept away from the supper-table, on purpose to avoid him.

At that moment Father Constantine came in. His face was ashen gray and distorted with emotion.

"What's the matter?" they all asked.

"Nothing. That is..." He could not speak. Ian made him sit down and went to a sideboard for brandy, which he waved aside.

"Joseph Skarbek is here," he stammered.

"Roman, you mean?" suggested Ian.

He shook his head and said with sudden vigor:

"No–not Roman. He..." Then, with another effort, painful to see, he added: "Roman went away this morning."

They thought he was going to faint. Ian loosened his neckband, the Count-

ess dipped her napkin in water and dabbed his wrinkled face; Vanda made him drink something. Minnie stood near, watching and listening. He had enough people taking care of him; besides, it took all her time to follow what was said. They talked Polish; a habit of theirs whenever they got excited or related thrilling experiences, so that she had to concentrate all her energies upon listening to them. They were pained and puzzled over Father Constantine, speculating as to what had happened to upset him like this.

"He is overworked," was Vanda's verdict, "I'm sure he's not been to bed last night. Look how rumpled he is."

He lay back in the chair, his eyes closed, his thin hands, puckered with age and none too clean, closing and unclosing on the chair arms.

"Worn out," said Ian, whilst his mother watched her faithful chaplain with deep concern. "I'll take him into my room. It's quiet there." He proceeded to do this; but the patient suddenly sat upright and said peremptorily:

"Leave me alone!"

"But you must rest," explained the Countess, soothingly.

"Nonsense.... I was never better in my life." They exchanged glances; the poor old man was out of his mind; never, in all the years he had been at Ruvno, had he spoken to her like that. Before they had recovered from their astonishment he got up and walked across the room, tottering a little, but more sure of his step every minute. They watched him in silence and Ian, at least, stood spellbound. This little old man, with his creased alpaca soutane, muddy shoes and unshaven chin, dominated the room.

He reached the door, which was a long way off, just as one of the servants came in with coffee.

"Give me that! And go away!" he ordered, taking the tray from its astounded bearer.

"Do as the Father says," said Ian, hurrying to take the heavy tray.

"Be off with you, quick!" repeated Father Constantine. The man obeyed, filled with curiosity. He locked the door, and turned to Vanda, whispering angrily:

"I tell you, Joseph Skarbek is in the chapel."

"Yes, yes," she agreed soothingly. Her tone only irritated him the more. He stamped his foot.

"Not yes, yes–but give me something to eat for him. He's starving."

"But where is he?"

"In the chapel. Behind the altar of the Mother of God of Czestochova."

"Hiding?" She was white as a sheet

"Of course." He drew them in a circle, and went on, very low: "Listen. Yesterday, the Russians took him prisoner."

”And he escaped?” asked Vanda.

”Rennenkampf said he must be shot....”

”What for?” she faltered.

”Mother of God, how should I know? Don’t keep on interrupting.” He looked apprehensively at the door, motioned to them to move further away from it and the windows, and went on: now, he spoke French, not for Minnie’s benefit, but for secrecy.

”They were to shoot him this morning—-”

Minnie, still watchful, saw Ian put his arm round Vanda, who looked ready to faint; she felt a pang of resentment. How dare he, seeing Vanda was betrothed to Joseph! He said something encouraging to her, but Minnie could not make out what it was.

”Last night,” continued the priest, ”a soldier came for me to see a prisoner. He takes me up to the turret. Imagine my horror, Countess, when I saw it was Joseph.”

”Oh–but he’s safe?” sobbed Vanda.

”Yes. He’s safe.”

”But how?” asked Minnie.

”Whilst I was talking to him in the turret, in comes Roman.”

”Roman?” they echoed.

”Yes.” He eyed Vanda. ”Roman is the best man who ever lived. He–he helped Joseph escape.” He stopped, brushed away some tears with the back of his hand, and sighed.

”But where is Roman now?” asked the Countess anxiously.

”With his Master.”

”With the General?” Ian asked.

Father Constantine nodded, blew his nose with vigor, put his handkerchief away and went on more calmly:

”Roman planned it all. He changed clothes with Joseph, who passed the door with me. We reached the chapel without seeing anybody but a young subaltern who ... who saluted him. I put him behind the altar in the chapel of the Mother of God of Czestochova. Roman said he must stop there till the General and all his soldiers leave Ruvno. Then, Joseph must volunteer for our side. That is what Roman said.”

”They’ve all left!” said Vanda, breaking from Ian and going over to the sideboard, where she hastily piled food upon a plate, smiling and crying in turns and taking no further interest in what the priest said. The others were more interested in Roman.

”But how did Roman get out of the turret?” Ian asked. ”Where is he?”

”I told you. With the General.”

"You're sure?" insisted the Countess, anxiously.

"Quite. He picked the lock when the guards went to sleep." He turned to Ian. "You remember that lock, how weak it was?"

"But how did he get past the guards?" asked Ian, to whom Roman's non-arrival of the evening before was explained.

"I don't know. But he managed it. He is not a child." Father Constantine spoke peevishly.

"You've seen him since?" asked the Countess.

"Yes, Countess, I've seen him since."

"After he was free?"

"As free as air." He leaned against the paneled wall and put his hand to his head. "I am very tired ... had no sleep ... and no food.... I am getting old."

"You must come and rest now." Ian put his arm round the stooping shoulders. The old man made no further resistance. He was dead-beat.

"But you must help me give him this," said Vanda, holding up her plate of food. Her face was radiant. Joseph was safe, above all he would never fight with Prussia again.

"Let Father take a mouthful first," said her aunt reprovingly. "Can't you see his condition?"

Vanda's heart smote her; she blushed and took some food to the priest, who, however, could eat but little. All he needed was rest.

"The shock," he explained, seeing their anxious faces. "Joseph Skarbek ... up there..."

They would not let him go back to the chapel, but Ian and Vanda, with infinite precaution, took the food to Joseph. Meanwhile, Minnie went to see the turret chamber, which she knew only from the outside. The dark stairway was littered with rubbish left by the soldiers. The chamber door stood open, as if the guards had rushed out of it in vain pursuit of their prisoner. She went in.

There were some dirty plates, and a straw pallet. Her eyes searched the door and the blood rushed to her face. The lock was intact! She examined it. Far from being old and weak, it was quite strong; indeed, it had been put on when Rennenkampf sent Joseph up to await his death. Roman had not escaped that way: she was certain of it, the old priest had hidden the truth. She turned to the window, which was only a slit in the wall, protected by a grating of iron bars. They, too, were firm and strong in the stone work. She looked out and saw a sheer drop of eighty feet, into the moat below. There was nothing Roman could have held, even supposing he had accomplished the impossible and squeezed himself between those bars.

She thought it out rapidly. The others, including Ian, would be curious to see Joseph Skarbek's prison; he would probably come up here himself. As she

failed to see how Roman had escaped, since there was no other exit, not even a chimney, she supposed that they, too, would be as puzzled. The priest, she felt sure, knew exactly what had happened; but he was not going to tell. Why should she betray his secret?

She went down to Martin, the old butler, and borrowed some tools he kept in his pantry, then sneaked up again and took off the lock and bolt. The bolt was rusty enough and looked as old as the room itself; but it gave some trouble and she chipped her hands. No prisoner could have taken them off the door without waking the guards, because the bolt was on the outside. She only realized this when she had half finished, for her nerves were upset. Then she put the bolt on again and threw the lock on to the pallet.

On her way back she saw the Countess, Vanda and Ian on the large staircase. They said they were off to see how Roman had escaped, and would she go, too. The tools were under her white nursing apron, and she was in no mood to discuss Joseph's adventure, so she muttered an excuse and went to her room.

Why had she connived at keeping Father Constantine's secret? she asked herself. Did she want to spare all the family the pain of knowing that the door had been opened from the outside, or only Ian? What had Vanda to do with her impulsive action? During that morning, whilst working in the wards, she searched her heart and found the answer. She had been jealous of Vanda for some time past. She felt, without knowing why, that Ian's coldness to herself was connected in some way with Vanda's presence in the house. He had never been the same since that day when the Jew brought news of the Kalisz atrocities and she had refused to go home. Where was Vanda to blame? Ian apparently had no more to say to his cousin than to his visitor; and yet, she did blame the girl. The sooner she married her precious Joseph and went away, the better. Perhaps she would stop on at Ruvno, since Joseph, it appeared, was to fight; but she would be married, and that would make a difference.

Thus she explained to herself the lock-picking of the morning; told herself *she* would have refused to have anything more to do with Joseph under the circumstances. First, he fights for Prussia: then he risks his brother's life, gives his brother's life, to save his own skin. And now as Vanda did not know that Roman had given his life in exchange, offered it for her happiness, she would marry Joseph. And that is what Minnie wanted her to do, with as little delay as possible.

Ian, too, examined the door, and the lock that Roman, so he thought, had picked and put on the dirty pallet. His mother asked what he made of the business.

"Roman is worth a thousand Josephs," he answered hotly. "Think of the risk! If the soldiers had shot the bolt, he would have been lost."

"But he saved Joseph so that he might fight for the right side," put in Vanda.

Their eyes met. He had his own thoughts on the matter, and his face was stern. Instead of speaking, he went out of the room.

He felt irritable. Though work waited him below he made for the old priest's room; he wanted to hear how Roman had persuaded his brother to accept the exchange. His contempt for Joseph grew at every step. How was he to know the trick would succeed? Yes: Joseph had left his brother in a trap, from which he escaped by the skin of his teeth, because the guards were too lazy to shoot the bolt. And Roman had done it for Vanda's sake. He believed love meant sacrifice and lived up to his belief. How *could* Vanda care for Joseph? Ian was disappointed in her, thought she had a juster sense of values. How blind love made women!

Father Constantine was asleep, and he had no opportunity that day of talking about the adventure with him. And later on, even, Father Constantine was very reticent about the scene in the turret chamber. When questioned about it, he would shut his bright, bird-like eyes, fold his thin hands together and say, in a voice shaking with emotion:

"It was the most terrible evening of my life. Let us not talk of it."

"Roman will tell me," said Ian, loth to disturb the old chaplain any more. "He may be here any day."

But it was some time before any Cossacks stopped at Ruvno, and when the first contingent rested there for a few hours, they told Ian they knew nothing of Roman's regiment, but thought it was fighting in Galicia.

But Joseph's escape caused changes in the family, all the same.

VII

The Ruvno family had finished supper. There were no servants in the room. Father Constantine was in bed, worn out with the excitement of the night before; and Joseph was still lying low. Martin, the old butler, waited on him; none of the other servants knew he was in the house. All they heard was that a Cossack officer who wished to be quiet had been given the blue guest-room. He had a nasty wound in his hand; but Father Constantine, who was something of a surgeon, said he could treat it without calling in the Russian Red Cross doctor who looked after the wounded. So the four, the Countess, Ian, Vanda and Minnie,

were all alone in the room.

Ian had been unusually taciturn during the simple evening meal which replaced the elaborate dinners of peaceful days, and after several attempts to make him talk the others let him alone. Somebody had brought a batch of papers from Warsaw and he seemed to be absorbed in them. Minnie, whose intentions were good, though unfortunate, began the trouble by saying she supposed there would be a wedding soon.

Ian looked up at once. He had been listening all the time. Minnie scented trouble, because of a gleam in his eyes, and was sorry she had spoken. But it was too late now.

"Whose wedding?" he asked.

"Why, mine, of course," put in Vanda.

He thrust aside the paper and took a cigarette from a large box at his mother's elbow, set it alight and began to walk up and down the large room. He remained in shadow for several seconds; there was no electric light in Ruvno and they were obliged to economize in oil in these difficult times. He passed and repassed under the one lamp and they noticed that each time he emerged out of the shadows he looked graver, more determined to perform some unpleasant task. Vanda had grown as pale as when the priest told her Joseph was sentenced to death. Minnie, ever watchful, thought she had changed greatly of late; she used to think her commonplace and dull; but not now. She, too, followed Ian with her eyes.

At last he spoke. And there was all the authority of the head of the house in look, tone and manner.

"Vanda, you cannot marry him, now."

"Why?"

He stopped before her, the table between them, the light shining on his large, well-shaped head. He was calm, his voice low; yet great emotion lay beneath.

"Why did Rennenkampf sentence him to death?"

You could have heard a pin drop in that vast room. All knew the answer, but none had the courage to give it, least of all Vanda, white to the lips, shaking with nervous excitement.

"Think of it," said Ian, almost in a whisper. "And on Ruvno soil."

Quivering in every nerve, she sprang to her feet, her face transformed by passion, indignation, a desire to defend her absent lover.

"It is false!" she whispered hoarsely. "I swear it is false! He never came to spy! He came because they were near; he wanted to see me. His regiment was ordered to France. He could not bear to leave without seeing me, without explaining. He meant to wait by the lake till nightfall, then creep nearer. But

some Jews saw him and told a company of sappers, who caught him. How could he tell why he was there, how could he get us in ill report with Rennenkampf? Oh! it is so plain I wonder you haven't all guessed it long ago. And if you don't believe me go and ask him."

"I believe you believe that," he admitted. "But others won't."

She turned to her aunt, asking for championship. The Countess caressed her, but her hazel eyes were firm as Ian's.

"Joseph must clear himself," she said.

"But he has!"

"To you ... but not to those who know he went back to fight for Germany."

Vanda urged no more, but sat down again, her elbows on the white cloth, the picture of dejection. In England, grown-up sons and daughters do much as they please. But here, things were different. Even Minnie knew that Vanda would not marry against Ian's will, because he was the head of her family and the family has an overwhelming moral power in Poland. Each family, whether that of a prince or a peasant, is a little community in itself, with laws and traditions which no member can break without incurring the opposition and anger of the whole. This spirit of family discipline, which has largely disappeared in politically free countries, is, if anything, stronger amongst the Poles since they lost their political freedom, more than a century ago. The reason is simple. Each family is a little unit of social and political resistance, which for generations has been fighting for religion, language and national customs ... and in unity is strength.

Minnie sat quiet as a mouse. They had forgotten her. A servant came to clear the table, handed tea, and disappeared.

Ian sat down again, between Vanda and his mother. Minnie had moved to a shadowy end of the long table. None of them gave her a thought from the moment she mooted Vanda's marriage till the end of their discussion. She had started it; but there her part ended. They were all three under the big lamp, and every line, every change of expression showed clearly. She kept eyes and ears open.

Ian lighted another cigarette. He was nervous; drank some tea and began playing with his spoon, squeezing the slice of lemon left at the bottom of the cup.

As he glanced up at the clock there was a pained look in his face. Honor told Minnie she ought to leave the room. But curiosity held her. This love affair of another woman was partly hers as well.

"I want to see him before he goes to sleep," Vanda said. "Have you anything to say?"

He pulled himself together and began:

"When Joseph obeyed that call to go home I approved. I even warned Roman against the possible consequences of disobedience."

"Well?"

"That was before I knew what this war meant, before Kalisz, Liège, Louvain."

"Joseph loathes all those atrocities as much as any of us..." she broke in.

"Yes. That is a double reason why he ought never to have gone on wearing a Prussian uniform."

"The German soldiers don't know what really happens—-" she began, then stopped, knowing the argument would not hold. Joseph was no ignorant peasant.

"I understand his confusion of mind in the beginning," pursued Ian. "We all had it. But afterwards—-"

"He would have been shot," she cried. "It's all very well to talk like that when we're in Ruvno. But when your superior officer gives an order, and you disobey, what happens? We're not all heroes, ready to die for an idea in cold blood. Battle is different."

"But we must all try to be honest–with ourselves," he said, and with sincerity; for he found honesty hard that night.

Her bright eyes challenged him and she opened her lips to speak; but he silenced her with a gesture.

"He disapproved the Prussians. Yet he stopped with them."

"He has left them," she retorted.

"Yes. But before he can be honest with himself, or with the family, he must work out the promise he made when Roman helped him to escape."

"The Russians have not been any too good to us in the past," she objected.

"You know it is not a question of Russian, but of right. He can go to France. But I'll have nobody in my family who ends his fighting record in a Prussian uniform."

Vanda sprang up and faced him.

"You talk a lot about honesty to-night," she cried scornfully. "And now I'll begin. I would not say one word against this decision if I thought you were honest, too. I hated to think of Joseph with the Prussians as much as anybody. But that is not the honest reason why you won't let Father Constantine marry us to-morrow, here in Ruvno. *That* is only a pretext."

"Vanda!" protested the Countess.

"A pretext," she repeated firmly. "Look at him! Look how nervous and insincere he has been all the evening! Do you know why, Aunt Natalie? I will tell you. Because he is the dog in the manger."

"Vanda!" repeated her horrified aunt.

None of them had thought the girl capable of such words. For a moment she looked the incarnation of passion.

"Let him deny it!" she retorted.

He looked up, his face flushed; but he was less nervous than a few minutes earlier.

She turned to her aunt.

"You see," she said. "He says nothing. He can't deny it."

"I don't wish to," he said quietly.

Minnie knew she ought to have tiptoed from the room. But the scene held her. It was not the novelty of seeing Vanda in a rage, nor the novelty of hearing Ian's avowal of love. It was because she felt her own sentence lay in their hot words.

"I don't understand," said the Countess, much troubled. "Surely you can deny your lack of honesty?"

"Yes, I can deny that."

There was a pause. Then he went on: "Just now I asked myself if I was being entirely honest"–he looked at Vanda–"with you. All day I have been asking myself, I was afraid I could not be. But after searching myself I think that, whatever my feelings about you–you personally—-"

He stopped. There was no mistaking the nature of his feelings towards her. They were written on his face, shone from his eyes.

"I–I have been honest in this," he concluded.

"We are seldom honest with ourselves," she put in.

"I have tried to be. I believe I have succeeded. And Vanda, on my honor, I believe that, even if I–even had I never given you more than a cousinly thought since–since it was too late, I'd be against your marrying Joseph till he has redeemed his promise to fight on the right side."

She leaned towards him, forgetful even of her aunt now, full of thoughts for Joseph, of him alone.

"Do you know," she said in low, passionate tones, "that there were years, yes, long years, when I loved you, would have died for you; would have followed you barefooted to Siberia rather than be parted from you? And you took no more account of me than of this table. What was I? The little orphan cousin. A bit of furniture in your house. Nothing more."

"Vanda! How unjust!" cried his mother.

She took no notice; I don't think she heard.

"You talk about honesty," she went on. "Take it; bare, ugly truth that few people can tell one another with impunity. Whilst I was giving you every thought, you guessed my devotion, accepted it, put it on a mental shelf to leave or to take down and use, according to how life worked out for you...."

"Oh–what injustice!" said his mother again. This time she heard the reproach; all she said was:

"Let me speak, Auntie." Then, to him: "Yes, as things suited you ... you

looked on my devotion, my foolish, dumb devotion, as something to fall back upon, if, when the time came for you to marry, you found nobody you liked better. Oh–I knew you so well.... And through you, I know men. I have not watched your face all these years, day by day, meal by meal across this table, in vain. Here, in Ruvno, buried in the country, I have studied life, in your face, through your words, through the change which has come over you when you knew that both Joseph and Roman wanted me."

"But why bring—-" began his mother. Vanda silenced her.

"Because we are out for honesty." Then to him: "Why do you come to me now, when I have learned to forget you, to look at you with indifference, killed the love I had for you after many silent struggles? Why do you try to make Joseph so honest to himself when I want him more than anything else in the world? Why do you step in now?"

Her voice broke; she stopped. As for Ian, the scales had at length fallen from his eyes; he saw his past folly clearly enough; and it was too late. In her "now" lay much meaning.

"You're unjust. I'm not so mean as you think ... or so selfish," he said gently.

She wiped her eyes, damp with unshed tears, but said no more. It seemed that her passion had worn itself out in those burning words she flung at him a moment before. Once again she was the quiet, unobtrusive Vanda, who did many things for other people's comfort and did not always get appreciation.

He took up an illustrated paper, turned over its pages without seeing them, furtively glanced at his mother, who gave him a look of deep sympathy, then left the room.

He did not blame her for this outburst; bore her no bitterness. The indictment belonged to him and he admitted it. But in a way it soothed him to think that she had cared for him once. And it had taken him all this time, all the events of the past few weeks, to teach him what love meant, that passion he had almost dreaded, never cultivated, because he liked a quiet even life, free from emotion. When her hot words fell on his ears they opened up visions to which he had been blind so long. Yes; he cared no longer to deceive himself. He did love her; not as Roman loved women, but in his own way, shyly, hesitatingly, with affection of slow growth that had taken deep root. At last he was honest with himself, admitted the fullness of his folly. It maddened him to think that all the time, whilst he let things drift because he was too comfortable to plunge into the depths of emotion yet untasted; whilst he, in his blindness, let chances drift by, enjoying to the full that pleasant, uneventful life which had been swept away in war's hurricane forever, whilst he could have given her all the comforts and joys of his wealth; whilst he, ignorant of his own heart, not heartless as she said, but selfish, procrastinating, basked in the sunshine of peace and security–all that time her

proud bruised heart had fought against the love he held of no account but longed for now with an intensity which left him sore, wondering, almost indignant at his new capacity for passion.

Pacing his office, he remembered that he could not even give her the generous dowry he had planned a few weeks ago. For the moment he had forgotten his financial troubles. Hastily he opened the big safe which stood in the room, took out account books and deed boxes, made rough calculations. He could give her the paltry sum of twenty thousand roubles, unless the Prussians advanced more rapidly than he expected and seized the remainder of his invested wealth. It was a fifth of what he had planned for her when he took that rapid ride to Warsaw, with Roman at the wheel.

He put back his papers, locked the safe and sought the blue guest-room.

He found Joseph sitting by a round table on which a lamp burned. Martin had put away the Cossack uniform and given him one of Ian's dressing-gowns. His hand was bandaged; but except for that he bore no trace of having passed through the experience of war since he last used that room. Yet Ian's feelings towards him had greatly changed. Before, he deemed him rather a prig, but a successful man, a distant relative who would never give him any trouble but in whom he felt no particular interest; not one he would have chosen for friend; but a man he tolerated as a cousin, with whom he had played, quarreled, learnt, and taken punishment in the long years of childhood.

But now, he hated him; hated him for Vanda's sake, for Roman's, for his coming to Ruvno in Prussian uniform, for his letting Roman risk life to save him from a death which, after all, was the consequence of his own conduct. But he determined to master his feelings and get over the meeting without an open quarrel.

Joseph welcomed him with unusual warmth, and this, too, he resented, as he resented his handsome nose and white, even teeth.

"I was hoping you would come," he said. "Tell me all that's happened since this awful war started."

"I won't sit. I've work downstairs."

Joseph gave him a keen look; the tone was ominous.

"You want to know what I was doing on Ruvno soil yesterday."

"Vanda told me your explanation."

"Explanation! It was the truth."

Ian's gray eyes were bright with hostility as he said:

"She has just told me you want to get married at once. I don't approve."

"Indeed!" this sarcastically. "Why?"

Ian paused for a moment. It was getting harder and harder for him to say what he wanted without saying too much, without betraying himself. He took

up the open book that lay on the table, glanced at its title, laid it down again. Joseph made no attempt to help him out. The air was full of tension. The least unguarded word would start a quarrel. And neither of them wanted that.

"For one reason," he began at length, "I don't like her to leave home without a rag to her back." He remembered the sables and fine linen he had seen at Warsaw for her, and Joseph wondered why he frowned.

"The date was fixed for the end of this month," the bridegroom reminded him.

"I know. If not for the war, mother would have had the things ready for her. But you know what sort of life we've been leading since you were here last."

Joseph nodded. He noticed for the first time that his cousin had aged in those few weeks; there were lines on his face and gray hairs round the temples that ought not to have been there.

"And then there's her dowry," he went on. "Mother talked it over with you, before."

"She said something about it. I said I wanted nothing. She gave me to understand that you insisted."

"I did. I had planned for sixty thousand roubles ... *then*. I haven't got it, now."

He took up a paper-knife, inspected it, balanced it on the palm of his hand, put it down again, and sought his words. It had been so easy and so comforting to talk to Roman last night, to tell details of his losses, discuss possibilities, hopes and fears for the future. And to Roman's brother he could scarcely open his lips for bare business. Not only did his animosity grow with every thought; but all the while he was cursing his folly, and Vanda's words of an hour ago, her: "Why do you step in *now*?" rang in his ears. He was burning to mar this marriage, had one pretext, at least, on his side. Yet, he must be fair, honest with himself and with them. Joseph noticed his embarrassment and misinterpreted it. He thought: "He was always a bit close-fisted, now he's mad with the grief of losing his forest and crops." Joseph, too, had his troubles. Last night, when death had been near, he promised to fight against Prussia with a light heart. He did not regret it. He was prepared to do his duty, to atone for blind obedience to the Kaiser's call of two months back. He had been miserable ever since the scales fell from his eyes, showing him the real issues of the war. But this step meant beggary. Everything he possessed was invested within the limits of the German Empire. Prussia would very soon hear of him, would set a price upon his head, seize his estates and his money. After the war, he would perhaps get them back. That depended on how things went, on which side won. During the evening, thinking over his position, he remembered his aunt's talk of Vanda's dowry with relief. At the time, he had pooh-poohed the idea of taking anything from Ruvno. It had pleased his vanity

to marry a portionless maid and give her all. But things were different now. He had counted on Vanda having enough to live upon until the war ended. He knew broadly what Ruvno was worth in peace time, and Ian's news shocked him.

"My dear Ian, I'd no idea you'd suffered so heavily. From the little I saw of Ruvno yesterday things looked pretty bad, especially the forests. But I comforted myself that you could fall back on your investments," he said warmly.

"The Vulcan Sugar Refinery, where I was heavily involved, went the first week of the war," Ian explained stiffly. He wanted none of this man's sympathy. "It was in the Kalisz Province, and you know what happened there. I've a certain amount in a hardware factory in Warsaw, now making field kitchens for the Russian Government. It's paying fifteen per cent. I can't sell out or make over all that stock, much as I'd like to for Vanda's sake. There's Mother to think of, if we have to bolt, and food to buy if we don't. I've a lot of starving peasants on my hands."

"Of course, of course," Joseph rejoined, "I shouldn't think of letting you do any such thing."

"I can manage fifteen thousand roubles. It would have seemed nothing, for Vanda, two months back. It means two thousand, seven hundred and fifty roubles a year. But it would keep the wolf from the door if–if anything happened to either of us. But if the Prussians get to Warsaw, that goes, too."

"Sell out in time."

"I'd lose half the capital–and where to invest the remainder? The rouble is dropping, foreign investments are out of the question."

Joseph was silent. Ian went on:

"But nowadays we've got to take chances. And Vanda will never want for what I–I mean Mother and I can share with her. But there's the other reason against your marriage, now."

"What's that?" His handsome face grew cold again. Ian did not answer at once; the old struggle between honesty and hatred was going on within his heart. He decided to let his foe decide.

"Put yourself in my place," he began huskily. "You come here, a prisoner, in a German uniform. You're all but shot as a spy. Let's not go into the whys and wherefores. But would you, in my place, let Vanda marry Roman, if the things happened that have happened to you, till he had redeemed his promise to fight on the right side?"

Joseph got up and faced his cousin.

"You're the head of the family, I'll not go against your decision," he said quietly.

"I don't want to decide."

"But why?"

"I'd rather not say."

Joseph gave a little laugh. "We may as well be frank with each other and have it out."

Ian made a gesture of dissent.

"Frankness is brutal," he said hastily. "It leaves rancor ... and I want to be fair."

"I suppose you despise me for letting Roman take my place, last night," said Joseph bitterly.

Ian was silent. The other watched his face, but could read little there; his own had flushed.

"It's easy to talk here." He glanced round the comfortable room. "But it was infernally hard to die, like that, and so easy for Roman to get past. He had brought tools with him."

"Yes," said Ian. "He unpicked the lock.... But there was..."

"There was what?"

"Oh, nothing." A sudden wave of passion was coming over him. He could trust himself no longer. He felt that, unless he escaped from the room he would hurl all the bitterness of his soul against Joseph, expose his deep wound to that cold gaze. He made for the door.

"Stop!" said the other peremptorily. He looked back, his hand on the door.

"Sleep on it," he muttered and would have passed out, but Joseph was beside him, his sound hand grasping his shoulder.

"I have made up my mind."

"Ah–and what—-?"

"You're right. After the war–if I'm alive."

"No need for that. In six months."

"Then in six months we'll get married. I'll tell Vanda." He put out his hand. Ian wrung it and left the room without another word.

VIII

Ian had no morbid intention of brooding over his troubles, sentimental or material. He was going to fight the one as he was already fighting the other, as he struggled against the starvation and disease which threatened the neighborhood, or against the difficulties of plowing and sowing within range of German guns.

He went into his mother's dressing-room that night with the firm intention of forgetting the evening's events as soon as possible, and her greeting helped him.

"What do you think?" she said. "Vanda wants to go to Warsaw and nurse, instead of stopping with us."

He looked at her with tired eyes.

"If she wants to, let her. I expect she's right."

Then he told her the gist of his talk with Joseph. She listened with disapproval. She would never forgive Joseph's successful wooing.

"I think he ought to wait till after the war," was her verdict. "What is the use of their marrying when he has nowhere to live and nothing to live on? Let us hope they will both think better of it once they settle down again."

And there the matter ended, so far as talk went. She had great hopes that her boy would "take to" Minnie. England would be a very good port in the ever growing storm for him. Of herself she did not think at all. What was left for her if Ruvno went? She busied herself about getting Vanda off, wrote to friends in Warsaw who found a vacancy for her in one of the hospitals which Polish women had started for the Russian wounded. She would be at least as safe there as in Ruvno and Ian would be all the better when she was away. Her own dreams had once been bent on a match between them. But things had changed since then and she wanted Ian to forget that which he could not win.

So she hastened on the day when the girl was to leave the house for work in Warsaw. Ian must drive her to the station because he had nobody left whom he could trust with one of the young, half-broken-in horses that alone remained of his famous stables. One afternoon in November the *bryczka* stood ready before the front door. It was one he used to use for going round the estate, simple and light, the body of basket-work plaited close and flat, and varnished over. The shafts were longer than one sees in western Europe where roads are better than east of the Vistula; but it went safely over ruts and holes which a closer-harnessed cart would not have taken at all. It was the only vehicle he had left except a heavy closed carriage which needed at least four horses to pull; stables and coach-house had been emptied of their best by several relays of requisitioning commissions.

Vanda, a little pale, slim even in her fur coat, said good-bye to the rest of the family at the front door. The Countess hugged her in silence, not trusting her voice. Who knew what might happen before they met again! Father Constantine gave her his blessing, after much advice about the evils and pitfalls of Warsaw, though his patroness reminded him that she was going to live with an old friend and would be quite safe. Minnie kissed her and wished her good luck, half sorry, half relieved to see her rival leave the field. Joseph was upstairs. They all agreed he had better not be seen by the servants. When his hand was well enough to

hold a rein he would ride to Sohaczev at night and take steps to join the Russian army.

Ian helped her to the high seat in front. Martin put her baggage into the space at the back. Off they went, down the avenue and out into the road, hardened with a sharp frost which had broken up the warm autumn weather.

It would have been hard for them to talk had they felt in the mood for it. The young horse shied a good deal and demanded all Ian's attention. He was glad of it. He Had no wish for commonplaces and could not say what was in his heart; so they went on in silence, bumping a good deal over the road, never too good, now cut up with war traffic, Vanda clinging to her seat to save herself from being pitched out when the horse grew more restive than usual, or rattled over a particularly bad stretch of road.

Their way lay through the country which war had so far spared. The heaviest losses lay to the north-west, where the Prussians were trying to break through on their way to Warsaw. A good many trenches had been made here, too, ready for the Russian troops to fall back upon; but there was not that stamp of utter desolation which already lay on the land nearer Plock. They passed very few troops or supplies; the day had been fine and transport correspondingly risky. Business on the road began at night. He had an odd fancy that they were going for one of those jaunts he and she had taken many a time before in the same little cart, when he wanted to try a young horse; that the space behind their seat carried no baggage but a sporting gun and game bag, and she wore no nurse's apron under her coat. It seemed, as she sat by him, sometimes to touch him as the cart jolted her, that recent barriers had never been, that there was neither Joseph, nor war nor ruin, that only the old free comradeship was there, mellowed into love. And he felt that they were boy and girl again, he home from school, she proud and glad to be with him, that they were driving on forever, into eternity, into the steel-blue horizon which stretched ahead of him on the straight, open road, without care or strife, always to be together, forgetful of the world, sufficient to each other, wanting nothing, asking nothing, blended into one mind and one heart, clear and limpid as the afternoon air of the northern autumn.

Never had those versts to the bare wooden station seemed so short. As they passed the slatternly town, then the long, poplar-lined avenue, he wondered of what she was thinking, if she regretted the past, would be content to put back the years and live without Joseph, only with him. But he was far to shy to share his fancy. What was the good? He did not even trust himself to search her face, lest he find there tears for his hated rival, whom she might never see again.

As he pulled up and helped her out, giving the reins to a ragged Jew who replaced the sturdy ostler of other days, he was relieved to see the Canon, who lived in the town. The good man was full of complaints, and looked to the two

young people for sympathy, if not redress. Rennenkampf's men had looted his poultry yard, he said, stealing half a dozen very fine capons as well.

"They stole them for *him*, Count," he whispered, as they made their way through a crowd of soldiers to the waiting-room, two Jews following with the luggage. "They denied it till I threatened to excommunicate them all, including my housekeeper, who ought to have looked after the fowls better but is no good when she sees a soldier around. I excommunicated the General, too."

"What did he say?" asked Vanda.

"Well, Countess, I'm ashamed to say he roared with laughter," returned the indignant ecclesiastic. "But my housekeeper was so frightened that she spoilt the dinner, which was one good thing, for Rennenkampf had to eat it. I'm going up to Warsaw and I'll complain about it. I sha'n't have a thing left if the men go on like this. But you, Count, can help me up there. You know your way about."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not going," he said. "My cousin is. I've come to see her off."

The Canon then asked Vanda a dozen questions about her plans and kept them both busy answering him till the tickets were bought and Ian had found places in the crowded train for them, glad to give her into the priest's care, for he noticed many admiring glances shot at her by a varied collection of Russian officers in the waiting-room.

For one moment they were alone. The Canon found a friend and began to tell him about the capons; the little platform, shadowy even in peace time, with its scanty lamps, was quite dark now except for feeble spots of light that came from the railway carriages, from those candles stuck into lanterns which the railway people thought good enough to travel by. Ian took courage, and said as he kissed her hand:

"Ruvno is your home. If you don't like Warsaw come back at once."

"Oh, Ianek," she faltered. "Forgive me, for the other night. I was mad.... I didn't know what I was saying."

"There's nothing to forgive," he stammered. Then, impulse flung restraint to the winds; he caught her in his arms, kissed her face, hair, lips, clasped her to him with all his strength, in a delirium of love, longing and remorse. He knew not what words poured forth from the bottom of his soul, nor how long he held her thus: never remembered how she got into the train, how he said good-bye to the Canon and got back to his *bryczka*. He only knew that it was dark as his horse sped homewards, without a glance at things that had made him restive on the way out; that he found calm and strength in the familiar ebon sky, glimmering with silver stars, put this new-born madness from him, checked each recurrent thought of her, fixed his mind savagely on refugees, potatoes, corn and fuel, till the white heat of his passion had cooled.

Joseph went away a few days later; thus the last link was snapped, he thought. And they heard no more of him for a long time, except that he finally managed to get a commission in a Cossack regiment, which went to the Carpathians. Vanda wrote to the Countess and the priest, content with messages for Ian; and he did the same in return. She was nursing in the Cadets' College, turned into a military hospital, and said she liked the work. But her aunt detected homesickness in her letters.

When he let a thought dwell on her at all, Ian felt thankful she was not in Ruvno. For in the middle of November they began to live in the cellars. They were in the danger zone for a fortnight. The Prussians took Kosczielna, a few versts off, so that their shells as well as the Russians' sometimes burst near the house. Ruvno became an inferno of din and the inmates often wondered that it did not crumble about their heads. In their underground retreat they had a certain amount of coal and coke, so that their quarters though dampish, were not so bad as they might have been. A neighboring village fared worse than they did; not a cottage remained. The villagers dug themselves into the earth and lived like rabbits, elected an elder, whom they obeyed, and who ruled the little community as some of his ancestors must have ruled over as primitive a settlement many hundreds of years before. No sooner had petty officials, in the pay of the Russian government, fled before the roar of German guns than they organized their village life underground in a thoroughly sensible way. Having eaten up the little food which was left after the Prussians looted them in passing, they subsisted chiefly on roots and the scanty game yet to be had, and the sparrows and crows. Ian sent them rations every week, but could not be too liberal because he had his own villages to think of. Their worst plight was that they could hope for neither summer wheat nor potatoes of their own; they had no sooner finished the winter sowings than the Russian soldiers came and dug trenches through their land. They had no seed left, and when Ian gave them some, the rain washed most of it away. So those at Ruvno felt they were not so desperately unlucky after all.

Yet they had their troubles. One night the two armies who have made Poland their battlefield, seemed to have gone mad. For twelve hours there was a ceaseless uproar of heavy artillery, and the earth beneath them shook as if troubled by an endless earthquake. They gathered in one end of the cellars, where Father Constantine had fitted up a rough chapel, and prayed together for their own salvation and the Russians' victory. Towards morning, when they were chanting a hymn, such a thunderous noise broke over their heads that what had gone before seemed like some childish pastime. The earth rocked as if to swallow them in her entrails. They stopped singing, and waited for death. A woman shrieked, but none could hear her; only the lines of her open mouth and the horror on her face told them what she was doing. Szmul, the Jewish factor, his lank hair

disheveled, his arms spread out with distended hands and fingers, rushed in and threw himself on to the ground, rolling in terror and shrieking continually. They had but one lamp for economy's sake, so that their little chapel, like those the early Christians used in Rome, was full of shadows. The Countess and Ian, after one horrified, questioning gaze at the Cross on the little altar, returned to their prayers, like the stout hearts and good Christians they were. She told her beads. Minnie, who had been standing at the back, ran towards Father Constantine with moving lips, but who could hear words when pandemonium was let loose? The peasants hugged their weeping children the closer and prayed for mercy. The priest, for one, felt sure his last hour was come, that God had summoned them as He had summoned so many thousands during the past few months. And so he said the prayers for the passing of souls, holding up the Cross, that all might see this symbol of eternal life.

They did not know how long they stood thus because people lose count of time when on the brink of eternity. But gradually the earth ceased to quiver, the tempest of bursting shells died down to an occasional boom. And they knew that the Almighty had seen fit to spare them through another night. Ian was the first to speak.

"They have brought down the house," he said to his mother. She nodded, but said nothing.

"Oh, woe unto Israel! Woe is me," wailed Szmul, squatting on his hams and moaning as the hired mourners at a Jewish funeral. Father Constantine told him to control himself or leave the chapel; and the calmer ones managed to comfort the others. Many peasants who had not cellars large enough for shelter were living down there with them. Szmul, whose hovel had no cellar at all, brought his numerous family. On the whole, they behaved splendidly during this night of anxiety and fear, when it seemed as if every stone in Ruvno had been brought about their ears.

The bombardment went on for hours; there was nothing to do but wait till it died down; only then could they go up and see what had happened. In days of ordinary activity the shells fell heaviest between seven at night and eight in the morning; then came a quiet hour when they managed to get some air, clean the cellars and examine damage done to house and village during the night. Between nine and ten, the "orchestra," as they called it, began again and went on till noon, when both Prussians and Russians paused for a meal. If the household was careful to dodge chance shells they had another two hours of liberty; if the Russians meant to begin before their regular time they let them know by a signal, to which Ian held the secret. The Russians' dinner-hour was Ruvno's busy time. Those peasants who had nothing left to eat came for rations; Ian had every detail of the daily round in clock-work order. The management of a large property like Ruvno,

with its twenty farms and sixty square versts of forest land, was good training for him. Each man and woman living in the cellars had an appointed task, and Ian, the Countess, Minnie and Father Constantine saw that it was done. Their great trouble was to keep the cellar refuge in a moderately sanitary condition, because the peasants, none too clean in their houses, had no idea of the danger they ran from infectious diseases. Here, Minnie was invaluable. They escaped fevers; one child died of bronchitis, which was very bad when they took her to the cellar, her parents' cottage and shop having been razed to the ground by a shell. Things were in a worse state down in the village, where Father Constantine and the two ladies had daily fights with filth and ignorance whilst the heavy guns were resting. They could not make the peasants see that they were packed so much closer together, and subject to greater privations, they had to be far more careful than in better days. By one o'clock the rooms and park became dangerous, though they could dodge the shells between the house and the village till dusk, if they remembered the dead angles. But night fell early, and the rule was for all to answer roll-call in the passage between the two main cellars at half-past two. Ian called the names unless busy outside, or in the house; and then the old priest replaced him.

After that the weariness began. Though the family did what they could to keep the fifty refugees–peasants, children and Jews–amused, time hung heavy on their hands. They took down all the furniture they could, and kept their feet warm with carpets. But they used straw for the peasants and Jews because they could burn it when dirty. Father Constantine always said Szmul and his family were the filthiest people he ever saw; it was a trial to have them; but they put up with it, and had to own that the Jew, with his wretched Polish and his funny stories, kept the others amused.

Ian could not give them work that needed a good light, because he had to be careful with oil and sit in semi-darkness most of the evening. But he and the Countess read to them and told them stories; they also sang hymns and Polish patriotic songs, of which they never tired. One or two, who escaped from the massacres at Kalisz, told their experiences, and the villagers never tired of listening to that, either. Like children, they loved to hear a story repeated over and over again.

Father Constantine managed to write up his diary, though candles were so precious. As they always kept one small lamp in the chapel he wrote there. It was colder than near the stove, but he had both his fur coats on, besides a pair of felt boots in which he used to hunt when younger. When his fingers got numbed he blew on them and rubbed them till the blood circulated. Many of the people went there to say their prayers and he would do what he could for them before they left again.

When the Russians and Prussians stopped for breakfast after that dreadful night they all spent in the chapel, Ian called up as many men as there were picks and shovels, took a pick himself and led the way up to the house. He demurred about Father Constantine's going; but he soon settled that. During the night they had decided that they must dig a way into the air through the ruins of the house.

They left the Countess in great anxiety about Ruvno, which had grown gray and mellow in sheltering brave men and beautiful women; and Father Constantine, who was not born there, loved it so dearly that to lose it meant to lose heart and courage. He felt that, going up the steps. And the peasants who followed Ian up were heavy-hearted, too; he and his forebears had always been good masters, generous in the days of serfdom, fair and square with the soccage, and living on their land ten months a year, unless they went to fight for their country.

They reached the stone entry which led from pantry to cellar and looked round. A wintry sun came through a hole in one wall, but the others were unhurt. With a shout of joy Ian threw down his pick and bolted over the debris, through the hole, which had swallowed up the door as well. Father Constantine followed as fast as his joints allowed, helped by Baranski, the village carpenter. They were both beyond the climbing age; so, by the time they reached the courtyard, the others had disappeared. So far, Ruvno looked as though it stood; but they noticed several new holes.

"Where's the tower gone?" cried Ian, pointing westwards. True enough, the tower had vanished; from where they stood it looked clean cut off, but on going nearer they saw that the front floor and part of the stairway remained, a dejected ruin. The falling masonry had struck the west wing. The cellar chapel was right underneath, which accounted for the fearful noise they heard in the night.

"The tower can be rebuilt–but the west wing is done for," he said ruefully.

When Father Constantine saw the tears gather in those clear eyes his own grew dim. The bombardment had destroyed the oldest part of the house, built when the first lord of Ruvno came home from the Crusades; it, and the moat, were all that the centuries had left of the original building. The rest was added on at various times. But the west wing was Ruvno's pride. Weakened by age, it could not stand the weight of the falling tower, and now lay in hopeless ruins. It housed many relics, too heavy to remove to Warsaw; and they had perished with it.

Everybody had come up from below, some vainly trying to rescue a few of the relics from the ruins, when Szmul rushed up in great excitement. He had quite recovered from last night's experience, and boasted to all who would listen that he had not turned a hair, but slept all night.

"The Grand Duke is coming–make way for the Grand Duke," and he took

off his cap, so as to be all ready for the important visitor.

The others looked up. A motor car was coming up the drive. It was easy to recognize the tall, spare figure, which towered over the other officers. The Countess dried her eyes and walked towards the entry. Ian left the pile of rubbish; Minnie followed him. Father Constantine stood a little apart; it did not amuse him to talk to important people; he preferred to watch, and listen.

"Bon jour, Comtesse," the Grand Duke said, and kissed her hand. Then he shook hands with Ian, saluted Minnie, and smiled at the priest. "I have good news for you at last. We have retaken Kosczielna after a heavy bombardment and a bayonet attack. The Germans have fallen back on Kutno."

Kosczielna practically belonged to the Countess, the little town being part of her dowry and, though her husband did his best to give it away to the Jews, she managed to save it. She looked at her ruined west wing and sighed.

"I would rather have lost the town," she remarked.

"I can believe you," he agreed. "The town is full of Jews–and that was the most beautiful part of your house. Never mind, Countess, we will drive them over the frontier one of these days and you can build up again."

"Is the fight over?" asked Minnie.

"Yes. In any case it has gone over there." He pointed westwards. "Ruvno is safe now."

"There," she said triumphantly, looking at the Countess. "What did I tell you?"

"I must be off," said the Grand Duke. "I thought you would like to know you can come above ground once more." He turned to the little group of peasants who had come up. "And you, my children, can go back to the village again." Then, to Ian, in French: "I will let you know when there is fresh danger." And he went off as suddenly as he came.

The news cheered them all greatly. For Father Constantine, there was a little cloud on the horizon; he meant to talk it over with the Countess and hear what she could advise. So, when they had settled in the rooms that were still without holes, he sought her out. He knew they would be able to talk undisturbed. Ian was looking after some men he had told off to fill up the gaps in an outer wall; and Minnie was looking after Ian.

"Countess," he began, "don't you think it would be safer if that English Miss went away?"

Though this was his first reference to the pursuit of Ian, she knew what he meant.

"Yes; but she won't go."

"There is an American Relief man about," he said. "He is sure to hear about the distress in the Vola, and he can't reach that without passing here. Naturally,

seeing the damage done to the house, he would call."

Her hazel eyes, still beautiful in shade and expression, twinkled merrily.

"But we don't want relief yet," she said.

"True, but when he sees the damage done and hears that there is an English girl living here he will be willing to take her to Warsaw ... or to England. I think I would not mention Warsaw to him. He probably has never heard of it. So he can take her further off."

"Minnie won't listen ... she is brave."

"Brave! She stops here for Ian."

She was silent for a moment. Father Constantine knew she had fallen under the girl's charm. He admitted the charm; but did not want a foreigner to rule in Ruvno.

"She is a good girl ... and her people are of an old family. Her mother..."

"She is a heretic," he said firmly. "Ruvno has never had such a thing."

"She might consent to enter the True Church." The Countess was an incurable optimist.

"And a foreigner."

She laughed. "Why, Father, Minnie would love the sort of life we live in times of peace ... she would not always be wanting to gad about to Paris and Monte Carlo, like so many young women."

"Do you mean to say that you will encourage her?" he asked in horror. "How about the little Princess whose father would be only too—-"

"I don't mean to say anything, or encourage anybody," she replied. "But I can't turn Minnie out of doors now that the Grand Duke says Ruvno is safe."

"The ruined tower looked such a good pretext," he said ruefully.

"And it failed."

"I would not consent to Ian's marrying a heretic," she went on. "Besides, he would not want to."

"He would not. I know him better than that..." The Poles have suffered so much for their faith that they put it side by side with their country. With them to say a man is Catholic means that he is neither Russian nor Jew, but a Pole.

"I don't see that Ian is very keen about her anyway," she said after a pause.

"In the cellar—-"

"We have done with the cellar for the moment. It is no good meeting trouble half way. Cellar or no cellar, I should only be drawing his attention to her if I warned him. Men are blind till you open their eyes. And then they are mules."

Father Constantine knew her tone; it was final. So he took his leave, and ordered all the Jews in the village to keep their ears open for news of the American

Relief man and report when he came to the neighborhood.

IX

It was early in December. For several days Ruvno had seen neither soldiers nor officers and received news of no kind. This had happened before. Szmul and other Jews in the village circulated the little gossip there was. After the Russians retook Kosczielna Szmul went back to his hovel, whence he had fled when the shells were whistling around, to find food and shelter for himself and his brood under Ian's roof. Then, being frightened to death, he was loud in expression of gratitude, vowing by all the vows Jews make, swearing by his progeny to the fifth and sixth generation that he would never forget how the Count had given hospitality to a poor Jewish factor. If you know much about Hebraic flowers of speech you can imagine what he said; if not, you miss nothing. Having settled himself in the village again, he picked up the gossip of both armies encamped in the neighborhood, for a Jew will get anywhere and talk to everybody, whether Teuton or Slav, man or maid. He knew that the Prussians were within a few versts of Ruvno before Ian or the Countess suspected they had crossed the river in one place, thereby cutting Ruvno off from the Russian lines and putting it at the mercy of the barbarians.

On this particular afternoon, after the *Ave Maria*, Father Constantine was locking up the chapel when Szmul hurried up. The priest knew he had tidings by the way he flapped his skinny arms. As usual he smelt horribly of herrings and garlic, and poked his dark thin face against the old man's.

"What is it?" asked Father Constantine, backing away.

"The Prussians," he answered, grinning from ear to ear, showing four yellow teeth which were all that the village barber had saved, for he suffered much from toothache.

"Coming here?"

"Yes–on this side of the river. They have crossed and fought their way through. Oh, such fine horses and such wonderful shining helmets! Each of their chargers cost a thousand roubles at least, some even..."

"Nonsense. The army pays—-"

"The Russian army pays miserably," retorted Szmul with scorn. "The Kaiser's with their wonderful—-"

"Hold your tongue! Now you think they are coming you pander to them and lick the dust off their boots," cried the priest, angry, not only because he knew that the Russian cavalry had then the best horses in the world, but because this news of the Prussians being over the river made him fear for the immediate future. Szmul giggled.

"Think! I *know* they're coming. Listen!"

Father Constantine heard the tramp of horses and a squadron of cavalry swept round the bend in the avenue. They were Prussians right enough. Night was coming on apace, but the day had been fine and frosty; he could see the spikes of their helmets and the hard, red faces of the foremost men.

His heart sank; there were more than twenty of them. For weeks Ruvno had heard false alarms. Once they were so near that Ian could see their helmets through his field-glasses. But the Grand Duke beat them back every time and the household had grown to trust that tall, gray-haired Romanov to spare them a visit from their enemies.

"Who's the owner of this place?" shouted their young officer, pulling up in front of the priest. His face was arrogant and coarse, with choleric eyes.

"I don't know."

He turned to Szmul, who was sweeping the ground with his greasy fur cap, anxious to make a good impression.

"Jew! Find the owner and bring him here!"

"At once, *Herr General*! At once!" He ran off to the house as fast as his spindle legs would carry him. Whilst he was gone the subaltern hurled questions at the priest, in German. How big was Ruvno? How many inmates? Their sex? Ages? He was answered laconically and in Polish. Once or twice the Prussian looked ready to lay his whip about the bent shoulders, but refrained. Szmul was a long time gone. When he came back, he had invented a new title for the German cub.

"Excellency. The Count is in the palace. He begs your Excellency to do him the honor and step inside."

It took him a long time to say this for he was out of breath with haste and excitement. Afterwards, Father Constantine asked Ian what message he had sent; and it was: "If a *boche* wants me he can come and find me." As you see, there was a difference; but Szmul did not stick at exaggerations when he wanted to please a powerful man.

The Prussian grumbled something about wasting time and all Poles being servants created to wait upon Teuton pleasure. But he gave a curt order to his troopers and made for the house, Szmul running by his stirrup. Judging by the way he cringed, Father Constantine sadly assessed the Prussian force around Ruvno at thirty thousand men.

The old man followed them, not that he could help Ian, but because he had a fond notion that when his dear ones were in danger they would suffer less if he kept near them. He tried to check this idea, but in vain.

Arrived at the large entry, the subaltern dismounted, clanked into the hall and looked round with the air of expecting to see Ruvno's master. But there was only Martin, the faithful butler who had nursed Ian on his knee. He led the way to his master's office. Half way there, he noticed Szmul.

"You're not wanted," he said.

"I–your old friend—-"

The Teuton understood Polish right enough, for he wheeled round with:

"This man comes with me."

Szmul giggled in triumph, and Father Constantine grew suspicious. These two had met before.

They trooped into the office which stood at the end of a passage, connecting it with the back of the house in such a way that people could go in and out without passing the hall or the living-rooms. Never in his life had Szmul entered from the large hall; but his elation was not due to that. Four troopers escorted their officer and mounted guard behind him, stiff and pompous as at a review.

Ian stood in the middle of the room, a large place, lined with shelves and cupboards where accounts and reports were kept. He looked very like his mother, the priest thought, well bred, dignified, king of himself. The four troopers clinked their heels and went through the contortions common to saluting Prussians; even the surly subaltern put hand to helmet. Szmul hugged the shadow of the door. Father Constantine went beside his old pupil, that fond notion of his uppermost.

Ian returned the visitor's greeting with a bow; then he saw Szmul. "I'll send for you if I want you," he said in the dry tones he used when giving orders.

"That Jew is with me," blurted the Prussian.

Ian's gray eyes met his with such cool determination that the other shifted uneasily.

"He is my servant." This in frozen tones; then, to Szmul: "You heard me?"

Szmul looked appealingly at the officer, won no support by word or glance and slunk out. Ian's gaze returned to the Prussian.

"Your business?"

"You have food supplies stored here." This angrily, in accusation.

"I have. To feed my household and the starving peasants."

"I hear you have enough to gorge them till the end of the war. Is that so?"

"I don't know how long the war will last."

The Prussian, angry before, became infuriated at this. He stamped his foot and bellowed as if he were drilling recruits.

"You're bandying words, *Herr Graf*," he shouted. "I know you're concealing

supplies. I'll have them of you, *mein Gott*, I will!"

"Your authority?"

Ian's eyes were ablaze with suppressed passion; but he controlled himself. His outward calm maddened the subaltern, who danced in his rage. Indeed, if not for the circumstances behind his visit, he would have been quite funny.

"Authority!" he bawled. "I *am* Authority. I am the representative of victorious Prussia! My word is law in this house! Surrender your supplies or I'll burn it down!"

Ian went over to the safe, unlocked it with the key which hung by a leather strap he kept in his pocket, and swung back the heavy door.

The subaltern whipped out his revolver, strode after him and peered in. The safe was almost empty except for keys.

"Your plate?" he asked, putting his revolver close to Ian's head. And anxious though he was, Father Constantine could not help thinking the man must be a fool to imagine the safe big enough to hold Ruvno plate.

"In Warsaw." Ian lied; it was in Moscow. But Father Constantine would gladly have absolved him from murder, were his victim this subaltern.

"Whereabouts in Warsaw?"

"The Commercial Bank."

The looter turned to one of his men:

"Make a note of that," he commanded. The man obeyed, producing paper and pencil from a pocket.

"Where are your family jewels?" proceeded the subaltern.

"At the Commercial Bank." Their eyes met again. Ian's mirrored a soul too proud to lie. And yet they say that eyes cannot hide the truth.

"What are they worth?"

Ian did not answer and murder shone from the Prussian's evil face. The old priest's heart stood still. What, oh, what could he do to help? The sergeant scribbled hard, finished, licked his pencil and awaited further orders. The subaltern put his revolver a shade nearer Ian's head. Father Constantine knew he was playing to put the looters off the scent. For if he lost the jewels there would be nothing left to live upon. Ian thought of the moonlight labor on the Plock road, of Szmul's prying eyes, and feared greatly.

"What are they worth?" repeated the Prussian.

"I don't know. They have not been valued for fifty years."

"But those emeralds ... you must know what they are worth."

"They are priceless," said Father Constantine.

The man turned to him.

"Hold your tongue," he said rudely. "You weren't so ready to talk outside." Then to Ian:

"Give me the banker's receipt for the jewels and plate."

"My lawyers have them."

"Who are they? But no matter..." He laughed roughly. "Next week we shall be in Warsaw, and if I find you've been lying, you'll be shot." He withdrew his revolver. Ian gave a slight breath of relief. "Now for the food," said the Teuton.

Ian took a bunch of keys from the safe, locked it and rang the bell. Martin appeared, white as a sheet. He had heard what was going on.

"Take this officer to the store-room; open the cupboards," said his master.

"You must come," put in the looter. Ian gave him a cold look.

"My servant will show you where to find the things."

The Prussians stalked out and Martin with them. Szmul was still in the passage.

Ian did not speak till the sound of their footsteps died away. Then he made sure there were no eaves-droppers, and shut the door, his soul filled with rage, worry and mortification. For a few minutes he gave way and called the looters by names it did the old priest good to hear, for the soutane put a limit on his own language.

"If not for the women I'd have strangled him at the safe," Ian cried. "But the day may come when I'll have to shoot them, to save them from dishonor."

"Mother of God!" Father Constantine gasped. "Are they going to make Poland another Belgium?"

The thought of what his Countess and the other women in the house would have to suffer filled him with horror. To shoot her! He could not bear it. Ian tried to comfort him.

"Cheer up, Father. It hasn't come to that yet." Then angry again: "That swine Szmul has betrayed us."

"What are you going to say about the cellars?"

"Swear I've nothing more. We've no list."

"But they'll tear down the walls?"

"It'll take time. Oh, if only I could get in touch with some Russians! We should have these devils entrapped."

"There must be thousands of Germans about. Szmul knows it, or he would not have risked telling about the emeralds and stores," said the priest.

"I'll punish him when this is over," cried Ian. "After I've sheltered him, too."

Here the Countess came in. She had heard all.

"Give them everything, rather than they should shoot you," she pleaded.

"They won't shoot me, Mother, not till they've tried the Commercial Bank. Where is Minnie?"

"Up in the secret room."

"Thank God!" He looked relieved. "And now, you go there, too."

Martin came in. He was shaking with rage and fear.

"That Jewish pig has betrayed us," he cried. "They're in the cellar now."

They looked at each other in consternation. Martin turned to his mistress.

"My Lady Countess, it will be well for you to go upstairs ... they are very coarse."

"Yes, Mother, I insist."

"But perhaps I can do something—-"

The question was settled by the subaltern, who stalked into the room, followed by two of his henchmen. He was afraid to go about alone. He had already found some of Ian's wine, his face was flushed, and both troopers smelt of it. He did not even salute the Countess, who glared at him in silent rage.

"Nobody to leave this room!" he bellowed. Then to Ian: "Where are your supplies?"

"It appears you have them," was the cool answer. "I hear you have already emptied my stores."

"But the cellar, dolt!" roared the Prussian. "The Jew says you have bricked up corn and potatoes to feed an army."

"My cellar holds wine," put in the Countess. "Judging from your behavior, you have found it without our help."

She devoured him with her scornful, angry eyes, and he had the grace to look a little confused. He saluted and lowered his tone.

"I give you three minutes"–he looked at his watch–"to come down and show me where to find your supplies. If you refuse, I'll not leave one stone upon another in your cellar, but destroy it as soon as my men have removed the stores and wine. You'll be without food, for, if you persist in your obstinate refusal, I will not leave you a week's rations; and you will no longer have a refuge in case of bombardment. You will have no choice then but to leave this place."

"Never!" This from the Countess.

"As you please. We will begin the three minutes."

There was silence. He eyed his watch, the Countess looked straight before her; Ian's face was like granite, the priest's eye on the clock in the corner. He almost wished Ian would come to terms with the looter, because perhaps then they would leave enough till Ian could buy more. Then he remembered they were probably cut off from Warsaw, and therefore from grain, and changed his mind.

"Time is up." He looked at Ian.

"I repeat," he said very distinctly, though the sweat stood on his upper lip, "I repeat, once and for all, that I have no stores in my cellars."

"Then you choose to have your cellars destroyed?" growled his tormentor.

"You will find nothing but wine. If the loan of my cellar-book can shorten

your visit..."

The Prussian swung out of the room without waiting for more. Ian rushed to the door, shut it, hurriedly took two acetylene carriage lamps from a cupboard and demanded matches.

Knowing what he used those lamps for, Father Constantine tried to dissuade him from signaling to the Russians, for, should the Prussians catch him, his life would not be worth a handful of corn, and there were surely more foes than friends abroad that night. But he only gave a short laugh. He did not believe there were many Prussians about or they would not have sent a subaltern to seize emeralds. Such a prize as Szmul must have promised would have attracted a field-marshal at least. This, he thought, was a chance visit. Any way, better to die of a bullet than see his people die of starvation.

"If there were guns to arm a dozen men from the village, I could entrap them and hold them down in the cellar," he explained, preparing the lamps. "I thought it out when he gave me his precious three minutes. I could never manage. It's ten minutes to the village, ten to muster them, ten to bring them back. I've only six sporting rifles. They are thirty strong."

"But the tower is down," objected the priest

"There's the village church. Mother, do you go and tell Martin to follow me. Father Constantine, get me a sheepskin."

He was off in a trice. The priest told his mother it was a wild-goose chase.

"But six armed men against thirty, and only Ian a good shot," she objected. "They would be butchered. After all, they may not find the stores. I hope they will all get drunk first."

They tried to get into the cellar, to see how things went. Two Prussians guarded the head of the stairs, two stood lower down, and two at the bottom of the first flight. Ian was right. It would be madness to send six men with sporting rifles against those hardened warriors. They would not let the Countess pass. She took whispered counsel with her chaplain in the kitchen, where some frightened maids were huddled together.

"Try the other way," he suggested. "I don't suppose they know about it."

They made for the library. It was deserted. Szmul had forgotten to tell them of its small door, leading to a passage, at the bottom of which steps led down to the cellars. For generations this entrance was unused, being narrow, steep and dark as the grave. But during their sojourn underground it served as a private access for the family, whilst the refugees and household used the larger staircase.

There were two main cellars, connected by a labyrinth of narrow, vaulted passages with smaller ones. Many of these passages, however, were blind alleys, terminating in stout brick walls. Some were solid and five feet thick; others hollow, with a good brick crust on either side. In these recesses, old Hungarian

wine was bricked up till some great family event justified its being drunk. In the recesses which were empty at the beginning of the war, Ian bricked up his food, taking out the wine from others and storing it in the large cellars.

Once at the bottom of the narrow steps the two had but a few yards to the part Father Constantine had fitted up as an underground chapel. To screen it off he had put a curtain across the narrow passage. The wall of a recess still supported the little altar. They hid behind the curtain. They could hear voices.

"They are in the big cellar," whispered the Countess.

"Now Jew, where is this grain? Be quick." It was the subaltern's voice.

"Oh, Excellency," began Szmul, and his voice was of honey. The Prussian cut him short.

"No nonsense–speak out."

"I was down here one day, when they all thought I had gone out for air, and I heard the Count talking to the silly old priest who—-"

"Go *on*!"

"And they were in the chapel, which they have fitted up because they stood in deadly fear of the Prussian shells. And they wondered between themselves if it would not be better to break into the cellar stores in the lower part on account of the damp and use that store as rations for the peasants in the other village, not the village belonging to the Count but the peasants' village, for there are—-"

There was a thud, as of hard matter against soft, and then a shrill Hebrew squeal.

"Go on!" roared the subaltern. "If you waste time I'll have you flogged."

"It's near the second big cellar," he said promptly. "I heard that."

The Countess clutched her chaplain's arm. "They'll find it," she whispered. "Oh, that traitor. And to think we put up with him and his dirty family."

"Show the way."

It did not take them long to find out which of the two blind alleys off the big cellar was hollow. The listeners heard the officer order his men to begin. Ian's bricklayers were good workmen, though, and gave them plenty to do. The subaltern swore at the thickness of the wall. At last they gave a whoop of delight.

"Potatoes," cried a voice in German. "Trust them to know a good potato when they see it.

"Take them all out, every sack. Let the Polish swine starve. I'll make that lying Count smart for this."

"Will you?" said the Countess, and so loud that the priest feared they would hear her.

There was much running to and fro as they took up their booty.

"Oh, for ten armed men," whispered the Countess. "I'd teach them to loot us."

Father Constantine begged her to keep quiet, but she went on muttering against them. After some minutes a soldier's voice reported all the potatoes upstairs, on a cart. They had taken one of Ian's.

"And the wine?"

"Three dozen bottles." Father Constantine squirmed to think of that good wine going down German throats.

"Get up the rest," ordered the subaltern. "And send me that Jew."

Szmul had been wall-tapping on his own account. He appeared breathless.

"Oh, Excellency ... there is a hollow wall just over there. And it's wider than the others."

"Lead the way." Their steps died in the distance.

"Did you hear what he said about Ian?" she asked.

"Yes. I'll run over and warn him not to come till they go."

"We have plenty of time," she said bitterly. "They have a dozen places yet. Oh, if I were a man!"

"What would you do?"

"I'd shoot him," and her voice was deadly calm.

Suddenly they heard picks behind the little altar, and sprang up in consternation. Szmul had found Ian's largest grain store.

"Let us go," she said. There was something in her voice the priest had never heard before.

They returned to the library. She shut and locked the door and without another word went to Ian's bedroom. Father Constantine followed, afraid of the look on her face. She took her boy's revolver from a table by the bed.

"What are you going to do?"

She looked him full in the face, white to the lips but her eyes blazing with the passion of protecting motherhood.

"Shoot him–before he gets Ian."

"But you're mad," cried the priest, vainly trying to wrest the weapon from her. "The troopers will avenge themselves on you and on Miss."

But she was in no mood to listen. She made sure the revolver was loaded and went to the door. Her chaplain managed to reach it first.

"You'll shoot me before you leave this room," he cried.

They stood glaring at one another and saying many bitter things–they who had been friends for half a century. Then they felt ashamed and were silent, though each was bent on victory. This lull in the quarrel was broken by the sound of horses' hoofs upon the frozen ground.

"They're off," she cried, and running to the window had opened and cleared it before the priest could get there. And in peace time she walked with a stick!

He followed her as best he could, but alas! when he reached the ground

she had disappeared. The place was deserted, the night dark. He ran hither and thither looking for her, his one thought to snatch away the revolver. He remembered all the terrible things they had done to women in France and Belgium for less than killing a Prussian officer. And she was a good shot. He had seen her hit the bull'seye over and over again, in the little shooting-range behind the shrubbery.

A shot rang through the air–it came from the kitchen side. He was too late! He could no longer save her from herself! Ah, they were already on her, for he could hear hoarse German oaths and a woman's screams. Yes, that was her voice. Oh, my God, that he should come to this! They were torturing her, subjecting her to unspeakable martyrdom, wreaking vengeance for the death of their chief.

In the kitchen entry he stumbled over a Prussian helmet. Its owner lay near by, on his face ... he hurried on...

The huge room resounded with the clash of steel, women's screams, men's oaths. There was a struggling mass of humanity in the gloom. Ian, his face bleeding, was fighting for his life with a trooper. Father Constantine butted at them, to catch the German in his big paunch. But something sharp and cold hit his head and he knew no more.

When he recovered his senses he was lying in a cold, dark place. His head ached greatly. Somebody was bathing it with water.

"The Countess? The Countess?" He tried to rise, but could not.

"She is safe. Please lie still, Father Constantine." This in English. It was Minnie.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"And Ian?"

"A flesh wound. He'll be well in a week; but you—-"

"And that Prussian?"

"Dead."

"She killed him?"

"No. The Russians came up just in time. Cavalry. Caught them with their booty at the top of the cellar steps. Ian killed two. They fought like devils, but were entrapped. Two others got killed, then the officer. When the rest saw him down, they surrendered. We've one wounded prisoner here. He says Szmul offered to bring them here if they would spare him and some money he had buried."

"And Szmul?"

She laughed bitterly.

"Got clean off. Trust him. Now, you must rest. I'm going to be very strict."

"But one thing more ... the signals saved us?"

"Yes."

"How many Prussians crossed the river that Szmul—-"

"You must not talk."

"Please, just that."

"The Russians say only a few. The rest were cut off as they landed on this side. But the prisoner, when I went to him just now–he is wounded in the leg–says several hundred got over and his lot believed they were in touch with the rest. Then they met Szmul who told them what booty there was to be had in Ruvno–emeralds, and grain and wine. He says the Germans will think Szmul got them here to entrap them, and will hang him to the nearest tree."

"Serve him right!" cried the priest. "That skunk! Why, when he came up to me last night—-"

"Be quiet, Father Constantine," she said severely, "or I sha'n't let you see anybody for a week."

And he obeyed.

X

Ian became vaguely aware of Minnie's feelings towards him on the night of that fight with the Prussians in the kitchen. She saw the end of that adventure despite his precautions. From the "secret room," which was the name the household gave to a small paneled chamber that had only a bull's-eye window and access from a bedroom by means of a small door cut in the paneled wall, she espied his signaling on the church tower. He had used this way of communicating before. She ran down there to help. On the tower she found Martin, whose ancient arms were pretty well exhausted. Ian, busy on the other side, did not know she was there till she shouted that she saw a red light. It was thrown up by some Russian cavalry and not far off. They arrived just in time. The Countess showed them the way to the cellars through the library, so that most of the Prussians were caught like rats in a trap. Some broke through the other way into the kitchen and fought hard, but were defeated and surrendered to the Cossacks, who marched off with all the survivors except one, who was wounded in the leg.

He was not ungrateful for her help on the tower, though he agreed with Martin that it had not been necessary. He told her that she had no business to leave the secret room whilst Germans were about; then seeing her disappointment at this cool recognition of her services, he told the Grand Duke, in her

presence, that she deserved a decoration. But he determined to send her home at the first opportunity. The events of the preceding evening proved how women hampered him when the enemy came. He would have sent his mother, too, to join Vanda in Warsaw, but she was so firm in her refusal to leave Ruvno that he gave up trying to persuade her.

For several days after the kitchen fight nothing happened. Ian was busy bricking up his rescued stores, which the Prussians had almost got away with. Father Constantine was still in bed, his head wrapped in bandages; the wounded Prussian had been moved to a hospital at Kosczielna, because his leg was getting better so fast that they feared he would run away.

Then Major Healy arrived. He was a great big good-natured American, doing his best to relieve the suffering in Poland with the means at his disposal. He was, too, intensely interested in learning all he could about the country, its customs and people. Ruvno was a revelation to him. So far, the work had taken him and his interpreter amongst the peasants, burrowing like rats below ground, and the Jews, for whom he felt more pity than admiration. He was delighted to find that Ian spoke English. They got on very well together. It was a long time since Ian had talked to a man of his own age who was not a soldier. The Russians he saw were infinitely more interested in turning his ground into trenches and battlefields than in suggesting the best means of keeping those dependent on him from starvation till the next harvest. Major Healy had worked in Belgium and France and was able to give him a good many hints for economy. Poland had always enjoyed such liberal food supplies that Ian had overestimated his war rations and was astounded to hear how people lived in Belgium. He cut down his ration system slightly, and results proved that the change did no immediate harm, whilst making a good deal of difference in the output of supplies.

Father Constantine, too, was interested in the visitor, though not on account of rations. Minnie, suspecting nothing and anxious to give him some news, told him about Healy's arrival with an interpreter and three other men who helped to distribute relief.

"American!" he cried. "I must see him at once. I wouldn't miss him for worlds."

Minnie explained that Major Healy would probably stop a few days, then come back on his way home.

"Home? Do you say he is going home?" His eyes shone like a bird's under the white bandages. "If so, the sooner I see him the better."

"Can't I give him your message?"

"Certainly not." Father Constantine could be very peremptory when he liked. "The idea! I am quite fit to see visitors ... and anxious to meet this American boy."

"He's forty if he's an hour."

"Well–forty or fourteen. See him I will."

Minnie put on the professional nurse's manner.

"Father," she said, "you're getting excited and you know how bad it is for you. I won't bring up anybody till your temperature goes down."

He said no more; next time she took his temperature it had gone up two points. He actually winked at her.

"There, my child," he said in triumph. "I told you that the sooner I see this relief man the better. I shall not sleep a wink to-night unless I do ... and to-morrow morning you'll find me in a raging fever."

"He is busy ... Ian is with him. I heard them say they would not finish till supper time."

"What are they doing?"

"Checking stores for some village. The Americans have got a wonderful system. Ian is learning it."

"You and Ian can do that whilst he is up here. I feel my temperature has gone up another point. Give me the thermometer."

She refused that, but went for Major Healy. After all, she reflected, he was an obstinate old man and capable of getting a high temperature just to prove himself in the right.

The introduction over, he turned to her with one of his benignant smiles.

"My child ... you have spent so much time with a poor old man to-day, I am sure Major Healy will excuse you ... you might help Ian check those potatoes."

She took the hint and went out; but not to the potatoes. I am afraid she did a very mean thing. She burned with curiosity to hear what Father Constantine wanted with the American major, and that instinct which often enables a woman to steal a march on man whispered that she was concerned in the priest's mysterious anxiety. It may be true that an eavesdropper hears no good of herself; it is equally true that she sometimes hears things good for herself. Therefore, argued Minnie, it was quite a normal occupation under the circumstances.

The Father's room opened to his dressing-room, approachable from the corridor as well. Thither she tiptoed, to find the door ajar. Slipping in, she stood behind a curtain which hung in the doorway between dressing and bedrooms. There was no door, so she heard very clearly. Father Constantine was talking; she caught the sound of her own name.

"It is not safe for Miss Burton to remain here," he said in his slow, correct English, for the Major had no other tongue. "I have told her so more than once. So has the Countess; and also the Count. But she refuses to listen. She knows how much we value her excellent work with wounded and refugees. But perhaps you can persuade her. Neither the Countess nor her son can insist; it would look

as though they wanted to get rid of her."

Major Healy was loath to interfere. He sat, like a giant in repose, by the little chaplain's bed, listening politely, but secretly wishing himself downstairs with the Count, whom he found more interesting every time they talked together. Father Constantine's message had interrupted a long argument not entirely disconnected with big-game shooting. Healy was a keen sportsman himself, and found it very interesting to swap stories with Ian, who did not know the Rockies, but did know the Caucasus and even Cashmere, where he had spent a long-remembered holiday with young Ralph Burton two years ago.

"Well," he said, in slow sonorous tones, his blue eyes watching the snowstorm that raged outside the sealed double window. "Miss Burton looks as if she could take care of herself. I hear that the Grand Duke promised to give warning if the place gets unsafe."

This was not at all what Father Constantine wanted.

"Do you see my bandages?" he asked.

Major Healy said he did.

"I received the wounds they cover in a fight which took place in the kitchen between the Grand Duke's soldiers and Prussian Hussars. Neither the Duke nor the Kaiser sent to warn me that a fight would be in the kitchen, which I entered by chance without any idea the Russians had come to the rescue. It was a very good thing they did come because, as you know, grain and potatoes are worth a dozen old men's skulls nowadays."

"Oh–don't say that," protested the major politely.

The priest went on:

"Let us put it in this way. What would have happened if Miss Burton and not myself had gone into the kitchen?"

"I suppose her head would have been smashed, too," murmured the American.

"Exactly," agreed the priest. "Her pretty young head would have been broken. And as a woman's head is softer than a priest's, it would probably have been broken past repairing."

Major Healy waited for more. It came.

"And what would the American government say if an American woman had her skull broken in a Polish kitchen?" he pursued.

"It would have written one of its darned notes."

"Oh!" said Father Constantine, disappointed at this unexpected reply. "It would have written one of those notes? They must be very interesting to compose, but will not mend broken heads. And England won't even write a note. But her brothers would probably blame us for letting her stop here. And Ruvno is one of the most dangerous houses in Poland. You can see for yourself what the

Prussians have done to the tower and the west wing."

"That I have," agreed the major, more interested in the west wing than the prospect of Minnie's broken skull. "I'd like to wring the Kaiser's neck for bringing down that old bit." He was an admirer of antiquities, you see, and Minnie was still far from being one. "No, Father, Poland isn't safe for young girls and I'll speak to her about it."

He rose from the depths of the armchair.

"Thank you so much. It will be a great weight off our minds when we know that this charming young lady is out of danger. When did you say you were returning to France?"

"Not yet. I'll have to go to Moscow, and can take her to Petrograd and find an escort for her to England."

The Countess came in then and Healy went off. Minnie was half-way across the room on her way out when a laugh from the patient stopped her. There was something wicked about it, out of keeping with a broken skull and high temperature.

"What is it?" asked the Countess.

He laughed again. The visit had cheered him immensely.

"I think I've managed it."

"Managed what?"

"To persuade the American that Miss can't stop here any longer." And he laughed again.

"But you know what the Grand Duke said."

"How about my broken head?"

"Oh–that was my fault, Father—-"

"No–no." His voice was deprecating now. "This American man will persuade her. He is the picture of American determination. Look at his chin."

"I haven't noticed his chin. But I have noticed your lack of gratitude. I'm ashamed of you after the way Minnie nurses you."

"I'm not ungrateful; but I've been watching her and Ian rather closely the last few days."

"You've been in bed!"

Father Constantine coughed.

"That is why. You have no idea, Countess, how supremely indifferent a young woman is towards a dozing patient. And I doze a good deal nowadays. Ian, dear boy, comes to see me. And so does the Miss."

Minnie had to restrain an impulse to go in and shake her patient. She heard footsteps outside, then Ian's voice at the old man's door.

"Is Major Healy here?" he asked.

"He is checking those American potatoes with the Miss," the priest an-

swered.

"Oh! I'll come for a chat later on." And off he went.

Minnie could hear the Countess and the priest giggle. They were still enjoying their joke when came another rap. The surgeon this time. Minnie went up to the ward, bursting with indignation at the priest's duplicity. The idea of his "foxing" when she supposed him sound asleep! She thought it very deceitful of him.

Healy was a conscientious man. Though very busy that evening, he found time to redeem his promise to Father Constantine, and talk to Minnie. She cut him short with:

"Yes. The old tower has spoilt one of the best specimens of architecture left in Poland, and the old priest's head has been smashed without either the Kaiser or the Grand Duke warning him. And I shall get my head broken unless I go home at once."

He fairly gasped.

"How on earth—-" he began.

"I've heard it before. I expect that Father Constantine has asked you to help him. I shouldn't wonder if he asked you what the American government would say if my head gets broken. Looking at you and knowing your personal sympathies with the Allies, I suppose you think I am able to take care of myself."

"Well, as you mention it—-"

He gave her an appreciative glance. She was good-looking and he admired her "spunk," to say nothing about her bright eyes and rosy cheeks.

Taking courage, she went on gaily:

"And the priest probably used his old joke about his head being harder than a woman's."

"He did say—-"

"Major Healy, I appreciate your kindness, but I'm not going home for any of these arguments, which I've heard before. You may have some of your own up your sleeve, if so—-"

"I hadn't thought of any, but—-"

"No, you've been so busy that you trusted to the old ones. It would take something better to send me back to London."

"There's Moscow," he mentioned. "It's nearer and quite safe." He rather liked the idea of having her as traveling companion. She would be entertaining and was good to look upon.

"Nor Moscow either."

"Warsaw?"

"Not even Warsaw. I'm going to stop here, where I'm wanted."

He laughed. "I don't know but what you're right. You can always get away

when things look bad."

He returned to his blankets and potatoes, so Minnie heard no more of the matter from him. But Father Constantine was quite nasty about it. Next afternoon, at the hour of his siesta, he summoned his old servant and made him read the newspaper. Then he insisted on learning how to knit. In future, when he wanted a nap, he saw that the door was locked, saying that visitors at that time disturbed him. He gave a pretty shrewd guess that his room was about the only place where Minnie could talk quietly to Ian these busy days, and meant to put a stop to the meetings. He was by no means so simple as he looked.

Major Healy sought her to say good-bye, on the afternoon of his departure. He waited till she had gone up to one of the large bedrooms she called her ward. He thought he could talk more freely there than before his host or hostess. His ideas about Minnie had changed in these few days, since he sat, bored and eager to get away, by the old chaplain's bed, and listened to his talk of broken heads.

"You're doing splendid work here," he said, when she had shown him a couple of her convalescent patients. "But I think you're too near the firing line."

"So is the Countess," she returned gaily. He did not speak for a moment. He had a habit of pondering beforehand that suited his big stature and heavy build. He was interested in her. She happened to be the first young woman he had met for weeks who spoke his own language. Relief work in a devastated country did not allow for social intercourse and he realized what a pleasant little break Ruvno had made for him.

"The Countess?" he echoed, looking at his cigar. "I guess the Countess is hanging on to a piece of herself. The Count tells me her family has been here for eight centuries. I hadn't realized what that meant till I talked to them. It means that the family was looking at this landscape, tilling this land and fighting for it when the Indians camped where my home is and the Norman king reigned over *yours*. So I expect she'd as soon die as leave it any other way."

"Yes–that's true," agreed Minnie.

"But you've only been here a few months," he went on. "It's not part of your bones."

"I've these," she said, looking round the room, which was peopled with peasant women and children, injured by Prussian shells or gases, whilst working in their fields. "I can't leave them."

He lowered his voice and bent over her, though not one of those suffering, frightened souls could understand what he said. "I've talked things over with the Count. It's plain enough that they're not going to leave this old house of theirs even if the Germans come for good. That's their look-out. If I were in their shoes I'd probably do the same thing. The Germans will have to burn them out. But you're not a Pole–Miss Burton. If they catch you here, they'll give you a pretty

bad time of it."

Her eyes flashed.

"I'm going to stay all the same," she said firmly. "The Russians aren't beaten yet."

He gave a slow gesture of despair.

"It's going to be a long party and the Germans 'll make another push for Warsaw soon. You're right in their road here."

He looked at her, a little pleadingly. He hated the thought of leaving her in the midst of this desolation, possibly a prey to German "Kultur." He had not noticed anything to make him suspect that Ian, rather than wounded refugees, was in her mind when she refused to leave. He had not seen the two together. Ian was busy all day long outside the house, she in the wards. His admiration for her grew.

"Haven't you any family?" he asked.

"One brother with the Fleet and another in Flanders."

"That's a family to be proud of," he said warmly. "D'you hear from them?"

"Not since the Dardanelles were closed. Will you take a couple of letters for me?"

"That I will. And I'll see you get the answers. I'm going to Petrograd next week–then to France. I'll be back here next spring. Meanwhile, there are other men doing the work. Tell your brothers to send through our office in Moscow. Here's the address." He produced a card, then a pencil. "On the back I'll write mine, in Paris, where you'll always get me." He scribbled a couple of lines and handed her the card. "Now you keep that and don't forget to let me know, either there, or through our Moscow office, when you want anything."

"Thanks awfully. I'll take great care of the card and will fetch the letters for my brothers. They are ready."

He followed her and waited in the corridor. When she came back he said, hesitatingly:

"Excuse a personal question; but have you got any cash?"

"A certain amount."

"How much?"

"Oh, about five hundred roubles–and my cheque-book."

"The cheque-book won't do you much good." His comely, rather heavy face flushed. "Look here I'm a banker at home—-"

"Why, you're a major," she retorted.

"So I am. But peace soldiering didn't suit me and I went into my father's business. I'm going to join up again when America fights–and she must."

"I'm glad to hear that," she said.

"Thanks. It'll take time–but it's coming. Why, if I thought we weren't

going to help put an end to this desolation over here...."

He grew suddenly shy, and broke off. Then:

"Let me be your banker now." He put a roll of notes into her hand. "You'll be glad of it before you're through with Poland, believe me."

She thanked him, prettily, so he thought. Her first impulse was to refuse the money. Then she reflected that they all might be glad of it one day. The American's kindness touched her, and she showed it; this flattered him. He had a susceptible heart and innate chivalry, inherited from Irish forebears.

"Oh–how am I to thank you?" she murmured, blushing redder than he had been a moment before.

"By using it to get out of this desert as soon as you can," he returned quickly. "I hate to leave you here–in danger."

"But there is none–yet. Look here, Major Healy, do let me give you a cheque on my London bank for it."

He laughed.

"I told you cheques are no good in this country. We'll settle later on. Remember to let me know if I can help. Good-bye and good luck."

He strode down the long gallery, turned at the end, regretfully, waved his hand and was gone. Minnie went back to her patients, whom she tended with the help of two village women, and Zosia, the housekeeper.

The Countess had wounded soldiers in another part of the house.

XI

One spring morning the Countess came into the office where Ian was working, an open letter in her hand. He saw by her eyes that she had unpleasant news.

"A letter from Joseph," she announced, sitting down by his desk, where he was busy with accounts. He looked up, his clear eyes hardened.

"What does he want?"

"He has a week's leave. He says that the six months are over, and wants—-"

"Wants his wedding," said Ian. "Then he must have it."

She laid her slim hand on his. He raised it to his lips; but did not meet her fond gaze.

"He says he has written to Vanda, to come here, to meet him."

Ian gave a grunt. He thought it just like Joe's impudence to order people

in and out of his house. But he said nothing. His mother went on:

"Vanda, it appears, wants the wedding to take place in Warsaw."

"She's right," he returned promptly. "A wedding in this muddle!" He looked out of the window, to the garden cut in trenches, and the barbed wire, rusty with spring rains, blotting what was once a peaceful vista of sedate comfort. "I'd write to the Europe about rooms, and to the Archbishop."

"But, Ianek, think of the expense, nowadays," she protested gently.

"It wouldn't be much. You need only invite the family. No lunch or anything, just a glass of champagne when you get back from church. A war wedding."

"Then you won't come, dear?"

"No. The work here ... you know how pressed I am for men." He lowered his voice: "It's easier that way."

She gave him one of her long, adoring looks, her hand on his shoulder.

"Courage," she whispered, "these things pass."

He nodded. "There have been so many other things, and yet, when you came in with your news, I wished him dead."

"Ianek!" she cried, shocked by the pain in his voice as much as his words. "I'd been hoping you had forgotten. You were more cheerful these last few weeks, and so busy."

He gave a little laugh. "So did I. Then this letter brought it ... showed it's still there." He got up and paced the long room. "Oh, I don't want it here. Manage that for me; find out from somebody where Joe is, send a messenger that we can't have it in this ruin, that I insist, as head of the family, on its being in Warsaw. Telegraph to Vanda–I can't spare a messenger or I'd send a note to her by hand. But telegraph her that she's to stop where she is, that you're coming for the wedding. Tell her to let him know; he may be in Warsaw."

She glanced at the letter.

"No address, of course, just the military censor's stamp."

"But she may know where he is," he rejoined eagerly. "Take Minnie with you. The change'll do her good. Women love a wedding. Stop a few days yourself. I'll write the telegrams myself, they must be in Russian, I'd forgotten that." Then, seeing the alarm in her face, he added: "Don't worry, Mother, it's only ... it'll pass. But start for Warsaw the minute you can, before either of them gets here."

"At once," she said, rising.

He wrote a telegram to Joseph, another to Vanda and a third to the Archbishop of Warsaw. He wanted that man of high courage and well-tried patriotism to bless her union. These he sent to the station, the nearest telegraph office; at some inconvenience, because there was a great deal of work to be done in the fields and he was short of labor. So he took the place of the boy he sent plow-

ing for him till all hands struck work at midday. Things had changed since last spring; when the squire rode over his well-cultivated property and merely gave orders to his manager. Now he was his own manager and his own bailiff, and sometimes his own hind as well. Plowing, he congratulated himself that he had at least saved the situation, as far as witnessing Joseph's happiness went; and the hard exercise relieved his feelings.

Here Destiny stepped in. He was crossing the hall to wash his hands for their frugal lunch when he heard the clatter of a quick-stepping horse through the open door. A tall figure, slim and smart in its brown Cossack uniform, swung from the saddle and stood in the sunlit entry. It was Joseph. They stood looking at one another in silence for a moment.

"Hullo!" cried the new-comer, "It is you ... couldn't see after having the sun in my eyes." And he strode over, spurs clanking, to hug the squire in an old-fashioned Polish embrace with a warmth that belonged, in the old days, to Roman, never to his brother.

Ian was forced to admit that war had changed his cousin. He was handsome as ever; but less a prig, more a man. Rubbing shoulders with the primitive aspects of life and death had done him good, widened his sympathies, rubbed off the crust of self-complacency which Ian has always hated in him, even before love came between them.

"I just wired to you," he said, releasing himself. "No idea you were so near."

"Near! The general's headquarters are in a railway truck at Kosczielna. I've got a week's leave. Has Vanda come?"

"No. Mother is packing to go to Warsaw."

"Anything wrong?" he asked in alarm. "Out with it, tell me the worst."

"Nothing wrong. Only...." He pointed towards the devastated garden, the gap where the tower had once been, and the rusty entanglements. "We can't have a wedding here."

Joseph laughed, not from lack of sympathy, but for relief that Vanda was not ill?

"My God! There are weddings on rubbish heaps nowadays. I call Ruvno a quiet spot for a honeymoon. I've no time to go to Warsaw. Vanda wanted it there, too, but it'll take too long. We're going to make an advance soon, and goodness knows when I'll get another chance like this. A week's leave! Not to be despised, I can tell you. I've got all the papers and things. We can get married the moment Vanda comes. Hard work getting them, but they've made things easier in war-time. I saw that old Canon of yours. Dragged him out of bed at six o'clock this morning. I say, anything to drink? I've the thirst of the devil on me!"

"Of course." He led the way to the dining-room, noted Joseph's long pull at the beer set before him–he was in too much of a hurry to wait for a bottle

of wine to be fetched and opened–watched, listened and wondered. And this was Joseph, the fastidious, pomaded, manicured, supercilious fop of six months ago. His face reddened by snow, sun and wind; his chin unshaven, his right hand disfigured by the scar of the wound he got in the Carpathians, his nails broken and begrimed with dirt that no washing would remove, his fair hair, once so sleek and trim, tousled from his high fur cap, which he pulled off and flung on to a chair. He looked the picture of robust health, happiness and sincerity, but never like Joseph Skarbek. Soldiering with men whose education and upbringing was ruder than his had rubbed the artificiality off him, leaving the old type of virile, keen, sincere Skarbeks who had fought their way through the country's history. Ian began almost to like him.

But he was not a second Roman, had none of his brother's fatalism, devil-may-care philosophy, odd glimpses into the truth of life's foundations. His was more the ingenuity of a big schoolboy, but such a schoolboy as he had never been when in his 'teens. One of his first questions was for Roman. He grew grave when they told him there was no news.

"I counted on your hearing from him. He wouldn't be likely to write to me, because of Vanda. But he must have got over that. It wasn't his first love-affair –nor his second. He can't be a prisoner. He'd never let the Prussians take him. He told me that. Besides, I know it myself." He gave a short laugh. "Crucifixion would be too good for us both if they catch us. And he's not on the list of dead or wounded either, for I got a man at Petersburg–I mean Petrograd–to bring me them."

"Up to date?" asked Ian anxiously.

"Yes. The latest. They came this morning, just before I started. Of course, it's just like Roman never to send a line, and then hell turn up all of a sudden and be surprised that we were anxious."

As he sat and listened to the story of the Carpathian campaign, told with simple directness, with that ignorance of main facts which characterises all such stories, where a man knows only what goes on around him, yet with that charm of the intelligent eye-witness, Ian felt suddenly very middle-aged and out of things. Here he was, doing daily drudgery on a ruined estate, always in the same place, always seeing the same people, in the dull monotony of a long winter, without any shooting, without visits to Warsaw and the opera, whilst this cousin of his, whom he had always despised for a coxcomb and an armchair agriculturist, had been running half over Europe, chasing the Austrians over snow-bound mountains, learning the sensation of fighting hand to hand, of being wounded, of getting a decoration, of thinking himself dead once, of being near death many times; not the death of rats-in-a-hole that Ruvno knew, but death with glory; when he heard tales of these things, told by a now unfamiliar Joseph, and compared his

own humdrum life, he reflected bitterly that if Vanda had loved this man before she would worship him now. He opened the demijohn that his mind had reserved for Roman's coming, and they drank the health of everybody they liked who was alive and to the other Skarbek's speedy return. During the evening they discussed business.

"Aunt Natalie," began the bridegroom, "I expect you think I'm mad to get married just now, with nothing to live upon and not even knowing if I'll be alive this time next week."

"Vanda will never want while we are able to give her a crust," she said warmly. This new Joseph pleased her, too; if not for her boy she would have taken him to her heart as she had taken Roman long ago.

"Thank you, Aunt. I used to think, there on the Carpathians, what a selfish beast I was to keep her to our engagement after I'd joined the right side and lost my property. But when I was in Kieff old Uncle Stephen came to see me."

"Old Uncle Stephen," was of the branch of Skarbeks who had estates in Russian territory and were Russian subjects.

"They say he's made a lot of money over the war," remarked Ian.

"At any rate he's not lost any. He was so pleased to hear that I'd joined against the Prussians that he made over a hundred thousand roubles to me. He's a wise old bird; had it invested in several things, I'll tell you the details afterwards. I've got the figures on paper. Anyway, Vanda will have enough to live upon. And on the strength of it I thought we'd better get married. Everybody doesn't get killed in the war. I don't see why I should be worse off than other men."

Later on he reverted again to his marriage; this time to Ian.

"Vanda has been working too hard in Warsaw," he said. "I can see that from her letters. She's not her old self. I want you to let her stop here till I can take care of her myself."

Ian did not answer for a moment; when he spoke it was with an effort.

"This is her home as long as she likes," he said. "But you mustn't forget that the Russians have been here twice and may come again. You wouldn't want her here then."

"I've thought of that. But they won't come so fast. And I'll let you know in time to get her out before they do. She wants a rest from that nursing business. It's wearing her out."

Ian's quick ears had detected the sound of wheels coming up the drive. He went to the window and looked out. A hired trap was making its way up to the house with that gallop for the avenue characteristic of hackney drivers in Eastern Europe. The garden was flooded with moonlight, which lighted up those on the trap. As it swung round by the front door, he saw two women sitting behind the driver. One was evidently a peasant, and beside her sat a slim, upright figure

dressed in dark clothes. He shut the window and turned to his cousin:

"She has come," he said.

XII

Next morning, Ian was up at daybreak, hurrying to his morning tasks, to get them over a little earlier than usual and have time for a chat with Vanda before breakfast. The Canon was coming at twelve, and would marry them immediately. Between breakfast and midday he had a great deal to do and could not expect to get five minutes alone with her.

Crossing to the farm, he met Joseph.

"You're up early," he remarked.

"Can't sleep. I'm so excited!" He laughed gaily.

"I hope Vanda is asleep. She looked awfully tired last night."

"Oh, she'll be all right in a little while. She's had too much hard work. The Princess ought not to have allowed it. She promised to get up in good time, too; I want every minute with her."

Ian glanced at him. So the old Joseph had not gone altogether. Ian would not have disturbed her so early if they were to part that day. She needed rest more than anything.

"Don't you think she has changed?" he asked. "It seemed to me last night she was different."

"Oh, nonsense! You know how devoted she is to me. And I to her, of course. Why, I love her a thousand times more than I did before I went to the Carpathians. You're getting a crusty old bachelor, full of odd ideas. *Au revoir*, I'm off to get a shave."

And he turned towards the house. Ian went into one of the fields which were being plowed. How sure Joseph was of his luck! Even if he heard from Vanda's own lips that she did not care for him he would refuse to believe it, put it down to fatigue, insist on their marriage all the same.

Ian was late for breakfast. The Countess alone lingered at the table, so that he should not have a solitary meal. They did not mention Vanda's name, but he asked if she had ordered the best luncheon possible, considered the menu, suggested one or two alterations. The best champagne in the cellars must be brought up–and some of the old Hungarian wine for dessert, as is the Polish

custom. She fondly thought that it was just like her boy to remember such details for other people's pleasure in the midst of his own pain. He spoke about a dowry, too, but here she was firm in her disapproval.

"It's absurd," she said. "Stephen is looking after Joseph. He is far better off now than we are or ever shall be again. And you know he always meant to leave everything to Joe and Roman. Keep your money. We shall want it badly enough before the war is over."

He said no more about it, but returned to the lunch.

"It would have been a better one if I'd known sooner," he remarked as they left the table. "However, the wine is all right. And they'll be too happy to notice what they are eating."

"Oh, Ianek, I do wish you hadn't promised him to keep her here," she exclaimed.

He took her face in his hands and kissed her white hair, laughing a little at her concern.

"Never mind, Mother. You've no idea how good plowing is for the sentiments."

This was another grievance. She exclaimed indignantly:

"To think you have to work like a peasant!"

"I want my crops. And when I've no manager, overseer or bailiff, and very few laborers, what can I do? It's good for me, I'm fit as a fiddle." And he made her feel the muscles on his arms, which were like iron.

"We seem to have become yeoman farmers," she said. "Oh, I'm not complaining for myself."

"Then don't worry about me," he rejoined cheerfully. "After all, we're a lot better off than most of our neighbors."

The wedding was over very quickly. Ian gave Vanda away because there was nobody else to do it. She wore a white frock which, oddly enough, he remembered quite well. Less than a year ago he had taken her and the Countess up to Warsaw for some racing, before she went to stay in the Grand Duchy. They had their usual rooms at the Europe, on the quiet side, away from the main street. There was a large sitting-room, with a balcony. The dress had come home at the last moment, whilst the car waited downstairs to take them to the course at Mokotov. She had put it on hastily and called him in from the balcony to look at it. He supposed that was why he remembered it so well. He would have given her a new one for the wedding, had he known she was coming so quickly. She looked very sweet in the old one, though. But his thoughts flew back to the sumptuous outfit he had planned for her, sables he had priced in Warsaw, whither he never returned, except to volunteer for the army; the guests he was to invite, entertaining them as Ruvno could entertain–once. And it had all turned out so differently.

There were no guests, no presents, no sables; not even an entire house. Nothing but ruined acres and dead hopes, and a pain in his heart such as he had never felt before.

He could not see her face as the ring was slipped on to her finger. He did not want to. He longed for the whole thing to be over and done with, the blessing bestowed, the healths drunk, the meal at an end, that he could go out into the sun and fresh air, working until bodily fatigue had numbed every other feeling.

Almost immediately after the marriage they sat down to table. He played his part decorously, without betraying himself, with a secret anger at the pain in his soul and determination to kill it. Even Minnie, who watched him closely, could find no fault. He was the lively host of peace days, but the champagne helped him there.

The Canon was in great form. He told all sorts of stories about the time when Rennankampf was lodged in his house and did his duty by food and drink as well. Then he rose to propose a toast. It was in verse. He had used it at every marriage feast he went to for the past twenty years. Even Vanda, youngest of the party, knew it off by heart; for all the author ever did was to change the names of bride and bridegroom; the body of the verses remained the same. No sooner was he on his feet, however, than they applauded him. Even Father Constantine, rather sleepy after his early rising and the old Tokay, woke up and said: "Bravo!"

"Ladies and gentlemen!" began the Canon, folding his hands over his well-filled soutane and beaming on them all: "Let us now drink to the health of the beautiful bride and gallant bridegroom, who—-"

He never got any further. At that moment, Martin approached Joseph and whispered in his ear. The Canon stopped, for he saw a new expression on the bridegroom's face.

"Anything wrong, Count?" he asked anxiously.

Joseph turned to Martin.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite. He is waiting at the door."

"I'm sorry..." He rose. "I'll be back in a moment."

But they all followed him to the door. A Cossack orderly stood there, his horse covered with sweat and he with dust. He saluted Joseph and said in Russian:

"I was to give you this personally—-"

And he produced a sealed envelope from one of his high boots.

Joseph tore it open, read the few words typed on a slip of paper inside, and turned white.

"To Hell with the war!" he cried savagely.

"What is it?" they all cried.

"I must go–at once."

"Oh–not a German advance?" asked Vanda apprehensively.

He crushed the paper in his hand and returned huskily, despair on his face:

"God knows. The orders are to report at Headquarters immediately. Oh, Vanda, it's Destiny. First the Germans, now the Russians take me from you."

"But you had a week's leave," said the Countess, whilst Vanda and her lover stood side by side, looking at each other in sorrow. "He can't go back on his word."

"It's imperative," said Joseph. Then to the soldier: "What's the news at Headquarters?"

"We're off at once. Galicia, they say." He swung into his saddle. "I'll get your horse, sir. Time presses." And with a salute which took in them all he went off to the stables.

In less than ten minutes Joseph was off, trotting down the avenue on his fleet horse, the soldier behind him. Farewells, admonitions, promises and good wishes were crowded into that short space of time. Ian could not forgive himself for his silence in the morning. They were not married an hour before Joseph left. He could have put it off for months, forever perhaps, had he only followed his better sense, instead of letting things slide, with true Slavonic fatalism, he told himself angrily.

But there was no use repining. He left the three women with the priests and returned to his work. He did not attempt to console Vanda, who stood on the steps where her husband had left her, watching him hurry away, waving her hands as he swung out into the road and was lost in the dust and the distance. He noticed that she was very pale, bewildered by the morning's rapid events and emotions, with tears in her eyes. He tried to read her thoughts, but could not.

So life once more returned to its old monotony. Vanda wore her wedding ring. But that was the only outward sign that she was no longer under Ian's guardianship. Letters came to her from Joseph, who wrote of getting leave in the summer. She helped Minnie with the few wounded civilians still left in the house and slipped into her old place again. Ian seldom spoke to her, avoided her eyes at table where he kept up a general conversation in English, for Minnie's benefit. As spring advanced he found more work to keep mind and body occupied. By dint of getting the most out of himself and the labor still left at his disposal he managed to put enough land under crops to feed Ruvno and its population for two years, and perhaps sell some grain as well. And this gave him as much satisfaction as it would have given any small farmer. And it made him feel young again to see the land regain some measure of its old prosperous aspect, though many a broad acre was cut up into trenches. Peasants who had escaped to Warsaw during the December campaign now returned, vowing that nothing would induce them to leave home again. True, most of them were obliged to live in trenches or in

the open, for their villages existed only in name; but as the warm weather came on this was no great hardship and they felt so glad to get back to the soil that they forgot past troubles and set out to cultivate their fields with the indomitable courage of their race.

XIII

The inmates of Ruvno thought they had witnessed all the wrack and vicissitudes of war; of advancing armies, entrenched armies, foraging armies, looting armies; of wounds, pollution and death. They had yet to see a retreating army.

By July the Russians were in full retreat.

Day and night they went by. Cursing, sweating, bleeding, limping; hungry, thirsty, weary, their eyes aglow with the smouldering fires of rage, disappointment and all the bitterness of recession; without haste, without hope they tramped past, to fall back upon the Nieman, the Pripet and the Dnieper, leaving Poland to the Prussian Antichrist.

At times, some of them stood to give fight, covering the retreat of the armies' bulk. Then, though these battles of despair were far from Ruvno, the ground shook under them, a very earthquake; the few trees left were stript of their leaves till it looked as though winter and not August, were upon them. The Russians had no ammunition; the rumbling and shaking came from their enemies. And this is why there were smouldering fires in the tired soldiers' eyes; it was a nightmare to try and beat off a modern army with lances, rifle-butts and sticks. One morning a lot of soldiers halted in the village. Having exhausted what water there was, for a drought had been added to the peasants' troubles, some sought the house. Ian went out to them. One, a giant with blue eyes, feverbright and dry, was holding forth to the servants in a frenzy of impotent rage. His uniform was in tatters, his boots a mass of torn leather, held together God knows how. His dirty blouse was open to the chest, where the blood had clotted on a stale wound. In his hand was a stout oaken club, which he waved about as he shouted and swore.

"What could I do with this? Tell me, what could I do? A stick to beat off the German swine. Son of a dog, what could I do? Never a rifle since we left the Lakes. My knife gone, too." He meant his bayonet. "Mother of God, to think of it! Not a hundred rounds to the whole regiment! But I killed three dog's sons with

it!" He wildly struck the air; all fell back in terror of their lives. "See! like this. One! Two! Three! Smashing in their skulls like I hammer the horseshoes on the anvil at home. Look at their dog's blood on it–look ye, and tremble!"

Father Constantine, who had come out, insisted on dressing his wound, and found two others, only half healed. But he was built like Hercules, this blacksmith from a village of Tula; they could tell he was in a high fever; some men march a couple of days and more in such a state, the kit on their backs, and none the worse for it in the end. For these sons of Rus are hardened from their birth and as strong as the beasts they tend at home. He was indignant with the old priest for bringing out some simple remedies.

"What are you doing, *Pop*?" he shouted. "The surgeon dressed it last night, or last week, I forget when. I tore it off me. How can I bear the feel of rags in this nightmare? I'll go naked to the day of Judgment, by God I will."

And he proceeded to strip, flinging his ragged garments to right and left, as the wild Cossacks do when they have had too much *vodka* and dancing. The maids rushed off in horror; but another giant, his comrade, managed to calm him and cover his huge, brawny body, where the muscles stood out as hard as iron under skin white as a woman's; for the Russians of his part are fair. Father Constantine gave him a cooling draught and did what he could for his wounds, which must have smarted terribly under the iodine; but he never groaned. He was lying on his back now, breathing heavily, eyes closed, hands clasping the club with all the strength of fever.

"He'll kill us if he keeps it," observed his comrade, whose head was encased in dirty bandages. "He has been mad with fever since last sunset ... but we can't find room in an ambulance for him and he lays out whenever we try to take it away."

"I'll lay out at all the ministers when I get to Petrograd!" bawled the patient, springing up and upsetting the Father. Worse than that, he sent over the bottle of iodine, too, and they were very short of it. "Son of a dog, I'll have them all, crush their skulls like walnuts. The war minister first, for sending us sticks instead of guns ... and then the intendant, for these boots." Here he flung one across the yard, where it stuck on to the well-handle. "I'll murder every dog's son of them–by God, I will, till we clean Russia of thieves and swine."

And so he went on, raving at everybody and everything, till he had shouted himself tired. Then he lay down in the shade of the stables and slept uneasily. Ian wanted to send him to bed, which was the only fit place for him. The officer in charge demurred, said he did not think the man was ill enough to risk being found here by the enemy, who could not be kept off more than a few days. He had orders to retreat with as few losses as possible. When Ian finally gained his point, promising to send him on by the first ambulance that passed, the man himself

refused to stop behind. He wasn't going to leave his comrades; he didn't trust priests ... this one had burned him with poison and tried to take away his only weapon, so that he would not even be able to crack German skulls when they came up.

They watched them march off; the giant, quieter now, staggered between two limping comrades who helped him along, though they had all their work cut out to put one sore foot before the other. When they reached the bend in the road they began to sing, in unison, as Russians do. And Father Constantine's heart went out to those brave, simple souls, and he prayed that they might reach the Nieman in safety.

At first this was the only army Ruvno saw–a host of men, way-worn but strong. But soon came the vanguard of another legion, a ghastly, straggling horde of old men, women and children, fleeing before the invaders. Some of them carried a kettle–all that remained of their worldly goods; others had harnessed skinny, starving nags to their long, narrow carts, piled with bedding, a quilt or two, a table or a stool. Here and there could be seen a sack of potatoes or buckwheat between the wooden bars; but this was rare indeed, because these unhappy people had nothing left in barn or cellar. And the women. They trailed on with their little ones; with children who could walk or toddle, with infants in arms, with babes at the breast, with babes yet unborn, destined to see the first light of a tempestuous world from the roadside, whilst jostling humanity passed indifferently by, benumbed with a surfeit of ordeal and pain. The household could do little for these poor wretches.

In one group of misery they saw a priest–a young man he was. Father Constantine chided him.

"Why did you let them leave their homes?" he asked. "Can't you see half of them are doomed to die in the ditch?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked at his questioner with the dull eyes of a man steeped in despair.

"What could I do?" was his wail. "The Russians drove us out of house and home."

"The Prussians, you mean," corrected Ian.

"I mean what I say. The Cossacks burnt the grain in the fields. Then they set fire to the village." He cursed them with unpriestly words, but even Father Constantine had not the will to stop him.

"If there had been one cottage left, one sack of buckwheat, I could have persuaded them to stop," he concluded. "But the sight of the burning fields and the charred walls of their homes filled them with panic. All our younger men are in the army, and we had only the scorched earth left. If we ever reach Warsaw we shall get somewhere to lay our heads and a sup to put in our mouths."

Ian gave them some food for their journey, for that other retreating army paid these unfortunates no attention. They had two young mothers in the house. One Vanda found in the ditch outside the paddock. Ian cut down the household rations for these fugitives, because his stock had run low, and the horde came on unceasingly. He had ordered fresh supplies from Warsaw nearly a month back; but there was no hope of getting them now. His new grain was ready to cut, and he set about it in haste, lest bad luck befall it.

Two days later, the stream of humanity still passed by. Many halted to beg for food, water. Ian gave both, though he could only afford the water, for his generosity of the last few days diminished the stores in an alarming way. So he had to harden his heart and give far less. The country for versts round was being laid waste. Every group of refugees told the same tale of destruction and ruin. On this particular morning passed some peasants of Stara Viesz. They told a ghastly story. They were cutting the crops when the Cossacks came up and began firing the grain as it stood in the fields. The reapers turned upon them with their scythes; a fierce fight followed. The Cossacks, having spent all their ammunition on the Germans, had but their spears left–and the peasants got the best of it, beating off the destroying *sotnia*, who left dead and wounded amongst the corn. But much of the grain was burnt and some of the cottages caught fire, for a strong east wind was blowing. The villagers who now passed had nothing left. Those lucky enough to save field or hut remained behind.

"If we can only reach Warsaw we shall be saved," said their spokesman. They had one cart left, for four families. Three had been abandoned because the horses dropped dead upon the road.

They all looked to Warsaw as a haven of rest and plenty. And an officer told Ian the Grand Duke had decided not to defend that city, but to evacuate it and leave it to the Prussians. This news was so bad that he had not the courage to tell it them. After all, they would not go back to their ruined homes. Ian and the priest used all their eloquence in trying to persuade them to it. But they refused. Terror was upon them. Perhaps they were right; why go back to starvation?

"Why don't the Russians give us food? They made us leave our homes," was the cry on everybody's lips. Ian could not answer them. So helpless did he feel that the temptation came to shut himself up in the top story rather than see suffering which he could not relieve. And he, too, asked himself why the Russians drove these peasants from their homes. What was the good of it? Those who did not die on the road would only swell the beggar population of Moscow and Petrograd; for they were destitute, though war found them prosperous men, with land and savings, too. These sad, ragged, homeless crowds would only stir up discontent in Russia. And the farms and holdings they had been forced to leave would give the Prussians room to put their own colonists. He was relieved to see

that very few priests were among the refugees. When he or Father Constantine asked a panic-stricken group where their priest was the answer always came:

"He would not leave those who stopped behind."

Again anxiety haunted the House. There was Joseph. He had given no sign for a month. He had been so emphatic in his last letters about sending word when Vanda ought to leave that they almost gave him up as dead. But though there was no longer any doubt that the Germans would be in Ruvno before long she refused to leave. Neither Ian nor the Countess insisted. The retreat had come so unexpectedly that they found themselves cut off from Warsaw, the only road to Russia left open, without a day's notice. There were no trains but for the army, and few enough for that. Ian had not a pair of horses left capable of taking her twelve versts, let alone to Warsaw; and he doubted if she could get away from there. Minnie was kept by the same reasons, that is, devotion to Ruvno and fear of sharing the fate of those fugitives they saw pass night and day. Then there was Roman. So many Cossacks went by but Ian vainly sought his face amongst them. Some remembered Roman well; but they had not seen him for months, they said. One thought he had been taken prisoner in Masuria; another, who seemed to have known him better than the rest, said he was reported missing as far back as last October. Ian questioned Father Constantine when he heard this, asking exactly what happened that night when Joseph escaped to the chapel. The old man repeated his story and said:

"Ian, I can tell you no more. Our little family is broken up. God knows when it will be reunited. Perhaps not till death binds us together."

Then, perhaps more pressing than all, was anxiety about the crops. It was quite possible the Cossacks would fire them before they left. Some were cut; but most of them still stood, not ready for harvest. And Ian, watching the Cossacks' lack of fodder for their horses, trembled for the fate of his haystacks and barns, where there was hay. The retreating army grew fiercer, more and more antagonistic towards the civil population of the country it had to abandon. The officers could keep in their men when they liked; but the officers themselves were often at little pains to hide their hostility, though the majority treated Ian and his property with consideration. But a retreating army is rougher and more turbulent than an advancing, or entrenched army. God forgive them! They knew all the wretchedness of failure. Rage and disappointment had hold of them. Some Cossacks stopped in Ruvno; they were those who remembered Roman Skarbek. They kept mostly to the village, but Ian wished they would go. One night their commander told him that the Prussians would be there very soon, and it was time to make up his mind as to what he was going to do. Ian told him he had long ago made up his mind to stay. But he called up the chief men from the village, a deputation chosen by the rest. The message he sent was for service in the chapel;

though he did have the service, the real purpose was to discuss the situation; but the Cossacks looked askance at him when they heard he had decided to stay in Ruvno, so he had to be careful. They kept watch day and night from the church tower in the village, either to direct the Russian fire on the Prussians or else to watch for their coming. Several times they warned the villagers to leave before their homes were razed to the ground. Some peasants were for taking their advice and going to Warsaw. Hence the meeting.

"The time has come for you to make up your minds," he said when he had them all in the little sacristy. "Are you going to leave your land and follow the retreating army, or to stop here and stick to your fields?"

"What is the House going to do?" asked the *soltys*, or head of the village community.

"We stop here so long as there is a roof over us."

A murmur of approval greeted this. Ian went on:

"But I don't want you to be guided by what I and the Lady Countess are doing. You know what is going on as well as I do."

"Ay. All the devils have taken the Muscovites," said a voice.

"Thousands of peasants, once rich, like yourselves, pass on their way to Warsaw," said Ian.

"Please, my lord Count," put in the *soltys*, "it's Siberia and not Warsaw they are going to. The Cossacks down in the village are talking a lot about it. The Russian government is offering the fugitives land in Siberia and work in the mines. It's not fair. This has been our land for centuries, long before the Russians came here at all. And I, for one, and my three young sons, are for stopping here. They can but burn our crops and cottages. Haven't the Cossacks done that?"

A low growl of anger filled the room. The old man went on:

"But when they've burnt the crops and our huts and stacks they've done their worst. They can't take away the land, even if they bring all the carts they've got. The land remains. And I remain. For I'd rather starve through another winter on my own soil than have the biggest farm they can give me in Siberia."

They talked a lot, arguing and disputing, as peasants do. But you cannot hurry them, so Ian and the priest waited for them in the chapel. After an hour, when each had had his say, Baranski came out.

"Well, what have you decided?" Ian asked with secret anxiety. It is no joke to be left in a big place like Ruvno without any peasants.

"Sir," answered the *soltys*, who had followed Baranski, "we have decided that each man may take his choice, and that the man who takes his family from Ruvno, to join that poor starving mob on the road outside, is stupid and a fool. If God wills that we shall die, we can die here. We have two months yet of warm weather, and the crops, thank God, are not so bad, considering the trenches we've

had put upon us. We can mend up our cottages and prepare for the winter. The Muscovites are retreating as hard as they can. So I don't see that there'll be any more battles in this part for some time. We can plow and sow in the autumn as usual. That's how most of us think. The others can go, if they like."

Next day Ian heard that the majority had decided to stop. The sight of those refugees haunted them.

XIV

On the day when the peasants decided to stop in Ruvno Ian had a visitor. It was none other than the narrow-eyed Colonel who was in the same house at the beginning of the war, when Rennenkampf came and Roman with him; when Father Constantine had vainly interceded that Roman might not be obliged to shoot his own brother.

The family, even to the Countess, was busy in field and barn. For the first time in her life she had taken to manual labor. But the peasant proprietors were hurrying to get in their own crops; Ian's men had been sadly thinned and he was therefore short-handed. One idea possessed them all: to gather in what they could before some enraged soldiers passed and took next year's food from them.

Well, the Colonel drove up to the house, made a great noise with his motor and was finally answered by Father Constantine, who appeared on the scene, rake in hand.

"I want to see the Count," said the Russian, saluting.

"He is with the others, at the home-farm. If you will go there." He recognized the man, but saw that his memory was better than the visitor's.

"I must see him alone. Please tell him so."

In due course Ian arrived. He was in his shirtsleeves and had on an old pair of white flannel trousers, formerly worn for tennis. He had been stacking hay. Father Constantine very much afraid that Roman's name would come up, had followed. The Colonel came to the point without delay.

"The sooner you and your peasants leave this the better," he said gruffly. "We can't hold it any longer. The enemy may be here at any moment."

"The peasants have made up their minds to stay," said Ian.

"And you?"

"I never thought of leaving."

The soldier's narrow eyes hardened. He was of those who thought it every civilian's duty to follow in his retreat. He drew himself up and spoke rather sharply. But he was still civil, knowing well that the master of Ruvno was no squireen, to be treated with contempt. Ian, for his part, was slightly hostile. He knew the man for his anti-Polish feelings, kept in check when things were going well, but ready to leap out into action now that misfortune was upon them all. Besides, Ian had seen those fugitives, and no man could look upon them without thinking that the army, even in retreat, might have done something to alleviate their sufferings, even if it were but to leave them their corn.

"Count, you don't understand. I repeat: the Prussians are coming. Surely you are not going to wait to welcome the Czar's enemies."

"Nobody hates the Prussians more than I," he rejoined. "If I leave Ruvno I shall be a beggar. Besides, it's my home."

"Russia is wide."

"And the road long. No, Colonel. We have lived here, peasant and master, father and son, through many wars, many invasions. For me and my mother there can be no choice, so long as a roof remains for us here. As to my peasants, I left them free to choose, said not a word for or against. But they have seen those crowds–" he pointed towards the road, where the weary stream of homeless humanity struggled on towards the unknown. "The old and sick left to die alone, children hungry, mothers exhausted. They made up their minds that it is better to die here than in ditches between this and Moscow."

"You accuse us of neglecting the refugees," cried the Colonel, red to his hair-roots.

"No. This is war. The weak and poor and aged suffer most. But I claim the right to choose between two kinds of suffering."

"Do as you please. But you'll all starve. I'm giving orders to burn the crops."

Ian turned white at this. For months he had been fighting against starvation. Every waking thought had been connected with the problem of how to feed those dependent on him for the ensuing year. Even his dreams had been of crops and storms and war agriculture. He had risen with the dawn to plow and till and sow. No landless peasant, hiring himself by the day, had worked harder than the lord of Ruvno. And now, when the fruit of his labors was ripening in these fields so thinned by rapine, trenches and mines; when, by dint of untold effort and determination he had overcome difficulties none dreamed of a year ago, this soldier threatened to fire the little that remained to fill his garners. Controlling himself with an effort, he said:

"And how will you feed us all?"

"In Warsaw."

"You're leaving Warsaw to its fate," retorted Ian. "And you know it."

The man looked perfectly furious at this, and would have burst out, but Ian went on, that tone of authority that Father Constantine knew well in his voice. He said:

"Listen. I had the Grand Duke's promise, last week, that Ruvno will be left intact so long as it or its village is inhabited. You know as well as I do that, where Nicolai Nicolaievitch has been, no villages or crops are ruined wantonly by his retreating army, and no peasants driven to the road against their will. If you tamper with my house or my people, who are half-starved even now, I swear to you that not only the Grand Duke, but the Czar himself shall hear of it."

The Colonel bit his lip and stalked off, fuming with suppressed passion. He knew that the Grand Duke was friendly here. He must have known, too, that Poland's old foes, the Russian bureaucrats, were responsible for driving people off their land by sheer force and doing nothing to help them on their exile into the most distant parts of the Russian Empire. In silence Ian and his chaplain watched him motor up to the nearest fields and inspect them. They were meager enough, God knows, cut as they were by trenches. As to the potatoes, they would not be ready for a couple of months, and last year's had gone long ago. They watched him anxiously. Was he going to fire the corn or not? He wanted to, it was plain, if only to show a ruined Polish nobleman that his word was law. He prowled round and then went back to the high-road, stopping some of the refugees and talking to them. Even after they heard his hooter from the village their eyes still clung to the yellow fields, fearing to see smoke. He went off at sundown without so much as a salute. But he evidently thought it risky to quarrel with Ian, and did not fire the crops. With a sigh of relief Ian glanced across at Father Constantine. They had finished the stack and were going in to supper.

"Thank God!" he muttered. "But don't say anything to the others."

"Of course not. But look, what is that?"

On the horizon they saw columns of smoke and a dull red glare; others had not been so fortunate.

The old priest had been trembling with fear all the time lest the Colonel should remember Joseph, and make him an excuse for burning the place. But he had evidently forgotten all about the incident last autumn. So much the better.

Next morning Ian, Vanda and Minnie, with a couple of maids, started out with the reaping machine. Ian, of course, was in charge, and the girls, willing but inexperienced, were to work under him. Since the Colonel's visit he had been in a perfect fever of haste to cut whatever corn was ripe. He left his mother and Father Constantine at the home farm, with admonitions that neither of them must overwork. These two old friends were in the farmyard when some of the Cossacks who had been so busy about the village and amidst the remains of the home forest, came clattering up on their little horses. A young officer was with

them. He saluted the Countess, and said civily, in broken Polish:

"Lady–I must ask you for that reaping machine I saw here yesterday."

"Oh–are you going to reap our fields for us?" she returned gaily. "That would be very nice of you."

The youth looked sheepishly at her, but said nothing.

"Well–what do you want it for?" she insisted.

"Lady–I'm sorry. But your reaping machine contains steel and other metals; and we have orders to take every ounce of steel and iron and copper away."

The Countess looked at her chaplain in silent consternation. The old man, ever ready to help her, sharply told the officer to be off. The Cossack was not so civil to him.

"No nonsense," he said. "Where is it?"

"But I protest against having my place looted," cried the Countess.

"Lady, I'm sorry. I would not take a nail from Ruvno. But orders are orders. See here," and he pulled a slip of paper from his boot, dismounted and took it to her.

She waved it aside.

"It's Greek to me–I don't understand this taking everything."

"No. I–Lady Countess, I say again, I'm very sorry. But I'm only a poor Cossack, to obey orders. Where is the machine? We have to be off–or the Germans will take us–and the metals."

"My son has gone out with it," she said shortly. "You'd take the shoes from our feet if you'd the time."

"No–I would take nothing. Whereabouts is your son with his machine?"

She pointed angrily southwards. The direction was vague. The man looked at the sun, which was getting high.

"He'll be back at midday?"

"I doubt it. He has much to do."

He turned to his men.

"Children! Hasten. Do you go and fetch the bells."

"What bells?" cried the priest in alarm. But nobody answered. The Cossacks left the yard and trotted towards the chapel. Father Constantine hastened after them, the Countess after him. But as the way was rather long and their feet older than they thought, they arrived before the chapel just in time to see the Cossack's take down the three bells and put them on as many horses. One had been cast four hundred years before by an Italian who did much work in the neighborhood. The other two were modern, but of good workmanship.

"And they've taken the bell that used to hang up in the home farmyard," said the Countess ruefully, as a Cossack they had not noticed before came up with it.

Father Constantine had not recovered from the shock of seeing his beloved bells slung across the Cossack saddles, when she gave another cry of anger. Several more Cossacks had come up. Their horses were laden with the copper pots and pans from the kitchen.

"It's as bad as if the Prussians were here," she exclaimed. "What do they imagine we're to cook with?"

The young officer, who had been to the kitchen, now went up to her. His face was crimson.

"Lady Countess, I regret this as much as you do–" he began.

"I doubt it," she retorted.

"... And church bells," put in Father Constantine.

"I wanted," said the youth earnestly, "God knows I wanted to leave Ruvno, where we have had so much kindness, as we found it. But the orders are explicit. We are not to leave any metal at all–which may serve the Prussians."

"It seems to me that between our friends and foes we shall have nothing left but the bare ground," she said.

But she protested no more. What was the good? She and the Father watched them pack up all the rest of the pots and pans in rueful silence. Before starting the young officer approached her again, his cap in hand, his long, shaggy locks all loose and dangling in his eyes.

"My Lady Countess," he said earnestly, "won't you please come with us? I have a spare horse or two and will see you don't put foot to soil till we reach Sohaczer. The Germans will not treat you well. We can pick up your son and the young ladies on our way."

"It seems to me that you have left nothing for the Germans to take," she remarked, but not angrily this time. There comes a point where civilians, in the war zone, cease to protest. It is not so much dumb despair, as a knowledge that their words are vain when the "military" come along. They are but spectators of their own ruin.

"Russia is wide," he said simply. "I am a wealthy Cossack at home. If you will come with us I'll see that you reach my farm in safety. My old mother will look after you, and you'll lack nothing, till the war is over."

This touched her. She answered warmly:

"Ah–that is good of you–but I cannot leave my land. Thank you all the same."

He waited a moment after this, saw she meant what she said, and pressed her no more, but wished them both good-bye and good luck, kissing her hand and saluting the priest.

"I am sorry you won't come," he said, mounting his horse. "The Germans won't be good to you."

And he left them reluctantly, followed by his men. The Countess laughed at the odd figures they cut, with her bells and saucepans tied to their saddles; but there were tears in her eyes all the same. When they were out of sight she and the Father returned to their work in the farmyard. They were still there, two hours later, when Martin came running into the barn.

"My lady," he panted, more from emotion than fatigue; "the Prussian brutes are here. One of their officers, who gives his name as Graf von Senborn, wants to speak to my Lord the Count."

"The Count is in the fields. Tell this officer I will see him. Bring him here," said the Countess.

She had on a cotton apron and a kerchief such as peasant women wear. She and the priest looked at one another with uneasiness; they had hoped against hope that the Prussians would keep off till their crops were in a safe place; they had hoped that the invaders would not care to put up at Ruvno, almost denuded of wine and as desolate as could be after nearly a year's war, comforting themselves with the thought that there were places, nearer Warsaw, likely to attract them better. The clank of spurs sounded on the stones; a moment later an officer, whose face was vaguely familiar to the priest, swaggered into the huge barn. Some girls were working at the far end, and stopped to look at him. He saluted and said:

"Where are the Cossacks?"

"They left an hour ago," said Father Constantine, racking his brains to remember where they had met before.

"Is that so?" he asked the Countess.

"Yes. They took the chapel bells and the copper things out of my kitchen. For the rest, you can search the place."

He eyed her with a certain interest. I suppose he had never seen a grand lady stacking before, except, perhaps, for the fun of it. And she was not very quick at the work, for even stacking is hard to learn when you are no longer young. He looked lean, hard, well-bred; a very different type from the man who so nearly carried off their stores last winter. He spoke French fluently, though with true German gutturalness. The others went on with their work.

"That is hard work, *Madame*," he said after a bit.

"These are hard times, *Monsieur*," she returned gravely. "The war has left us little but our health and our determination to make the best of things."

"I always heard that Polish ladies have high courage," he went on, with a stiff Teutonic bow. "And now I see it for myself."

"Courage is one of the few things war does not destroy," put in the priest.

The Prussian gave him a glance, as if he were trying to think where they had met before. His face was a worry to the Father. Where, oh where had he seen the man?

"*Madame*," he resumed, when he had stared at Father Constantine a second time. "Allow me to put some of my men to this stacking. They are rough peasants and will get it done in no time."

She hesitated, then accepted his offer, which the priest was glad of. She had been working hard since the early morning, and looked very tired. He called some troopers and set them to work with short, dry words of command, which they obeyed with alacrity. Then he went with the Countess and her chaplain into the house, asking all sorts of questions about it. Of course he had heard of Ruvno and its now ruined glories. And when the Countess left them to rest, he questioned Father Constantine about the plate, jewels, and especially the emeralds. The priest answered him as best he could, and they gradually lapsed into silence. He sat in one of Ian's easy chairs smoking a cigar. Suddenly he got up and said:

"Take me to the Countess' wardrobe."

Father Constantine stared at him in amazement. Hitherto his manners had been such an improvement on those of preceding Prussians that he could scarce believe his ears.

"Do you hear? To her wardrobe," he repeated, with a shade of sternness.

"What for?"

He laughed.

"She has no need for old laces and sables, now she works on the farm," he answered.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Father Constantine angrily.

The Graf's face flushed; he broke into German.

"I'm master here. And I command you to take me up to the Countess' wardrobe. You'll find, if you persist in your refusal, that my men can do other things besides stacking."

And now that he was in a rage and had fallen back to his native tongue, the priest recognized him. And his own wrath grew.

"So, Graf von Senborn," he cried, "you're a true follower of the Crown Prince, your master. He loots in Belgium; you in Poland. How many Polish children have you tormented since I met you at Zoppot?"

"Ah–you're the little priest who refused to salute His Imperial Highness," he retorted, forgetting furs and laces for the moment. "It's a pity I didn't chuck you into the Baltic, I should have saved myself the trouble of having your miserable body hanged up on a tree now."

He made towards the old man, who stood firm, because he did not care if he were hanged. But he did want to speak his mind first.

"I wish your evil-faced Crown Prince were here, too," he said, as fast as he could, lest the Prussian strike him down before he spoke his mind. "I'll tell that

son of the Anti-Christ what none of his sycophants dare speak of—-"

"Some of your Polish plots again?"

"No plots, but the vengeance of the Almighty. Hell-fires await him and his friends for all the deviltries you—-"

Strong hands were round the thin throat; Father Constantine felt his last moment had come. But there arose a great noise and shouting outside. Von Senborn threw down his victim, as you would cast off a cat whose claws have been cut, and rushed into the garden. He suspected treachery. Father Constantine picked himself up and followed. There were things he wanted to tell him yet, things which had lain heavy on his soul for many a long day.

He was in the garden, surrounded by bawling troopers, who were very excited. Four of them held two Cossacks. Two of them held Ian. Vanda was there, too; she rushed up to the priest; she was in tears.

"Oh, Father, they've arrested him ... and he knows nothing about it."

"About what?"

"These Cossacks. They were hiding in one of the lofts. They had matches. He says"–she indicated von Senborn–"they were going to burn the troopers as they slept."

"Found any more?" von Senborn asked some men who came up now.

"Not one."

The officer turned to Ian.

"You're to blame for this."

"I know nothing about it."

"Do you know what we do to people who hide the enemy?" von Senborn pursued. "We shoot them."

"He knows nothing about it," put in one of the Cossacks, and got a kick for his pains.

"Nothing," said Ian. Was this the last moment of his life? He spoke up; but his words were of no avail.

"Oh, please listen to me," cried Vanda, in agony. "He knows nothing about it. We have been harvesting since six in the morning ... away over there." She pointed towards the south. "Everybody says the Cossacks left at eleven."

"Nobody knew of our hiding but our ataman," said another Cossack. "Shoot us you can. But the Count is innocent."

They did not even trouble to kick this one, who protested and defended Ian in vain. Ian defended himself, too, but he felt all along how useless his words were. What was about to happen to him had happened thousands of times since last July. He remembered Zosia's sister in Kalisz. Father Constantine felt his poor old head swimming with the agony of the thought. Nothing more terrible than this could have occurred. He, too, saw that von Senborn had made up his mind.

"You were found near the Cossacks," the latter argued. "You're guilty." Then he turned to Vanda: "Go into the house. Keep the Countess there and away from the windows. When I've shot him I'll tell her myself."

"I hid them! Shoot me!" cried Vanda, throwing herself at his feet "For the love of God, spare him. He went out at six. The Cossacks left at eleven. How could he know? Take me instead! He is wanted more than I!"

"Vanda! Vanda!" cried Ian, struggling to get away from those who held him. "Don't believe her!" he cried to von Senborn. "She's as innocent as I am. If you must shoot somebody, shoot me."

Von Senborn looked from one to the other; but his face did not soften.

"You're wasting time," he said to her. "Go into the house."

She went up to Ian. They gazed at each other, reading the secret each had guarded too long. Her eyes were full of love as well as misery; his face, under its sunburn, was white as hers.

"Can nothing be done?" she wailed.

"Go to Mother. Don't let her see."

As her eyes lingered on his face his heart ached; many bitter thoughts and feelings rose within his soul. He wrenched an arm from one of his captors.

"Leave me!" he ordered. "I'll not run away."

At a sign from their officer the two troopers loosened their hold and stepped back a couple of paces, leaving the cousins together. They said little; for at such moments human lips have not much to say. Hearts are too full of words; words too poor to be heart's mouthpiece. He knew now, when it was too late, that she loved him, that she had always loved him, that Joseph was but an incident, mostly of his making; that he loved her, that the happiest hours of their joint lives had been spent together in his old home, in his large, cool forests, by the frozen river, under the broad grayness of a northern sky; over the crisp snow and flower-decked meadows; on his sleek, fleet horses, in his swift-running sleighs, whose bells made jangled music in the frosted air; in every season of God's good year, in every phase of his pleasant, long-dead life, he and she had been all in all, she the key to his happiness, the gate to that earthly paradise which he had shunned till Joseph closed it to him. And he, in his blindness and procrastination, learnt about it too late.

"Oh–what we have lost!" he murmured, locking her in a long embrace.

"Ian–Ian–my darling!" she sobbed.

This was all; and in broken words, choked with sobs.

The faithful old priest gently separated them at last, for he saw von Senborn was going to do it. He took her to the long window which led into the Countess' favorite room. She was crying bitterly, but without sobs, forcing them down lest she make it yet harder for Ian.

They bandaged his eyes. He refused at first; but the sight of that landscape, familiar in its desolation, dear to him yet, was more than he could bear. Oh, to leave life thus, when others were dying like men! And how dear was life, despite ruin and war and uncertainty! How many things he had meant to do; how much more happiness he might have had before this cataclysm fell upon them! Then thought turned to his mother.

"I must speak to my chaplain," he said in the firm voice of a man accustomed to obedience.

"You dare not murder him without shrift," he heard the priest say. He had left Vanda in the house and was returning hurriedly. A moment later his thin, shaking hand was on Ian's arm.

"Three minutes," said von Senborn's voice, impatient now. "Make the most of your time."

Hastily, the priest gave his quondam pupil what comfort he could. Then Ian whispered:

"Take the women away at once. You may yet reach Warsaw. Then with Mother to Rome. The Cardinal is all she'll have left but Vanda. Don't forget the jewels."

"Yes, yes. Courage, my boy. Don't worry for us."

"I have that, thank God. Good-bye, Father. Get away at once. All of you."

Von Senborn came up, saying:

"You must leave him now, Father."

Catching a shade of regret in his voice, Father Constantine pleaded for his dear patron's life, using all the eloquence and arguments he had. Not unkindly, the Prussian pushed him aside.

"Can't you see you're making it harder for him?" he cried. Then he called up his men, who ranged in front of their victim. Father Constantine said prayers for the passing of that beloved soul across the gulf that leads into eternity. Ian listened for his death-order, his back to the wall, determined to show these Prussians he could meet a dog's death like a man.

"Ready!" von Senborn's voice rang out.

"Oh, Mother!" shouted Ian. And this is not strange, because when life is going, a man's thoughts and heart turn to her who gave it him.

The men pointed their muskets. Von Senborn's mouth was open to give the word of command that was to send Ian to the unseen world when his name was called loudly, a few yards away.

"Von Senborn! Quick! Quick!"

With a gesture of annoyance he turned round. The men still pointed their arms; but they did not shoot. Ian, expecting that every leaden-footed second would bring the fatal word, whose nerves were strained almost beyond en-

durance, thanked God for Prussian discipline. He heard footsteps, and hope arose in his heart. Perhaps the Russians were back again. Father Constantine, through his tears, saw another Prussian officer hurrying towards them.

"I've captured a *sotnia* of Cossacks ... and a ton of copper," he cried, his voice full of life and triumph. Then he saw Ian.

"What are you doing?"

Von Senborn told him.

"I know your voice," cried Ian. "You talked to me in the fields this morning ... for God's sake tell him I'm innocent."

The two Prussians looked at one another. Ian felt sick with emotion. Those minutes were the longest he ever lived, whilst the new-comer had his eyes uncovered and looked at him earnestly.

"Yes," he said at last. "I talked to you in the field. You told me your name. It was seven o'clock. The Cossacks did not leave this till eleven. They own it themselves. Let's have their captain up."

They did. The officer who had offered the shelter of his Cossack farm to the Countess came up. He said, in an undertone, to the priest:

"I told you to leave. I knew the men were here, hiding." Then to the Prussians, in very bad German:

"I'm your prisoner. I've nothing to lose or gain by seeing this Polish Count shot. He knew naught about my men hiding. He was in the fields with a reaping machine I happened to want. He left here hours before I hid the men."

"That's it," said the other Prussian officer. "Don't be an ass, von Senborn."

Von Senborn turned to Ian.

"You can go."

Ian burst into a shout of joy. Father Constantine fell upon his knees and thanked God for this miraculous escape.

XV

Towards dawn a shell fell near the house. It was followed by another, and yet another, but these were nearer the village. Ian went out, to try and see if he ought to send his household into the cellars. At the front door he found von Senborn, struggling with complicated locks and bolts. He said he was going out to reconnoiter. Ian let him go alone, having no wish for his company. He knew

that the Russians were in telephone communication with Lipniki at any rate, if not with the more distant centers they had occupied during the last few days.

As the sun rose and the household began to stir, Martin, the faithful old butler, being first on the scene, a couple of maids following, von Senborn came back. He took no notice of Ian except to ask where the baron's window was. It happened to be over the spot where they stood. Von Senborn aroused his friend with a shout. In the fullness of time a shock-head appeared at the window.

"Come down," von Senborn cried in his native tongue. "The Russians have made a stand."

"Where?" asked the baron sleepily.

"God knows. They are shelling Lipniki like the devil. Our losses are already heavy. I'm going back to the telephone."

He strode off. The shock-head disappeared. Ian went to his bath; and the whole village soon knew that the Germans in Lipniki were having a very bad time of it, whilst their friends in Ruvno were breaking their heads to know what to make out of the Russian awakening. Where had those fools found ammunition? Where were they firing from? Who was spying for them? There were no Russian aeroplanes about, yet the news from Lipniki grew worse and worse.

This development made the Prussians very sullen, but the household could barely hide their joy. Later on, news came in that the Russians, retreating beyond Kosczielna, had found more ammunition and were using it with good effect. Firing seemed pretty near all that day. Ian and the others hoped it would send these men off to help their friends; but not a bit of it. More Prussians came up and settled themselves just outside the village. The house was full of officers, and it was worth something to see their disappointment when they found out that all the wine had been drunk, all the lace looted and all the plate sent to Moscow.

As a matter of fact, this new phase was Ruvno's undoing. If the Russians had not been firing on Lipniki it would probably have escaped the worst of its troubles. As it was, von Senborn worked his vengeance upon the innocent household.

On the second day von Senborn sent for Ian just as he was going out to the fields. The squire found him and a couple more standing on that hillock where the pine copse used to be and where Ian had spent many nights at the beginning of the war, watching the shells hit his property. The trees went months ago, opening up a very good view of the neighborhood country, denuded of timber. Indeed, the war had now taken every good tree Ruvno ever possessed. They were using their field-glasses as he joined them; he could see they were upset.

"Count," von Senborn began, "there must be a Russian observatory in the neighborhood, between this and Kosczielna, or even here, within reach of the Russian retreating army. It is either a tower or other elevated building, or else

an underground one. It might be hidden in such a place as this." He stamped his foot on the ground. "Where is it?"

"There are no towers left in the neighborhood, except that belonging to the village church. As to an underground observatory, I never heard of one in the neighborhood, which is fiat as a pancake," he returned.

Von Senborn gave him one of his arrogant looks, which Ian returned with interest.

"Your escape from shooting is so recent that I need hardly remind you it would be better to tell the truth at once," said the Prussian.

"Life, bad as it is, is too dear to me for me to run needless risks," retorted the other. "If you don't believe me, I can't help it."

He only seemed half convinced, but walked off. Ian did not go to the fields, but hung about to watch them. They evidently suspected that he, or somebody on his land was signaling to the Russians. They searched every inch of the hillock for a possible inlet to a hidden observatory and then inspected the house and outbuildings from top to bottom, turning over hay and straw till Ian heartily wished them all at the devil. After that they tried the village. He saw some of them on the church tower from, where he had signaled for help last winter with Minnie and Martin to help, on the night his stores were looted....

A feeling of intense anxiety came over him, as if instinct was foretelling fresh disaster more terrible than anything which had yet fallen. The firing from the Russians went on and he could see von Senborn and his fellow officers were not only disturbed but very suspicious. By the way Kosczielna lay it was clear that the Russians, retreating on Warsaw, could easily shell it if their fire was directed by anybody on a high spot in Ruvno, since on the level it was above all the other villages by a hundred feet. They questioned every man, woman and child in the village, trying to find out if there was some vantage ground from which the Russians could have their attack directed. Ian kept as far away from von Senborn and his friends as he could, not wanting him to think he spied on their movements. The experience of the day before had taught him a lesson. All the same, he was determined to follow their movements as far as possible, if only to be on his guard; and he managed it fairly well, for some of them were always coming and going between the house and the village, where they had put up a telephone with their friends at Kosczielna. These were having a bad time of it and had lost heavily. Before long he heard one trooper say to another who was watering horses:

"We'll have work again soon. All ours in that place near by have been put out of action."

"Liar," said the man's comrade, with that courtesy so characteristic of the race.

"True as gospel. I was by the major when the news came. He's mad, too."

"What's going to happen?" said the man at the trough.

"We're falling back from that place."

"What place, idiot?"

"That begins with a kay and ends in a curse."

The man was evidently right, for a lull came now as though the retreating force had completed its tasks in Kosczielna. The day wore on. The women, though obsessed with the same sense of coming disaster, bore up splendidly. But at about four in the afternoon, when the firing began again and two shells burst, one on the site of the windmill, the other at the end of the village, where Szmul used to live, Ian sent them and the women and children from the village into the cellars.

The Russians stopped firing at six o'clock and the women came up from the cellars. The little family had supper in the dining-room as quietly as in times of peace. None of the Prussians came to table. They had just received a supply of fresh provisions by motor-lorry and sent the Countess some, with a message that there was beer too, if she liked. They refused the beer, but ate the food. They could not afford to be proud, for supplies, except for cereals, had quite given out. Being cut off from Russia, the land of plenty, and the refugees they had fed, put them in this unenviable position. There was no chance of buying things in the neighborhood, as bare of supplies as if it had seen ten years' war. Vanda, noticing that her aunt had no appetite, laughingly remarked that she had better eat a good meal, for who knew where the next would come from. Little did they think how true her jest would prove to be.

They had finished and were sitting out in the ruins of the rose garden when the firing suddenly began again and so violently that Ian insisted upon the women taking to the cellar. Then he ran to the sacristy, calling to Father Constantine to keep under the broad archway leading from the chapel. He heard an answering voice, no more. He wanted to see what was happening with the Germans, so ran to the hillock, which seemed safe so far. Indeed, all the firing was on the other side, towards the village.

This new attack made fearful havoc amongst the Prussians who had taken up their quarters beyond the church. They had been making merry over the beer when it began, and though not a shell dropped within five hundred yards of the house the human target was hit so well that even to Ian's civilian eyes it was clear that the Russians knew exactly where to aim. The earth didn't shake; it rocked; beasts and men were belched up in an eruption of earth and smoke, to come down again in pieces. Those who could got away and began running towards the house; but they must have left three-fourths of their force behind, literally blown to bits.

Von Senborn, who happened to be near the house when the attack began, was saved. But Ian could not help admiring the way the surviving officers rallied their handful of men and brought them up from the village. Even as they made for the cover of trenches in the garden the shells had them. Then, either because their ammunition had run out or else because their mysterious signaler could not work in the dusk–for night was falling–there was sudden calm. Ian sighed to think what destruction the Russians could work if only they had enough guns and gun-fodder. Oh, the pity of it.

When things had quieted down, von Senborn turned to his men.

"We are going to blow up that church tower," he said, wiping the sweat from his face.

A haggard subaltern explained that they had already searched every nook and corner of tower and church several times.

"We'll blow it up," he repeated. Then he turned to Ian, every muscle of his face drawn with nervous tension, his voice hoarse as a crow's.

"Hark ye, Count. If I find that signaler I'll hold you responsible."

"As for those two Cossacks," he retorted. The Prussian muttered something inaudible and turned on his heel.

Ian followed them down to the church. It stood a little aloof from the village, nearest the house, yet almost half-way between the two. It had not suffered from the day's bombardment any more than the house. The scene of horror where the Russian shells had done their work was beyond description. Though by now fairly hardened to the abominations of war, the things Ian saw and heard through the twilight of that summer evening made him very sick. The surviving Germans were too busy looking for the signaler to worry about the wounded who howled, groaned and shouted with pain. It was a pandemonium of anguish. One man, mutilated beyond all semblance of God's image, implored him to end his misery ... as Ian stood there hesitating a trooper shot him.

"He was my good friend," he explained, and burst into tears. But he soon controlled himself and a few minutes later Ian saw him carrying out von Senborn's orders, apparently unmoved by his ordeal. Indeed, again he could not help admiring these brutes when it came to the pure fighting part of their work. It was in the intervals and with the unarmed that they were so cowardly, such bullies. Once it was a question of fight they bungled nothing and left nothing to chance. Perhaps their passion for perfection in detail made them doubly furious at the trick a handful of Russians who had found some ammunition played on them that evening. Von Senborn was determined to solve the mystery.

"We must not blow the tower to bits," Ian heard him say to the haggard subaltern. "We must do the work in such a way that we make a rift in the tower and can explore it ourselves." Then, aloud to his men: "Now, you are going to

avenge your dead comrades."

They were willing enough, but found they must go to fetch some explosives which they had stored near the house. It took them some few minutes to get there. The time seemed very long to Ian, listening to and watching that human charnel house near by. He wanted to get home, away from it all. Yet some mysterious force kept him there. Later, he thanked God for it....

Once more, Russian wit was to forestall Teutonic thoroughness. Before the men told off to the stores got back a shell whizzed past, struck the tower at a tangent. Ian was thrown to the ground and half buried. It took him some time to get clear. Sore, dazed, yet alive and with, apparently, no bones broken, he managed to regain his feet. Then he sat down, for his legs were like cotton wool.

The moon was rising now and lit up a hundred details of the desolation around. He could see von Senborn, sitting down, holding his head and swearing. Several dead bodies were near that had not been there before. Other men were perched on what seemed a hillock, born out of nothing since that shell burst. They were very excited, and he languidly wondered what they found to be excited about, when he felt so indifferent. He heard them quite plainly, without wanting to.

"It's a captain," said one.

"And an engineer," put in another.

"No–a sapper. Look at his collar."

"Look at this," cried somebody else, and the tone of his voice made Ian look, too. He was holding up a Russian drinking bottle.

"And food–look–a loaf of black bread. *Gott in Himmel*, he was a tough one."

Von Senborn stopped swearing and asked Ian if he was alive.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then go and see what they've got there. I can't move till I've had something," he groaned loudly.

"Can't I help you?"

"Only that." And he lay back, yelling for the surgeon.

Ian went up to what he had supposed was a hillock and found it to be a heap of stones and debris–the remains of the church tower. Only the top part had fallen; the rest loomed up, jagged and broken.

Several of the Germans squatted round a body, so limp that every bone of it must have been smashed.

"A Russian, sir," said the man who held the water-bottle. "He fell with the tower."

They rifled the dead man's pockets, turning over his broken body with as scant care as if it had been a lump of beef. They contained little; an old man's photograph; one of a girl with a broad face and small eyes, and a slip of paper.

Nothing more.

Von Senborn joined them, staggering but alert. He took the slip of paper and glanced at it by the light of an electric torch. Then he handed it to the haggard subaltern.

"Russian. Read it."

The boy took the slip and pored over it for some minutes, either because the torch burnt dull or because he had not much knowledge of the language. They had left the body, which lay in shadow. Ian looked at that young, tired face without recognizing in it any of the sappers who were in Ruvno during the Russian retreat. Later on, he heard from a peasant that the Russians, when last in Ruvno, kept everybody away from the church and that at night they made noises, as with picks and spades.

"Go on," urged von Senborn impatiently. "I thought you spoke Russian like a native."

"It is hastily written," explained the other. "And therefore indistinct. But I think I have the meaning now."

"Well, for Hell's sake let me have it, too."

"You cannot take me alive," he read in his hard North German. "I have chosen how I shall die. When I have written this I mean to signal to my friends to shell the tower, before your men come back to mine it. And we, too, shall return, driving you to the very streets of Berlin. And Europe's wrongs shall be avenged. We Russians are slow; but neither stupid nor discouraged, as you pretend." He stopped and looked up.

"That all?" asked von Senborn.

"All." He returned the paper to his superior.

"*Ja, ja,*" said a voice. "I see it now. He had himself bricked up in that tower, to signal and cover the retreat. He was no coward."

Nobody spoke. The incident had impressed them all. The man who gets himself bricked up with enough food to last till he is found out, is a hero. Von Senborn, having his head seen to by a surgeon, talked it over. Ian kept in the shadow, not wanting to be seen. Dazed though he felt from the last shell, he knew that this discovery would spring back upon him and his dear ones.

"How did he signal?" the surgeon asked.

"God knows."

"That Polish Count knew of this," murmured the haggard lieutenant, little thinking Ian was within earshot.

"Yes," said von Senborn savagely. "I'll swear to that. But I'll be even with him. Be quick, Surgeon, there's work to do yet."

"Serve him right to shoot him after all," put in the surgeon. Von Senborn laughed angrily.

"Shooting's too good." He lowered his voice. Strain his ears as he might, Ian only caught two words. But they were enough. He waited to hear no more.

He ran as fast as sore legs would carry him up to the house. Outside, not a soul. All the women and children, besides several men, were in the cellars.

"Get out at once," he shouted. "Run as hard as you can, along the Warsaw road."

"What is the matter?" asked the Countess.

"A Russian bricked up in the church tower. They are coming to blow us up, shutting you in first. Run as far from the house as possible."

When he saw them on their way he left them, then ran for an ax and made for the sacristy. There was no guard now, all the Germans being down by the church and village. He soon had the door in, to find Father Constantine walking up and down, saying his prayers. Ian hastily said what had happened and urged him to join the others on the Warsaw road. But the old man was in no hurry.

"They may not do it," he said. "I expect they'll go to sleep and wake up in a better mood."

"If you don't go I'll carry you," cried the squire angrily. "And that will prevent me warning the people hanging about."

Then he dragged his chaplain from the room. But the priest insisted on taking a little malachite crucifix which hung over the cupboard. It was the only thing they saved out of all Ruvno's beautiful things.

Then Ian warned as many of the peasants as he could find, though the shelling had already frightened most of them out of the village and on to the road. Baranski, whom he met, helped him.

Terrible was the confusion and alarm that followed, the calling of mothers to children, the cries of frightened babies, the curses of old men. Every second of that awful night was burnt in Ian's brain; he did not forget it whilst he lived. In quite a short time the Warsaw road was filled with panic-stricken peasants. Some of them had snatched up a table, a chair, a kettle or a pillow. Those who had any left panted along with a sack of potatoes or buckwheat. A few were fortunate enough to possess a horse. He tried to get a couple of his–farm horses were all he had left–but the Germans were around the yard before he could get back. So quick were they that he had not time to take a thing for the women. The peasants, being nearer the road, were more fortunate in this way. Even as Ian left the village he could see soldiers hovering round the house, evidently shutting the doors, lest their victims escape! A wounded Prussian cursed him and Baranski as they hustled some children on to the highway.

"You'll starve and die on the way," he shouted. "Decent Germans, not Polish swine, will have this place."

His words ended in a yell. Ian did not look round, but Baranski silenced

him with a stick.

"He won't people Ruvno, thank God," he cried.

They took the road, destitute as any of those hordes they had pitied and tried to succor during the terrible days of the Russian retreat.

Near where the windmill used to be Ian found his mother, Vanda, Minnie, the Father and all those who had been in the cellar. Here he rallied his people, giving the backward ones time to get up. But many laggards were yet to come when the earth rocked under them; there was a dull rumbling in its bowels.

"Mother of God!" shrieked somebody. They all looked towards the house....

Ruvno, their home for centuries, where every stone was a friend, rose towards the moonlit sky in a volcano of smoke, flame and rubbish.

Courage failed Ian. He fell down in the road and sobbed like a child.

XVI

When Ian broke down–there by the road–the Countess was thankful to God for it. Only the need of helping him recover courage took her through that night and the days which followed. For next to him she loved Ruvno.

The peasants were rushing past wildly; the sight of the old House, so stable for centuries and the pivot round which their lives had always worked, dismayed them more than the memory of those helpless fugitives they had seen pass lately. So they made a stampede up the road, towards distant Warsaw.

"Father Constantine!" cried the Countess. "He's being carried with them."

Ian was up in an instant, and off with the crowd. He knew enough of war by now to fear that if once the old man got away from them they would never see him again, dead or alive. When fugitives block the road, and especially at night, progress is slow, confusion great; thousands of children had been separated from their parents during that hasty retreat at the beginning of the war, in December and, presumably, now. Ian did his best to rally his peasants, shouting that they were safe in the road and would probably be able to return to the village in the morning. But they, poor things, were heedless of him as of the wind. Panic filled their hearts and made them deaf, blind, fiercely obstinate. Their one thought was to put as many versts as possible between themselves and Ruvno's downfall. But he found the priest, very tired with the hustling; indeed, only his indomitable spirit kept him from sinking to the ground. Together they returned to where he

had left the women.

"We must talk things over," he said. He was master of himself again, but harder, more bitter than he ever felt before; and some of the acrimony that sank into his soul that night remained with him always.

"We can't go back," said the Countess. "Not even to find shelter amongst the wreckage. Von Senborn would kill you. Where shall we go?" She looked around at the desolation lighted by the moon and choked a sob. She must bear up for her boy's sake.

"We must find the jewels," said Vanda.

"We're destitute without them," returned Ian.

"Think of it!" cried his mother. "And a year ago people envied us."

Ian hated to leave what had been his home. Only his fears for the others prevented him from proposing to them to creep back and live in the open rather than desert it. He knew they would need no persuasion; but dared not risk it for them.

For the moment, he vainly tried to calm the peasants. At least, when he had shouted himself hoarse without avail, the stream passed onwards. Even old Martin disappeared, and they were left alone, whilst the cries and shouts of the fugitives died away in the darkness. They were near the bend of the road, where stood the old windmill before a shell set it on fire. Just beyond it they could, in happier days, catch a glimpse of the House. He always looked forward to seeing it when he came home after being in Warsaw or abroad. He and Vanda, as children, shouted for joy when they came to it. And now, when there was no home to go back to, they turned their steps towards that bend....

I can't tell you what it looked like. The moon was still high enough to light up its devastation. A dark mass showed where home had been. The House was absolutely leveled to the ground; here and there, higher mounds of wreckage stood above the general ruin. The Countess lost her self-control when she realized that all had gone; for loud as was the noise when von Senborn's men blew it up, she still harbored a faint hope that a wing or story might be saved. But there was nothing, nothing, nothing. Ian bit his lips and the tears ran down his cheeks; but he was silent. They still wept for this ruin when they heard another explosion, or rather series of explosions, not so terrific as the first but powerful enough to be appalling. This time the Germans had destroyed the home-farm and outbuildings, then the stud. The little group stood rooted to the spot, though Ian, at least, would fain have hidden his eyes from this horrid sight. The thought that those barbarians, in less than an hour, wrecked all which it took his race centuries to build and improve maddened him. He thought of all the care and time and money he and his mother alone had spent on the place, to say nothing of those who went before and loved Ruvno even as he loved it. It was his life, the

care of that which lay in wreckage. How would he shake down into a new existence, amongst strangers, an exile, a ruined man at thirty-five through no fault of his own? In a modest way he knew what a good administrator he was; how he had improved the estate, and how he took its welfare to heart he realized fully but now. And his mother? What could she do with the rest of her days? Oh, it is hard to be uprooted in after years; the old tree cannot bear transplanting, even if you put care to it; the trunk is too stiff, the branches wither, the tree dies in new soil. And she had been torn up roughly, by the strongest and deepest root, cast into a ditch, to die of a broken heart, in a foreign land. He had yet to learn that the thought of him would give her courage to live; but she knew he still wanted her and she could help him to endure.

And so they watched and wept and shook impotent fists at those barbarians, whose dark figures still moved amongst the ruins of home, their teeth chattering with the chill, huddled together like the waifs they were for a little warmth and comfort, with not a blanket nor a crust between them. Fires had broken out in the ruins and Ian thought of the library, of those old books and parchments which could not be replaced. They never knew how long they sat thus; but the Prussians ceased to move about. Ian felt as if nothing could make him close his eyes again. When the flames had given place to columns of smoke Father Constantine struggled to his feet. They had ceased to weep, even to curse their foes; the silence of despair was upon them.

"Children," he said quietly, "let us say a prayer together."

He held up the old malachite Crucifix he had taken from the sacristy.

Afterwards the Countess was wont to say that the prayers saved her reason, though they did bring back the tears, and in floods. But supplication drew the poison of despair from all their hearts; they let God, Whom they had reproached aloud just before, back into their souls; and he gave them strength to endure. Ian, too, was all the better for it; his first outburst over, he had had another and another, not of grief but of rage, whenever he heard a fresh explosion and saw flames consume yet one more building of Ruvno. Vanda and Minnie, too, were the quieter afterwards. The Father reminded them, in his simple intimate way, in the tones they had heard over the supper-table, as well as in the little chapel, that this was not the first time that their dear Poland had been laid waste by fierce enemies; that the Lord Jesus watches over the weak and heavily stricken; that the Prussians, though they destroy homes and even bodies, cannot kill souls! He used such simple words of consolation, of faith and Christian courage, that they all felt new strength in them to drink the bitter cup–to the dregs, if need be.

They were still on their knees by the roadside and Father Constantine was giving the Benediction when they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs coming down from the direction of Kutno. The Countess' first thought was to crouch in the

ditch, for she had grown suspicious of all travelers; but the horseman, riding low and fast on his horse's neck, had a drawn revolver and with it covered Ian, who appeared to be nearest.

"A step and I shoot you!"

He spoke the German of the Russians who learn a few words on the battlefield and in the trenches.

Probably they would have heard and seen nothing more of him, but his horse, with a neigh of pain and yet of affection, dropped.

"Dead," he muttered, this time in Russian. Slipping off the poor beast's back, he began to caress it, using those endearing words even the wildest Cossacks have for their horses, whom they love, calling him his beloved Sietch, his little dove, his only friend, his brother. And there were tears in his voice which moved the spectators, now so well acquainted with grief.

He took no notice of them; said they two must part, but he would not leave his good friend by the road, like a dog, but would put him into a ditch or trench, and cover him with earth, lest the vultures picked his tired, faithful body. He looked about, evidently for a grave, and saw the desolate little group.

"Russian?" he asked.

"Polish," answered Ian.

"Running away, too?"

Ian told him, shortly, what they had run away from.

"Am I near Kosczielna?"

"Ten versts."

"Ah–do we hold it?"

"You do not. But you've killed nearly all the Prussians who held it last night."

"Warsaw is still ours?"

"So far. But Prussians hold this road as far as the river–perhaps farther."

He was thoughtful for a moment. He looked the wildest figure, capless, bootless, his long dark hair blowing in the night breeze.

"To get to Warsaw is useless," he muttered at last.

"Then how can we escape ... where can we go?" put in the Countess.

He pulled his long Cossack forelock and gave an awkward bow.

"Madam, we must strike the Vistula and make for Grodno, or Vilno."

"What? Tramp four hundred versts?" She was horrified. "We haven't as much as a horse, let alone a cart."

"Four hundred versts," he repeated. "I did not know. I don't see how we are to reach Warsaw before it is German." He turned to Ian. "Do you, sir, help me lay my little horse in its grave. Then we can decide."

Hastily they put it into a trench, and the Cossack kicked earth over it, telling

his story, meanwhile, in odd, broken Polish, of which he was very proud. He had been captured by the Prussians not far from Ruvno, and taken to the Vistula, he was not clear where, to be sent by water into Germany. But their boat was shelled by the Russians and wrecked. Like all Cossacks he was an expert swimmer and he swam up against the tide, got ashore near a wood and struck the high road from Thorn to Warsaw. He had been riding since early morning and Sietch was already much tried when they were captured.

But for all his advocating the Grodno route, he seemed loathe to leave his new friends and strike out done when he saw that they were bent upon trying to get to Sohaczev. I think the knowledge, gathered from their talk amongst themselves, that Ian knew every by-way and short-cut to that town–for much of the way lay on his own land–impressed him.

"I am strange to this country," he explained. "I might not find the river, to strike across country into Lithuania, and four hundred versts is a long way."

"You will come up with your friends once you cross the river," said Ian. "The Russians still held the right bank of the Vistula, this evening."

"Have you no horses?" he asked.

Vanda told him that Ruvno and its contents lay under a wreckage of brick and stone. Ian turned to his mother.

"I am for pushing on to Warsaw," he said. "Neither of us can tramp four hundred versts within three weeks. We must trust to our luck to find the Grand Duke in Sohaczev. Von Senborn said this morning that he was there, waiting for the rest of his army to come up."

"Very well," she said, putting her arm in his. "If only I could see the Grand Duke, he'd send us to Warsaw by hook or by crook. War changes many things, but it doesn't kill the convenience of having powerful friends."

"Will he go with us?" asked Vanda, meaning the Cossack.

"I hope not," whispered her aunt.

"They are wild people at the best," said the Father, speaking English. "If he joins us he'll see your jewels taken from the earth."

"Besides," said Ian, "if the Prussians catch us alone they may give us a pass to Warsaw–God knows, we're harmless beggars, even to them. But to have an escaped prisoner–only–how to tell him?"

"Well–are we going to start?" asked the Cossack. Nobody answered.

He was no fool, for he guessed the reasons why they greeted his proposal in stony silence. I suppose he thought a woman would be soft-hearted, so addressed himself to the Countess, giving one of his awkward bows.

"Madam," he said, "I know you think me a savage Cossack, given to pilfering and all sorts of wildness. But I am a good Cossack, of the Don Troop, coming of many atamans. My name is Ostap Hovodsky; my mother is an Efremov. We

serve the Tsar with our own horses, uniforms and arms; we are warriors and farmers, but neither Huns nor Prussians. You need not fear for any treasure you may have about you for your journey. As to this"–he threw down his pistol– "it has been in the water and I have had no ammunition for a week. And this," he tore off his ragged coat and threw it into the ditch. "I spit upon it. I always meant to change it the moment I could find a dead man to pilfer. This is no place for Cossack uniforms. I'll walk in my shirt, or without it, rather than make you anxious. If you want my company you will not regret it. From your looks I see you are not used to make your way through deserted battlefields. You will find me useful, and I shall be glad to know the nearest way to report myself to Nicolai Nicolaievitch."

"I will take you with pleasure," said Ian, who felt confidence in him after this little speech. "But there are others."

"I, too," agreed Minnie, who naturally did not share the Polish aversion to Cossacks.

"I believe you'll be our friend," said Vanda.

"I have known good Cossacks," said Father Constantine, "and I think you are one of them."

The Countess said no more, so it was settled that Ostap, as he insisted on their calling him, should go with them. He thanked them, and then, of a sudden, took the initiative, and became their leader.

"You have no pick?" he asked.

They looked at each other in consternation. It was true. In his haste to leave the house Ian had forgotten to bring a spade, to dig up the jewels.

"Where do the Prussians lie now?" he asked again. Ian took him up the bank by the windmill site and showed him, so far as he knew, where they had occupied Ruvno soil.

"Very well. I'll go for a pick, or a shovel."

"You'll be captured if you do," said Father Constantine. "They have sentries."

"Never mind. We must have a few things. Do you all wait here and I'll be back very soon. If you hear a very long whistle you'll know I am taken and then you must fend for yourselves. Otherwise, wait."

"I'll come, too–" said Ian.

"Can you walk on your belly?"

"I can try."

"That's no good. You learn it early or not at all. And you cannot take a pannikin or water-bottle from a sleeping man's side without waking him. Even the Prussians can't do that. I'm safer alone."

And he disappeared, after taking up the bridle which had been on Sietch–

the only harness he had.

The moon had waned and darkness was upon them. To save time they moved to the spot where Ian and the Father had buried half of the jewels last summer. They put the rest in the lane which ran to the east of the house. During the momentary lulls when safe from prying eyes, Ian had been in the habit of going to see if they were safe and none the worse for lying underground. When the windmill was destroyed they were anxious about them. But on clearing away the debris he found them safe and sound in kind Mother Earth, who never deserts men, if only they know how to tend and love her as she requires. He and his mother thought more and more about them as their forests were ruined and fields ceased to bear; for with them they could not only live, had they to bolt, till the war would be over; but later on they hoped to come back and repair some at least of the damage done to Ruvno.

But in all their talks of the dim future they had never dreamed of such utter ruin as now faced them. For the Russians appeared to do well after driving foes from the very gates of Warsaw, and everybody was full of hope till a couple of weeks back.

They had all learnt by heart how many paces north and west of the windmill was the hole, so did not foresee much trouble in finding it. It seemed hours before Ostap came back, and they began to fear he had been captured and could not even whistle to warn them. At last, however, a faint whistle came from the road below. Ian went to meet him.

He always knew the Cossacks for pilferers, but never thought the night would come when he and his family would be glad to share a Cossack's booty. Ostap had lived up to the traditions of his people, which includes a genius for finding the thing they want and making the most of an awkward situation. He struggled under the weight of many things, slung on his back by means of Sietch's bridle. He had a pick, which he handed to Ian.

"Do you dig," he said. "And I will divide these things among us."

He had found what remained of the Prussians' feast, so rudely interrupted by shells from Kosczielna. He had three huge loaves of rye bread, brandy, which the Countess insisted on Father Constantine's having some of, three tins of preserved food (it was too dark to read the labels) and cheese. He had boots for himself, taken, he said, from a dead trooper, and a jersey from the same source. The women shuddered at the thought of wearing clothes stripped from a corpse, but he was quite pleased with them. Then he had a water-bottle, three nose-bags and two horse-cloths. These were a good deal torn, but Vanda and Minnie, in light frocks, were very glad of them.

"Only three loaves," he said regretfully. "But I ate the other on the spot. I heard you say you had had supper and I had touched no food for twenty-four

hours. These nose-bags will do to carry the food in, one for the priest and one each for us men."

Quickly he distributed his booty in the three nosebags.

"There," he said when it was done. "We shall not have a feast, but at least something to put in our stomachs. Mine was empty before I went over to them. They are all sleeping like the dead they lie by, except the wounded, who groan and yell." He turned to the Countess. "And where can I fill this water-bottle without getting poisoned, my Lady?"

"We shall pass a spring soon after we start for Sohaczev."

"My God, but I've a thirst. Is there nothing nearer?"

"Only the House supply," she answered sadly. "And that must be under the ruins."

Meanwhile, Ian and the two girls were working their hardest, Ian loosening the earth with the pick and helping to shovel it up. This they did with their hands, having nothing else. The Countess helped, too, but they all insisted on the Father resting before his long tramp. His seventy-odd years could ill withstand the experiences of the past twelve months. His rheumatism had grown worse, and the wound he took in the winter, during the kitchen fight, never properly healed. A surgeon Ian had called in said it would take years before the skin hardened over the bone. They did manage to get a kind of cap, of aluminum, to protect the skull. But whereas a quiet life and comfort would have done him good, all they could give him that year was worry and hardship.

Ostap looked on but did not offer to help dig up the "treasure" as he called it. He did say how sorry he was not to have found a spade as well as a pick; but that was all. He did not want them to suspect of a desire to pilfer their jewels.

The three worked hard for some time, then Vanda got up to stretch her legs, cramped by the posture.

"We haven't hit the right spot," she said.

"I believe you're right," agreed Ian. "We've not struck cement even."

"If only we had another pick," sighed Minnie. "We'd get on quicker."

"What are they saying?" Ostap asked the priest.

"They are short of a pick."

Despite protests he disappeared; whilst Ian was still measuring the paces, he came back, not with a pick but a spade. Ian, seeing the girls were exhausted with work and anxiety, asked him to use it.

"Ah–you trust me," said the Cossack. "I'll help with pleasure."

They set to work again; silence holding the little group. Even the talkative Ostap did not speak.

"Cement!" Ian said suddenly.

He had said it so many times only to find stones that the others took no

notice. However, he and Ostap plodded on–and at last Ian held up a small object.

"The thermos bottle," he said, giving it to his mother.

In the dark she and the girls opened it, counting the black pearls. They were intact.

"Work carefully now," Ian warned Ostap. "The rest are in waterproof packets–we shall miss them."

"It's so dark," complained the priest. "Can't we use my electric torch?"

"Not if you want to be alive to-morrow," said Ostap bluntly. "Their sentries are watching."

And they fumbled on. The moon had set long ago, so they worked very slowly. But at last, after feeling every clod of earth near where they found the thermos bottle, they came upon a waterproof packet. It contained Minnie's pearls.

"Only one more, Ostap," said Ian. "It was put near this. We sha'n't be long."

In a few moments he found it; it held half of the famous Ruvno emeralds, worth many thousand roubles. Ostap did not ask what was in the packet, but remarked:

"Oh, God, it's wonderful how little room treasure takes up. Now do you all, ladies, secure them well about your persons; and we must be off."

"Thank God, we have them at last," said the Countess. "We shall be able to keep the wolf from the door." She spoke thus, afraid that he would have an idea of the treasure's real value. For she did not trust him yet. Hastily they put the pearls about their persons, while Ostap strolled a few paces away.

"And now for the lane," said Ian. "We'll find that easier."

They had to make a big detour to reach it, for it was madness to go near the Prussians, as the Countess pointed out. Even as it was they heard the groans as some wounded men very near at hand. Once, Ian stumbled over a softish stiff body, in the darkness. He examined it as well as he could, fearing it might be one of his own household. But the dead man's helmet told its tale. They left it lying there, walking as silently as they could, Ian leading the way, because he knew every inch of the ground. Every now and again some noise from the Prussian camp made them stand still, in terror that they were discovered. But they were all false alarms. Many of von Senborn's men were in their last long sleep, and the rest so tired that it would have taken more noise than these poor waifs made on the grass to awake them. Their horror was great when they finally arrived at the top of the lane where Ian had buried the remainder of the emeralds and his mother's rings. It was blocked with the wreckage of his once prosperous stud farm.

"We're ruined," whispered the Countess. "None of us can get through that."

"I'll get over," said Ostap, when the situation was explained to him. "But

you must tell me where the treasure lies."

"I'll come with you," said Vanda.

"Nonsense!" This from Ian. "I'll go."

She put her hand on his arm.

"You're too heavy. You'll bring down a lot of the ruins, wake the sentries and we shall be done."

"It's not safe," he said, squeezing her hand.

"It is," she whispered. "I can climb like a cat. Do let me."

He made no further objection. In silence he watched her climb the ruins. Ostap was wonderful. He made not the faintest noise, reached the top of the ruins, which were like those made by an earthquake, then took Vanda in his arms and stepped as noiselessly down the other side with her. It seemed a long time elapsed after their dark figures disappeared. Then they arrived unexpectedly over the far end of the ruins.

"Well?" asked Ian anxiously.

"Hopeless," she answered.

"The spot where your treasure lies is under twenty feet of brick and rubbish," said Ostap.

"Can't we clear it?"

"Not without waking some Prussians. We heard their snores."

"Oh, Ostap," said the poor Countess, forgetting her suspicion in her anxiety, "you are so clever–surely you can help us. I'll come–and we'll all lift the debris away brick by brick, with our hands, silently."

"I cannot, my lady. Look!" He pointed eastward. "Daylight would overtake us. Besides, the ruins are very heavy. It can't be done without risking your jewels and your lives."

"Yes, he is right, Aunt," said Vanda sadly.

They were all disappointed and loath to give up the search. The Countess wept a little at the thought of leaving so much wealth behind. Ostap, who had been silent about the other jewels, did his best to comfort them now.

"Your treasure is safer here than in a Moscow bank," he said. "The Prussians will not touch it, for who would think to scrape under this horse farm? And when we have come back and cleared the earth of the enemy, you can dig for them in peace, and you will have money with which to build up your home. In Russia, neither bread nor meat is lacking and you can very well live on what you dug up near the high road. Let us go. The night passes, and darkness is now our best friend."

He was right. What good to linger weeping over their misfortunes? With heavy hearts they turned away and set out across the trench-furrowed fields to

Sohaczev.

XVII

Although it was easy to see that the Countess and the chaplain were tired, Ian listened to his mother's entreaties to set out without any rest; for who could sleep within sight of their ruined home? Besides, time was precious, unless they were prepared to remain under the Prussian rule; and they decided that exile, beggary, anything would be better than living in some town to see them every day and every hour of the day.... Their way lay through what had been the home forest, by paths and fields that run south of Kosczielna, thence south-west to Sohaczev. It was already the last day of July and the Prussians at Ruvno had been boasting that they would be in Warsaw for the third of August; and the Kaiser's second son crowned King of Poland, in the old palace, within a month. They were a couple of days late in getting into Warsaw, and Poland's crown is not yet on a Hohenzollern's head.

The fear that the Grand Duke might no longer be in Sohaczev haunted them all. Even as the crow flies, Ruvno was twenty versts from there. By the road, which ran fairly straight, it was thirty. By cutting across country, by the ways which Ian and Vanda knew well, he thought they could save five versts, thus leaving twenty-five to cover. He and Ostap, walking a little ahead, to warn the others of barbed wire and trenches, soon saw what the short cut meant.

"I'm for getting back to the road," said the Cossack.

"But it is much further." Ian explained the distances.

"Eh, God, but we can't do more than a verst an hour if this kind of ground goes on, and I know this part. It's cut up like Hell. We shall be clambering in and out of trenches and dodging wire and dead bodies all the way. We might do three versts an hour by the road. None of you are walkers. Nor I. We Cossacks are more at home on horses' backs than our feet. You walk as if every step hurt you."

"There's something inside me that grates about as I move," admitted Ian.

"Broken ribs. I had them several times. If you tie them up it's all right, but a bit nasty if you let them jog into your flesh."

They stumbled on a bit and avoided some more wire, making a long detour to do it. Ian noticed that, whereas his mother and the two girls kept up better

than he thought they could, the Father showed signs of exhaustion, though he did his bravest to hide it.

"The priest," whispered Ostap. "We shall be carrying him soon. Another reason for going to the road."

Ian said nothing, knowing he was right. In fact, he soon doubted if any of them could keep up this kind of exercise very long. The ground was intersected with trenches, and full of pitfalls in the way of tree-stumps. They had all been working since daybreak, even the Father, who was fit only for bed. Ostap was a worse walker than Ian himself, bruised and shaken by the shell which buried him near the church and led to their worst troubles. Ostap said he had no sleep for two nights, being afraid to doze on Sietch's back for fear of getting entrapped. Father Constantine almost fought to keep his knapsack; but they managed to get that from him.

"Even if we do three versts an hour, it will take ten hours to Sohaczev," remarked Ostap, when they had struggled thus for some time without much progress. "... Walking all the time. That's an impossibility. What hour is it now?"

Ian took out his watch. It had stopped. The glass was smashed, too. Ostap studied the summer sky with some attention.

"It is one o'clock," he said after a moment. "In two hours or so it will be the dawn. We can perhaps cover six versts by then, by the road. Then we must rest for an hour, or we shall be dead."

"This will be hard on the Father," Ian whispered.

"Yes. And listen. By three we may cover six versts on the road. That leaves twenty-four. We start again at four, a good hour to walk, for it is fresh. We go on till six. That leaves us twenty-two versts, for we shall be going slower than three an hour, say two ... where was I?

"Twenty-two versts from Sohaczev."

"We rest an hour, walk three versts more. That makes eight o'clock ... we are yet nineteen versts from our goal."

"There's a village nineteen versts from Sohaczev," Ian put in. "Vulki, it's called."

"We rest a bit. Then we make a great effort, and if we are lucky, by noon we are ten versts from Sohaczev."

"We'll never catch the Grand Duke," said Vanda, who was with the two men.

"Who knows? But at ten versts from Sohaczev there is a large camp. Or there was. If we are lucky we shall find some of the men there, or a place in a train, for there is the railway, unless we have already destroyed it. But we shouldn't do that till the last minute, for we are retreating with as little loss to ourselves as

can be. Then we are safe for either headquarters at Sohaczev, or Warsaw. And Warsaw leads to anywhere in Russia. I shall join my troop, and you can rest till the war is over. It must be over sometime, even the Prussians can't help that. And then your mother, who is a brave woman, and a really great lady, can come back and rebuild your house. And you can marry your sisters in the meantime."

"They are not my sisters."

"Then the young lady is your bespoken wife."

"My husband is a volunteer in the Cossack army," said Vanda.

Ostap gave a little shout of pleasure. "Oh–good! Which troop?"

"The Kuban troop."

"And the other young lady by your mother?"

"Is English. She has been very good and kind in helping us through our troubles. She has lost one brother in the war."

"And I three. I spit upon my life. And upon money. I want to fight the Prussians and burn down a few of their towns before I am killed by them, or the cholera. For that is almost as sure as their shells."

"Have you no family to keep?" asked the Countess.

"I have. But they have the farm and the wife can look after that when the time comes for my old father to die. Then my two boys will do their service, too, but I want them to go to good schools first."

"But you said you spat upon money."

"I mean for its own sake. There is enough on the farm to keep them at school. We Cossacks are beginning to wake up and have our boys and girls taught things besides fighting and horses. But Tsars have taken away all our autonomy, little by little, and have never given us the free use of all our land, like they promised. Many men in the troop find it a great burden to supply their own horses, guns and uniforms."

He was silent after that and then began again with:

"You, on the other hand, must be a powerful man, for the peasants I used to talk to when we were at Kosczielna spoke about Ruvno and its lord."

Ian told him they were mined, and had nothing but their jewels, half of which they had left behind.

"But they must be worth many farms and horses," he argued. "People like you don't bury treasure for a few roubles. As to what you left under your horse-farm, it is quite safe. The earth is your best friend in war; better than banks."

Ian said nothing. The others, too, listened in silence. There was something attractive about his frank speech and simple outlook of life. But Ian had always noticed that about the Russians. The Poles, with their old civilization, had become as complex as the French.

"I am sorry those rascals have burned you down," he resumed. "The castle

was a fine thing. I often saw it from the distance. But I should have liked most of all to see the horses you bred...."

Ian and he talked horses then, and got a little in front of the others, till a muffled cry from the back recalled them. Father Constantine was on the ground.

"He fell," said Vanda. "I am afraid he has fainted."

"No, I haven't," he retorted with a shadow of his old spirit. "I'll be–well–in a moment."

The Countess was for giving him brandy, but Ostap intervened.

"Soak some into this," and he tore off a piece of his rye loaf, which they gave him. It finished their stock of brandy, but revived the priest, who was on his feet in another moment.

"I can walk now," he said bravely.

"No. I'm going to carry you," said Ian. Father Constantine made a step forward, then fainted in earnest.

"Let me look," said Vanda. "I believe his wound has opened."

She bent over him and said:

"Yes. It ought to be bandaged. But how?

"Your handkerchiefs," said Ostap. But they remembered that they were filthy after the digging operations and feared to use one till they could rinse it out. Ian made up his mind that they must go back to the road.

"Yes," said his mother, willing enough now. "We'll never get along on these ghastly battle-fields."

So they started for the road, Ian carrying Father Constantine on his shoulders, regaining the highway by a little shrine, with an image of the Madonna. Many years before the Countess had put it there as a thanksgiving offering, when Ian recovered from an attack of scarlet fever. The peasants of the neighborhood used to say that it had miraculous powers to heal all sick children. So it was very popular with mothers of families.

"Who's there?" cried a familiar voice from the darkness.

"Your own people," answered they.

It was poor old Martin, who had been carried on in the general stampede; but he had grown very tired, and seeing the others were not amongst the mob, had the good sense to await them there, knowing they must pass the shrine on their way to safety. He had fallen asleep to find, on waking, that the moon was set and the night at its darkest.

"The others?" asked Ian. "Where are they?"

"Mother of God, they rushed on. They are mad with fear," he answered sadly. "Some fell and did not get up again. Old Vatsek, and somebody's child. The road is hard, being strewn with rubbish, what the other fugitives and soldiers have left for lack of strength."

"Seen any horses, or carts?" asked Ostap.

"Dead ones, under the moon ... they lie as they dropped, in the shafts."

"Far?"

"A quarter of a verst."

Ostap and Ian, leaving Martin with the others, went off to look for a cart. They wanted to get the side of one for Father Constantine. It would be better for him than carrying him on their backs. They had to grope about for some time, because it was the moment before dawn when night is darkest, when neither moon nor the streaks of coming day help you, when the air strikes chill to the very marrow and the heart has least courage. They finally found what they wanted by the smell of decomposing horseflesh, which guided them to a peasant's cart. They broke off one side of it, and took, too, some straw they found at the bottom. When they went back to the others the Father was talking.

"Go on," he argued. "Leave me.... I have God.... I shall not be alone."

And he said this more than once before he reached the end of his journey.

Ian managed to find a warm cover, too, and they made him as comfortable as they could. Then they ate some bread and cheese, saving the tinned meat for the morning. There was a spring near this spot, so they drank water and bathed their faces. As well as they could in the dark they washed out Ian's handkerchief–the largest–and bound up the sick man's head. The cold, damp linen revived him.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Going to Warsaw."

"Where is my diary?"

They knew he used to keep one and did not like to tell him it was under Ruvno's ruins. So they said nothing.

"Please give it me. I want it," he urged feebly.

"What does he want?" asked Ostap.

Ian told him.

"I remember," said the Cossack, "he did take two books out of his skirt pocket, there under the moon when you were digging up the treasure. He put them in his nose-bag." He slung it off his back, drew out the two books and handed them to the sick man, who eagerly clutched at them.

"Ian," he said, "come here." When his patron obeyed he gave him the two little books, bound in black oilcloth, such as children write their copies in.

"Keep them," he said with an effort. "Have them published. People must know what Poland endures."

"I will," said Ian, putting them in his knapsack.

"Have you them safe?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Now, give me the little Crucifix. It is in the nose-bag that Cossack brought

us."

They did so. He clasped it tight and pressed it to his lips. It seemed to give him strength. "I'll keep it to the end–of my journey," he said. "Countess, forgive me, all forgive me, for adding to your burden with my infirmities."

All tried to reassure him, and he spoke no more for a long time. They knew he suffered much. His head and hands burned with the fever that was consuming him.

They started off again.

Ostap was right about the road being easier. But it was even more horrible than the fields. In spite of debris, bits of soldiers' accoutrements and stiff, silent noisome forms scattered in their path, there was no comparison between it and barbed wire or trenches, so far as walking went. They walked for another hour, Martin taking short turns with one end of the stretcher whilst either Ostap or Ian rested their arms. They trudged steadily on, knowing that every step took them nearer Warsaw, further from the Prussians. Ostap and Ian, with the litter, took the side of the road, for the middle, cut with a year's war traffic, was no better than a plowed field. The three women walked near, to do the little that was possible for the patient. Martin walked by Ian, to tell him what he saw and heard with the fleeing villagers. Ian told him how Ruvno ended. They spoke low because of the Father; instinctively–but heavy guns would not have aroused him from his delirious torpor.

As dawn came on, painting the sky with gray and purple and the breeze grew less chill, Ian could see more and more plainly the desolation that lay around. Not a living creature did they meet. But the dead were many. The few surviving trees were bare as in a January frost; the roadside and neighboring fields, strewn, not only with every kind of garment, every simple article of a peasant's cottage, but with costly things which must have been a soldier's loot, with the soldier's mortal remains; and with their knapsacks, caps, ragged boots and bits of kit. Dead horses were many, too; and dead peasants, of both sexes and every age, were not a few. And he passed near by these things, flotsam and jetsam of war, passed dead hamlets, where only ruins remained, and one dead mother he saw, her new-born child near by, and dead, too. He hoped the others had not noticed, for it was the most terrible sight of all. And as the dawn spread he could see the distant fields with the burnt corn, the trenches full of horrid sights and an army's rubbish, burnt trees, wire twisted as by gigantic hands; ruined crops, ruined homes, broken lives and perished hopes.... And this was all they had left of Poland.

And when his weary eyes turned from the misery around and fell upon his dear ones, he saw how fitted they were to travel the road of death and despair.

The three women, dainty all their lives, were ragged, dirty, disheveled, their

thin frocks covered with horse-blankets which were stained with blood. What did the future hold for those brave souls? He preferred not to think of that, and turned to look at Ostap, black with dirt and tan, coatless, his arms far too long for the Prussian's jersey, his feet bare and bleeding, for the boots proved too tight and he had cast them aside, his long hair wild and dusty, his nose swollen, a scar across his face; he looked as ferocious a member of an army as you could ever fear to meet. Martin had aged twenty years since he served supper the night before; he limped along painfully, his house-boots worn through with the rough tramp. Happily, the women were sensibly shod, having put on their strongest boots for yesterday's field work.

Looking on Father Constantine's ashen face, Ian knew his hours were numbered. The seal of death was on it. The thin hands which had clasped the crucifix so eagerly a little while back were clutching at the rags with which they had covered him....

The forlorn party took stock of each other furtively for some time. Then their eyes met; and they smiled.

"It is war," said Ostap. And, noting their low spirits, he did the best to cheer them with the humorous side of his year's campaign. It made them forget how dirty they looked, helped them to grow accustomed to their new selves, perhaps. Now that the light was good, Ian noticed that the Cossack's dark eyes were intelligent and merry. He had that contempt for death which enabled the retreating Russians to make ramparts of their bodies when ammunition failed. He gave them unwittingly a grim story of crippled men, muddled orders, peculation and pilfering; with that childlike literalness which is wholly Russian and the dash of fatality which stiffens courage, and makes men patient under pain....

They made a wide detour before reaching Kosczielna, fearing to run into the Prussians again, and none wished for that. No sounds came from its ruins; but many gray forms showed how well that Russian sapper, in Ruvno church did his signaling. The fugitives had planned to rest awhile near the little town; but the place was so horrible that they hurried on, quickening their pace, to leave the orgy of death behind, though death went with them step by step.

At Vulki they made a halt. Here there were signs of life, the first since they left home, though the village had been destroyed. But they found that a dozen or so of Ruvno peasants had halted there, and were cooking a few potatoes they dragged from its wreckage. Baranski, whom they had chosen as leader, saw the little procession and hurried to meet it.

"Oh–my Lady Countess," he cried, kissing her hand, "to think you have come to this plight, and the young ladies, too, and you, my lord Count, and the Father–oh, if I could only help you. But there is nothing here. Some of ours have started back to Ruvno over the fields. They hope to creep back into the village

unseen by the Prussians and pretend they never left. The sight of all this misery is too much for them. They fear they will die like dogs if they go any further."

"And those people?" asked Ian, indicating the group round the fire.

"Most of them meant to stop here. The native peasants have fled. Those are too tired, they say, to go back or go on."

"Have you a watch?"

"Yes." Baranski pulled out a silver timepiece. "It is ten past five."

Ian looked at his little group.

"We can't reach that camp before one. It's only ten versts from Sohaczev."

"We had better rest," said his mother, and he saw she could not walk much further without sleep.

"Baranski, do you wake us in two hours."

"Yes. And I'll look to the poor Father here," he said. He was a loyal old peasant and heartbroken to think of the tribulation that had come upon them all. He found a mattress in a ruined cottage for Father Constantine, and searched vainly for some refreshment for them. They all slept heavily, except the invalid, till he woke them, at seven o'clock.

"And what are you going to do?" asked the Countess, when they told him and the other peasants their own plans.

"Some of us go back. We have buried our grain where the Prussians won't think to look for it," he explained to Ian in a confidential whisper, as though von Senborn himself were within earshot. "I have no liking for the road, or a tramp through Russia. They can't take my good earth away and where shall I find soil to bear like Ruvno fields?"

Six went with Ian. They had sons fighting with the Russians and did not want to be cut off from all communication with them. Ostap did not like this addition to the party till one of them returned from the far end of the village with a lean-looking but sound horse and found a cart for it. He had grown very tired of carrying the litter. They placed Father Constantine in the cart and started off, taking a sad farewell of those who remained behind....

Sore-footed, sore-hearted, faint for the lack of food, they went slowly on, through the same scenes of desolation and death, halting every half-hour for a few minutes, scarcely daring to do so, but sure of breaking down before reaching their goal unless they did. The road was very bad now; Ian and the other men often had to clear the way of the human and other wreckage which stopped the cart's passage. They spoke little. Each wrapped in his own thoughts, listened to Father Constantine's delirium. He, who had helped so many souls through the Valley of Death, must pass it unshriven.

At midday they halted again; they had not reached the camp of which Ostap spoke. The Father's frail body was making a desperate effort to retain his fleeting

soul. Vanda, who had watched so many die of late, said the end was near. The peasants came up to the cart and joined in their prayers. They wept, for all loved the kind, simple old man who had taught them what they knew of God and letters.

He opened his eyes, making a feeble sign that he wanted to speak. Ian bent over to catch his words.

"Go on–" he faltered. "I'm not alone...."

And thus he died. With tears they folded his hands over the little malachite crucifix, the one relic of home. The Countess covered his thin, withered face, so peaceful in its long sleep, with a peasant woman's kerchief. Then they urged on the tired horse and their own weary limbs, the women praying for his soul as they staggered on, because retreating armies wait not and their one hope now lay in escaping the Prussians. They had no food left; every scrap of the bread, stained with the blood of those who held it in the Ruvno canteen, had gone. And strength was fast failing them.

XVIII

At last, however, they saw signs of life. A train whistle told them they were near a railroad and they passed a group of soldiers who were firing two large hay stacks.

"The camp, thank God!" cried Ostap, and they all quickened their steps.

The place had been made by the war and for the war. There were no peasants' cottages, no farm buildings. There were rows and rows of wooden huts where troops in repose had passed their time; there was a wooden church with the onion-shaped dome which pertains to Russian temples; there were gardens in which the men had grown cabbages for their soup and a few flowers, especially sunflowers, for they liked to eat the seeds. There were tents and hospitals, magazines, guns and aeroplanes. Above all, there was great confusion. Most of the troops had left and ambulances, carts, trains, motor-lorries, anything upon wheels the Russians could find, were being packed with the sick and wounded.

Leaving the others at the upper end of the camp, Ostap and Ian set forth to seek the commanding officer. It took them some time because nobody knew anything about him, and nobody cared whether they were refugees in distress or what they were. The whole mental force of the place was concentrated upon getting away as many sick and wounded as possible before the Prussians came

in and seized them. After half an hour's search, however, Ian found his man. He was standing by a large hospital tent, ticking off entries from a notebook. Judging from his looks, he had neither slept nor washed for some days. At any other time Ian would have refrained from interrupting a man with that stamp of haggard determination on his face. But his own plight was desperate. He told his story as briefly as possible and asked for help to get his women to Warsaw before the Russians left there.

When the man heard the word "help" he looked up in irate surprise.

"Do you know how many wounded I've got on my hands here?" he asked.

"I can't say—-"

"Three thousand of ours–a thousand Germans. I've had four thousand to get off since the night before last. The Grand Duke with his staff leaves Warsaw this evening. You know what that means?"

Two men brought a stretcher from a tent. Its occupant's face was black; he fought desperately for breath. The officer asked the bearers curt questions, made notes, signed to them to pass on. Then he turned to Ian.

"Gas. That man's regiment has lost three thousand by it, to my knowledge. That gives you an idea of our work here. Help! How can I help?"

"I'm sorry," said Ian quietly, but with that air of authority he had learned in ruling Ruvno. "But I've a right to your help. My home has been blown to bits because you left a signaler bricked up in my church-tower. I know the Grand Duke will approve of anything you can do for me. If you've German wounded you can surely let some of them wait here for their friends and send my womenfolk to Warsaw in their places."

"I've no orders to help refugees," he returned sullenly.

"I'm a personal friend of the Grand Duke's."

"He has so many friends."

He was ticking off names from his list and asking the bearers questions during this conversation, which took some time.

"My time is precious, too," argued Ian. "I'll bury my chaplain and come back to you then. In the meantime you can perhaps think of some way to help me."

The officer pointed to a motor-lorry which was passing them on its way out of the camp. It was packed full of ghastly-looking men.

"There's your answer. How can I help with this Hell going on day and night?" he exclaimed irritably.

"Give me two horses and a peasant's cart."

"There are none."

"Then a pass for a train ... room on the roof will do."

His face softened now. He thought he was to get rid of this importunate

civilian.

"A capital idea. But I can't give you the pass. It's not my job. The officer who can is over there."

He pointed towards the station. "Go to him. Say I sent you. Nicolai Petrovich Ketov is my name. Good luck!" and he hurried into the tent.

On his way to the station Ian met Ostap.

"The devil take this hole!" he cried by way of greeting. "Not a horse to be found. Nor a cart. Nothing but bad temper and confusion." Then, when he heard the other's experience:

"Ketov. Don't know the name ... a Little Russian, I expect. But you can see all these officers are too busy to bother with us. I'll try humbler folk. Never mind. Do you go bury your priest. Meanwhile, give me your card, if you have one about you and write down the number of your followers and your quest upon it. Have you any money? That is always useful."

"Yes." Lately, he had been in the habit of carrying about all the ready money he possessed in case of an emergency like this. But he did not tell the Cossack he had enough to keep his little family for a few weeks, till he could sell the family jewels. In silence he pulled out a couple of hundred roubles, produced a card, and a note which he had had from the Grand Duke a week before.

"I'll not take the money, because we don't pay for any conveyance we may get till we're all in it. But I'll take that note. It may help us to get the conveyance," said Ostap.

He went off, whistling, and Ian sought the others. He found they had been more fortunate, for they had made friends with old Princess Orsov, better known in Petrograd and Moscow as Vera Petrovna. And she had heard of the Countess, first from hearsay; then, more fully, from the Grand Duke, for she was a personal friend of the imperial family.

She listened in silence to the Countess' story, her bright, Tatar eyes taking in every detail of that tired, well-bred face and the torn clothes, never made for tramping over battlefields. She took a fancy to the Polish woman at once, admired her courage and her determination. When the tale was told she made the three women go into a little pinewood hut which stood by the roadside, and managed to get them some hot coffee in a remarkably short time, considering the confusion.

"You shall have a dinner when it is ready," she said, speaking the purest French. "I'll help you to get off by hook or crook. But we are hard pressed here to find room for your wounded. Wait a moment I'll go and talk to my head nurse." And she hurried out, leaning on her stick.

"How clean this is!" sighed Vanda, looking round the cell-like place. "I wonder if she'll give us some soap and water, as well as a dinner. I seem to want it more than food."

”She’ll give us everything,” said Minnie cheerfully. ”She is the good fairy who always turns up, even in real life, when things look blackest. No, Countess?”

The Countess did not hear. She was thinking of the life they had left behind and wondered what the future held in store. And she thought of her faithful old friend, the chaplain, now lying in peace after his long journey and envied him, till she remembered that her boy wanted her and this thought gave comfort.

In a few minutes the Princess came back.

”We’re so packed that you couldn’t put a bayonet between the men,” she said in her brisk way. ”But I can take you three ladies on my hospital train if you don’t mind wearing white aprons and veils.”

”I am most grateful to you,” said the Countess. ”If you will take these two girls for me, it will be a great load off my mind.”

”But you?”

”I’ll do what my son does. I’ve known so many cases of families being separated and not finding each other for months together. And I don’t think I could bear the anxiety of that.”

Vera Petrovna laughed.

”That is when people have to tramp the roads by night,” she argued. ”Your son can get on a troop train, by hook or by crook. On the roof, or with the stoker. It’s nothing for a man.”

”But the train he gets on might not go to Warsaw,” objected the Countess. ”And where should I find him with all the telegraphic communication stopped?”

”I sha’n’t leave you,” said Vanda.

”Nor I,” added Minnie.

The old Russian was rather puzzled at this. But Ian came to the rescue. He looked on the matter in a far more practical light.

”It’s the greatest piece of luck you could have,” he said. ”I can’t tell you, Princess, how grateful I am. I’ve not been able ever to get anybody to listen to my request for a seat on the roof of a train, even. But I can tramp it. And I’ll do it all the better when I know you’re all safe.”

”You can’t help going to Warsaw,” said the Princess. ”You can arrange that whoever gets there first waits for the rest of the party.

”I wonder what the chances of getting from Warsaw to Petrograd or even Kiev are?” Ian asked her. This had been worrying him a good deal. He did not want to be left in Warsaw, unable to realize his valuables.

The Princess blinked her narrow eyes at him and tapped her stick on the floor. It was the same ebony stick whose knob was an enormous emerald set in pearls which she used in peace days. It was her one vanity. But in order to preserve the stones from scratches and dirt she had a lot of little washleather caps made for the knob which were changed and washed as soon as they showed the

need for it. For many months now this wonderful old woman, remnant of a type which the revolution has probably swept away forever, whose friends of youth had passed away, who stood alone in her memories, had been living between her hospital-train and her Petrograd palace, turned into a hospital, too. With that independence characteristic of her House she refused to have anything to do with the Russian Red Cross, supplied her own train, nurses, surgeons and requisities, her own engine-drivers, her own locomotives, and wood from her own forests to heat the train and make it go. The food came from her own estates, the civilian aid from her own circle of friends and acquaintances. In fact, she supplied everything but the patients and they never lacked, for Vera Petrovna's train and hospital soon won for themselves renown for comfort and good nursing that the wounded clamored to be taken there. Ian watched her as she stood, near his mother's chair, evidently revolving some plan in her shrewd old head. He, too, had heard of her, of her wealth and imperiousness, her kind heart and open hand. He reflected, little bitterly, that her fortune was safe, because her immense forests in Central Asia and her hunting grounds in Siberia, wherein you could have put Ruvno and lost it, where trappers caught sables and marten for the world's women, lay well beyond the invaders' grasp. He could not foresee her terrible end, which she met with fortitude; little guessed that her palace in Petrograd would be broken into by Lenine's mob, looted and burnt; that her old body would be thrown into the nearest canal after the life had been strangled out of it. All he saw now was a very energetic and prosperous member of the Russian aristocracy, a woman who could afford to laugh at the German advance because her native land was intact.

"Count," she said, addressing him because she had all her life preferred to deal with men.... "I have a proposal."

"Yes?"

"Will you allow me to take these ladies in my train to Petrograd? We go straight through."

"Straight through? But the difference in the gauge of the rails?"

She gave him a wink.

"That's a Russian bureaucratic legend," she returned. "I have a contrivance they put on the wheels, and all gauges are alike. The Germans have it, too, you may be sure, all ready to run their trains right up to Vilna. But to business. It's far better for you, Countess, and you, young ladies, to come straight up to safety with me than to risk being left in Warsaw. Who knows if you will get seats in a train or motor-car now?"

"It's very kind of you," said Ian, glancing at his mother, "But—-"

"No buts," retorted Vera Petrovna. "You're going to say we were complete strangers a few minutes ago. That's true. But in times like these one makes friends or enemies very fast. Oh, I've heard of all you've done for wounded

Russians at Ruvno," she went on, giving the Countess one of her shrewd looks. "And it would be a great honor for me to show you that we Russians are not like our government, that we wish to be Poland's friend and help her brave sons and daughters, who have borne the brunt of this awful war."

"Oh, how nice to hear you say that," exclaimed Vanda.

"I mean it. But let us arrange this. You, Count, can join your little family at my house in Petrograd. If you've never been there, all you have to do is to ask for the Orsov Palace. Every street-urchin knows it. Now, I must leave you for a moment. So much to do! Do you wait here till a bath and dinner are ready."

Then the others held a family council and persuaded the Countess to accept Vera Petrovna's offer. Later on, if they decided to stop in Petrograd they might find a furnished apartment, but it would be a great thing, Ian argued, for him to know they were in safe hands till he joined them. He gave his mother half his store of money and many promises to use every means to join her as soon as he could. He meant to stop in Warsaw and see what had become of the hardware factory which had been making field-kitchens for the army. But he kept this to himself, knowing his womenfolk would only worry about him the more, lest he fell into the Germans' hands. They all had lively recollections of that Prussian cavalryman who was so interested in the family emeralds, and whom he told a lie to. The Countess still had scruples about letting him go off alone.

"I shouldn't mind if I felt sure you wouldn't have to tramp all the way to Russia," she said, as she reluctantly took the money.

"But I sha'n't tramp, even to Sohaczev," he said confidently. "I'm sure to get on some kind of a train. And it will be like getting rid of a millstone round my neck to know you're all going in safety and comparative comfort." He lowered his voice. "Vera Petrovna's friendship will be a most valuable thing for us in Petrograd. And she's just as charming an old woman as everybody said she was."

There came a loud rap at the door.

"Bath!" exclaimed Vanda. "Come in!"

To their surprise, it was Major Healy, as large as ever and now very sunburnt into the bargain. He looked at them for a moment, took in the situation in his rather slow, very sympathetic way and said:

"Well, I'm glad to see you safe. I've been horribly worried about you these days. I was going off to Ruvno." He glanced at Minnie, who flushed, partly with pleasure at seeing him, partly with annoyance at her unkempt appearance.

They told him their story. He listened gravely, putting in a nod or a slow, heavy gesture now and again.

"I feared it," he remarked, when they had done. "When the Princess told me Lipniki had been bombarded I knew what that must mean for Ruvno. I was going to push on there this afternoon and get your news. As you're here, I'm

back to Warsaw. I've distributed all my relief. There's room in my side-car for one. Which of you is coming?"

"Oh!" said the Countess, and looked at her boy.

"I've some peasant women," said he.

Healy laughed and shook his head.

"I can only take one, and a light one. I'm a heavy-weight and the road is awful."

"They can draw lots," said Ian. "The others will have to shift with us men."

He saw Healy was not over eager to take peasants, and determined he should. They were still discussing it when Vera Petrovna sent word by a nurse that the bathroom in the train was ready for them and that there would be a hasty dinner in half an hour.

The women hurried out. Healy offered Ian a cigarette and lighted one for himself. Then, in his pondering way, he began.

"Count, we've not seen each other as much as I'd like, but I believe we're friends."

"We are," agreed Ian heartily. "And you've been a good friend to my country, too."

"Well, I've only done my duty and not half as much as I'd like," said the American giant, sitting on the camp bed, which creaked plaintively under his weight. "But for the moment I want to talk to you about my private affairs." He looked round the log hut and through the little window to the hospital beyond. "It seems an unsuitable time and place for me to worry you, when you've been torn up, root and stock. I appreciate your troubles, but I've no choice but to worry you a moment with my own affairs."

"By all means. We part soon, and you never know how long it'll be before—-"

"Exactly. You've hit the spot, Count, I may as well say, without any more beating about the bush, that I'm interested in Miss Minnie Burton."

"Ah!"

"Deeply interested. I suppose she told you that we saw quite a little of each other when she was in Warsaw during that December advance."

"Oh, yes," said Ian, putting politeness before veracity.

"My interest has grown, deepened, since then. She's a real fine girl, is Miss Minnie Burton, and comes of a fine old stock. I want to marry her." Here his honest eyes met his friend's and his honest, broad face became redder than ever. "And I want to shoot her out of this danger in my trailer."

"As to marrying her, I'm not her guardian," said Ian. "Her brother—-"

"On the high seas. And can't give opinions, one way or the other right here."

"I doubt if you'd find a parson to marry you just now," said Ian, who had exaggerated ideas of American impatience.

"Good God! I wasn't thinking of marrying her this minute. Nor in this Hell of a place. I guess there'll be time enough for the ceremony in Petrograd. I'd like the wedding to be from Princess Orsov's palace."

"Oh, does she know of your–your—-"

"No. But she will. And she's just as cordial to yours truly as she can be. What I want is your countenance to my taking Miss Burton on my side-car. There are a few points I want to fix up with her. I guess we'll have plenty of time to talk on the way to Warsaw."

"But Warsaw isn't Petrograd," objected Ian. "I think she'll be far safer in Vera Petrovna's train. I'm responsible for her, you know, till you–till you get the family's consent to the match."

Healy laughed. The idea of family consent appeared to Ian to amuse him greatly.

"She's of age. And family consent be darned if she's willing, which I'm nearly sure she is. As to responsibility, I'd not like to have her get into any unpleasantness with that brother of hers. But she needn't worry. I'll get her safe to Petrograd as soon as the Princess could. And sooner, maybe. I know how they shunt those trains into sidings. We've got a fine touring car waiting in Warsaw and enough petrol to take us to Vladivostock. In fact, I'd be glad to give you a seat in it if you can get there in time for us to start fair of the Germans."

"Thanks very much."

"And then you'd do the chaperon, and that brother couldn't say anything. Now, then, can I take her on my trailer?"

"Yes. If she likes to go. But you'd better arrange with the Princess about taking a peasant woman in her place. I'm getting so many favors from her as it is, I can't ask for any more."

"That I will."

Ian got up.

"I'll leave you to do it. I've some things to see about." And he sought Ostap, to arrange with him about Father Constantine's funeral immediately after a hasty meal.

He was glad that Healy and Minnie were going to marry. It relieved him of any further responsibility and would certainly put an end to maternal hints about the advisability of settling down with her as wife. He did not want to settle down. He meant to go and fight as soon as he had put his mother in some secure corner and provided her with enough money to live upon.

They buried Father Constantine just as he died, in his dusty alpaca soutane, his hands folded over die malachite Crucifix. They laid him in the cemetery be-

hind a group of tents which formed the camp hospital, amongst Russian soldiers, digging his grave with a spade Ostap managed to pick up somewhere. Several other hasty funerals were going on and nobody paid the least attention to him. They could find no wood to make a rough cross; but there was some ivy near and Vanda twisted that into one, putting it over the newly-turned sods. They could not even write his name–so left him, unrecorded, and in peace. They had not gone far towards the station when a messenger met them to say that the hospital-train was ready to start. Ostap ran up, too. He had good news.

"It's nearly settled for you and your peasants," he said to Ian. "The transport officer asks for you."

Ian hurried off, leaving the Countess and Vanda to go to the train under Ostap's guidance and found the officer in question checking figures on a bit of paper. He was as weary and worried as the first one had been. But he seemed to want men.

"Five hundred unwounded Germans leave at once," he said hurriedly. "You and your peasants take charge of some trucks. The first train to leave. We are short."

"I accept with pleasure."

"Good. Go with your peasants; for you'll be wanted in a moment."

"My peasants are here. I'll just go and say good-bye to my womenfolk."

He ran up to the Orsov train which stood at one end of the primitive station, ready to start. Ropes had been tied over the roof and down the sides of the coaches; to these clung men with bandaged heads and feet. The Princess met him.

"They are down here," she said. Then, seeing him look at the crowded roof. "You are wondering how all these men are going to hold on till we reach Petrograd. But you know what happens. We shall be shunted into sidings for hours and then they can rest. Some will be back in their regiments before a month. The bad cases are all inside."

She led the way through a crowd of soldiers, prisoners and stretcher-bearers towards the head of her train. His mother and Vanda stood there, with Minnie and the American. Ian noticed two of his peasant women on the steps of a coach as they passed.

"Why, have you taken them, too?" he asked. "You're simply wonderful."

"A nurse is ill–typhoid, I fear. So a peasant goes to do her work. Your mother tells me she has had some experience. The other goes in the English girl's place." Her narrow eyes twinkled. "She's off with Healy. These Americans make me laugh. They do things nobody in Russia would do and with impunity, too."

"Yes. But he's a good fellow."

"Excellent. But you'll see he'll make me have the wedding in my house, busy as I am."

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Ian.

He said his good-byes, with many injunctions to his dear ones not to leave the Orsov palace till he fetched them. Vanda's soft eyes rested on his and their look was an embrace.

"God bless you," he said, kissing her hand.

"And you," she returned in low tones. "Listen. There is a man here who is in Joseph's regiment."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"No. But the Princess says he told her the name of his captain. He has gone on to Warsaw. The regiment, he says, must be there by now. Will you?—-"

"Yes, I'll find out. And tell him you are safe."

Then he thanked the Princess who returned his hand-kiss in true Russian fashion, with a salute on his forehead.

"God with you," she said in her native tongue. "It's more hearty in Russian than in French." She knew the Polish dislike for the language of the bureaucrats and government who had oppressed them for generations. "Your little family is safe with me." Then in French: "I'm your friend, Count, and sha'n't forget you."

A moment later he had helped her into the train, which left. He had to hurry back to his own. Healy and Minnie had disappeared.

The Germans were packed into cattle-trucks without roofs or benches. Over each truck were two sentry boxes, at either end, facing one another. Each of the guards had a rifle, taken from the Germans. But there was no ammunition. A weary-looking subaltern came up as they were getting settled and told them to use bayonet and butt if their charges gave any trouble.

Ian's peasants were distributed amongst the Russian sentries. He was with Ostap opposite him, Germans packed like cattle in between. Martin formed the subject of heated talk with the subaltern.

"He has no more strength than a cat," grumbled the Russian. "You can't take him on this train."

"Very well," retorted Ian, furious. "If you send him off the train we all go. I'll tramp to Warsaw, but I won't leave him."

"He's neither so old nor weak as he looks," put in Ostap. "I'll answer for him to do his work here."

"You won't answer for prisoners getting loose," retorted the subaltern. However, Martin was finally put with the engine-driver. He sat on the floor by the wood-chest and slept for ten hours, without feeling or hearing anything, though people came and went and he found somebody's dog fast asleep on his chest when he awoke.

It seemed as though they would never start. Several times the word was given, only to be rescinded. Many human odds and ends of a military camp arrived, apparently from nowhere, and demanded to be allowed standing-room amongst the prisoners. The weary subaltern protested and swore but all applicants seemed to find places. Before they left two empty trains came up from Warsaw to take wounded. Ian noticed they were roped like the Orsov train. In a remarkably short time they were packed, inside and out, with sick and wounded whom Nicolai Petrovitch Ketov was striving to get off before the Germans came. He was an amiable lawyer in private life, with a passion for music and a speculative mind. Ian had the satisfaction of hearing later on that he left neither man, woman nor child behind at the camp, that he saw everything was burnt that the troops could not carry away and that he even made the grain uneatable by pouring petrol over it.

The delay fretted Ian, for he was in a good deal of pain from his broken ribs and feverish as well, suffering agonies of thirst. He had a hasty visit from Minnie and Healy, who came up as near as they could to shout him good-bye.

"We're off," said she. "I wish you were looking more comfortable."

"Oh, I'm all right. I forgot to get some water, that's all."

Healy went off and brought a bottle full. And he insisted on Ian's taking a packet of cigarettes.

"I'll reach Warsaw before you," he urged. "So do take them all. I'll keep the car there as long as I dare. Look me up at the American Consulate. You know where it is?"

"No. But I can find out."

"Good. Mind, your seat will be kept till we start."

"When is that?"

"When the Grand Duke leaves. They say here he leaves to-night. But I don't believe it. And I'm not going to forget Poland. When I've got more stores I'm coming back again."

He watched them go off in a cloud of dust. They had luck with love, he reflected. They would get on very well together. He knew Healy was well off, and Minnie had a little fortune of her own. And they would spend it wisely, helping those poorer than themselves. He had no hope of marrying Vanda. Joseph was well and safe. He ought to have been glad of it, he knew. But he hated his cousin bitterly, all the more bitterly as ruin closed around him and years of exile filled his tired vision. Very likely he would get killed before his rival.

Ostap was very cheerful. After telling the prisoners what they were to expect if they tried any nonsense he shared his last cigarette with one of them. Ian seemed to hear his voice all the time. It broke into his sorrowful meditations and sometimes got mixed up with them, for the fever made him rather muddle-

headed.

"We haven't ammunition," Ostap said. "But we use the knife instead. There were hundreds of you in that camp wounded with our bayonets. All ours are wounded with shells and shrapnel because you are afraid to come too close."

"We have enough ammunition to beat the world," put in a thick German voice; it belonged to one who had been a clerk in Moscow.

"Perhaps," agreed Ostap. "But we have more men and don't care if we die or not. That will beat the people who beat the world, in the end."

Thus the talk went on. Ian dozed on his perch, wondering at last who was beating the world and where the ammunition came from. And just before sunset they arrived at Sohaczev.

XIX

Here, a rough surprise awaited them. They were bundled off the train without ceremony by a transport officer, whose temper was so bad that the memory of Nicolai Petrovitch Ketov was pleasant in comparison.

"Off with you!" he shouted. "We're not going to a party. This is war."

"But we were put in charge of this train by the transport officer at the last camp," protested Ostap.

"The devil take the train. I've got wounded to send off."

"Then what are we to do?" asked Ian.

"Hang yourselves," was the polite reply and the officer turned on his heel.

The fugitives, standing in an indignant little group on the platform, hustled by the many passers-by, turned to Ostap. He was a soldier and ought to help them out of their new predicament.

"What next?" asked Ian, voicing the thought of his followers.

"God knows." He looked round at the multitude of races who jostled and cursed and shouted and implored. "If only I could see a Cossack I might get some information. But all the tribes of the Empire seem to be here except ours."

"Look! They're marching off our German prisoners," cried Dulski, the Ruvno village blacksmith, a huge, good-natured man, whose three sons were fighting, and whose wife had gone on Vera Petrovna's train. "They must be going to Warsaw. If we follow them we can't go astray."

"On foot!" exclaimed Ostap. "Not if I know it. And you, Count!"

"I'd rather tramp than be left here, but I think we ought to try and get a lift first. I know this town and may find a Jew who will sell us something to go in." He turned to the peasants: "Don't any of you move from the station till I tell you. Here's money to buy food." He handed Dulski a twenty-rouble note and was off in search of a horse and cart.

First, however, they tried to get some information from the station-master about possible trains to Warsaw. But they might as well have talked to the moon, for all the answer they could get.

"Let us go outside," said Ian after wasting precious time in their vain quest for information. "If there are any Jews with a horse and cart to sell we shall find them there."

The precincts of the station were as crowded as the camp had been. But they found, on talking to the loiterers, that most of the citizens had decided to stay where they were. Ian noticed a prosperous horse-dealer of the race of Israel, in a new alpaca *halat* and a pair of very shiny top-boots.

"There's our man," he said in relief. "If there's a bit of horseflesh left in the place Hermann has got it to sell."

Hermann met their request with florid expressions of sympathy and devotion. With tears in his eyes he swore he could not provide a lift.

"There's not a beast on four legs left within twenty versts or more," he said regretfully. "What with the army and the refugees we're as bare as that." And thrusting out the palm of one fat hand he pointed to it with the other.

Ian turned to his companion.

"There's nothing for us but to tramp it," he said sadly.

The horse-dealer shot out his arms in unaffected horror. In eastern Europe only the poor go on foot. Bad roads and good horses have something to do with people's dislike for walking.

"Tramp to Warsaw!" he cried. "The Lord of Ruvno tramp those horrible roads! Such a thing was never heard of. Peasants and the poorest Jews do that ... but no gentleman!"

"The times have changed," remarked Ostap. "But if you are so shocked at the thought of it do you help us to ride."

"Wait I will ask some of ours what is to be done."

He disappeared into a dirty-looking general shop which stood close at hand. In a very short time he emerged, beaming all over his broad, greasy face.

"My Lord Count," he cried, bursting with importance, "I have arranged everything. There will be a train."

"The last is just leaving," said Ostap. "We were turned off it to make room for the wounded."

"One is to arrive from Warsaw," persisted the Jew. "It will take the rest of

the wounded and such of the citizens as want to go."

"Who said so?"

"Our Rabbi."

"What does he know about it?"

"He had it from the transport officer."

Ostap, listening, looked at the Jew with mingled scorn, wonder and admiration.

"You Jews are strange people," was his verdict. "Here have we been trying to get information from the authorities for half an hour, one a great gentleman in these parts, the other a Cossack officer anxious to rejoin his troop, and nobody will give us a good word. Yet this Jew horse-dealer here knows everything."

"He may be wrong," said Ian. "They often are."

"But I am right," said Hermann. "You'll see for yourself I am right if you wait in the station. Meanwhile, I must go, for a messenger calls me home." And off he went.

Ostap looked down the forlorn road which led from the station to the town and pointed to a Red Cross flag flying from a distant building.

"There are wounded left. Our people will try to get them away. We may not have to tramp after all. I'll go to that transport officer again."

"Don't. He'll only swear at you. Let us get on the train, if it comes, without asking anybody's leave."

Ostap gave him a quick look of alarm; he had spoken in a listless tone the Cossack heard from him for the first time since they met.

"You're ill?"

"Nothing. A pain in my side and the devil's own thirst."

"It's the broken ribs. Go to one of the hospital tents and get a bandage put around you. It helps a lot."

"They've something else to do than see to a trifle like that. I'll go and get a drink." And he rose from a trunk, abandoned by some hasty traveler, which stood near the station steps.

"Good. Do you go get your drink at the station pump and await me. There must be food in this town and I mean to have it."

Ian produced a banknote, but the other waved it aside.

"No. Let this be my meal. Besides, I don't count to spend money." And he hurried down the forlorn road.

Ian went to the pump, slaked his thirst with its cool water, soused his head and began to feel better. The long summer twilight still lingered and, as he sat down on the bank, he saw a vaguely familiar figure come towards him. It was a Cossack, grizzled, thin as a rake, hard as nails. As the newcomer began to work the pump he recognized the bluff colonel who had refused to have him as

a volunteer at the beginning of the war.

He waited till the man had drunk and washed, baring himself to the waist, showing strong muscles that stood out from his fair skin and a large scar on his right arm. Then he said:

"Are you still refusing volunteers?"

The Cossack turned sharply.

"Who the devil are you?" was his greeting.

"Do you remember a Polish squire who asked for a commission at the beginning of the war?"

"No," he grunted, drying himself as best he might with a bandana handkerchief he pulled out of his wide trouser-leg. But it was a hopeless business so he gave it up, walking about and waving his arms.

"You said I was too fat."

"You don't look it."

"And too old."

"Older, better men than you are strewing the fields to-night."

"Do you want volunteers now?"

At this the Cossack turned upon him, rage, mortification and sorrow choking his voice, so that it came harsh and thick.

"Want!" he cried. "I want guns, gun-fodder, batteries, honesty. I want to sweep out all those German-spawned traitors at Petrograd. I want to clean out the ministries, put honest soldiers there instead of the breed of thieves and liars. Want, indeed! Russia wants everything. Everything! Where are my men? Where to God are the three thousand Cossacks I led from the Don? There! There!" He thrust his bare, muscular arms towards the west. "Carrion," he cried, with a half-stifled sob. "Not killed in fair fight. Never a one of them. But murdered; yes, murdered by a horde of thieves in Petrograd, who sent me promises for guns, empty words for muskets, champagne for shrapnel! Oh, think of it! The flower of the Don Troop, crying for the wherewithal to fight, beating off the Germans with sticks we tore from the trees, with never a musket, never a gas-mask, nothing but corruption and treachery, bought with German gold. Oh, my heart bursts with the burden of it! All my good Cossacks flung into the cannon's mouth, belching forth fire, whilst we had nothing, nothing!"

He broke off, tore up and down, muttering like a wounded lion.

"And they died like dogs! For this!" His arms swept the desolate landscape. "For rapine and retreat! For burning corn and ruined farmsteads! To leave the Lakes of Masuria; to leave the Vistula, the Dneiper, the Niemen and God knows what besides!"

He stopped, overcome with his emotion, strode back to the pump, let a stream of water flow over his grizzled head, gave a gigantic sigh and relapsed

into silence. And thus they stayed together for some time. Ian did not even try to comfort him; what solace could he offer when he knew that those bitter words were all too true? The Cossack spoke first.

"A cigarette," he demanded.

Ian handed him the packet which Healy had brought up to the train. He took a couple, threw back the rest, and asked for matches. It was now almost dark and in the light of the little flame he scanned Ian's face.

"I remember you," he said when his cigarette was half smoked through. "You talked of shooting quail on the wing and wanted to shoot me."

"Not quite. But I was sore because you wouldn't have me."

"It was all so different then. Eh, God! What a fool I was to believe in that lying, thieving horde at Petrograd! Petrograd forsooth! They might as well have kept it Petersburg, for all the Germans that are in it still. Phew! I spit on these politicians!" And he did so.

"Russia is wide," said Ian.

"Wide and bungling! With a little order, a little honesty we should have been in Berlin long ago. God! How they ran from the Lakes of Masuria! How they scuttled like geese before our Cossack spears! And then our supplies gave out, and none were forthcoming, Oh, the Empire is a prey to a horde of thieves. Many defeats await us yet. By the way, you spoke of your country house and your lady mother and your forests, when in Warsaw. What of them?"

Briefly Ian told him.

"Ay. The same story everywhere. And I thought I'd be coming to you with German booty," he remarked sadly. "It made my heart bleed to see the fugitives. But you may be glad your womenfolk got safely away. And what will you do now?"

"Fight. Won't you take me in your regiment?"

"Regiment!" the other echoed bitterly, beating his chest "I am the regiment."

"Not all gone?"

"Killed, wounded, gassed, a few prisoners, and you have the lot."

"But you'll reconstruct?"

"Ay. That I will. If there's a Cossack left I'm game."

"Then let me be one of your new officers," pleaded Ian.

He was beginning to like this gruff, grizzled soldier. He did not want to volunteer in France, for that would mean going a long way from Vanda, and separating his mother from her. In his shy way he tried to convey his eagerness to join the Russian army, and the Colonel's manner softened.

"Eh, God. I think you'd make a good soldier. I can't say ay or nay. The matter lies with my superiors."

"But you can recommend me," he urged.

"I can and will. I haven't a card. Have you a scrap of paper?"

Ian searched and produced a card and pencil, also his electric torch. The Cossack wrote some lines and handed the card back.

"Now, headquarters will be in Rostov. It is a long journey. But do you go there and say I sent you. It's written on the card. We shall meet there within a fortnight, but I must go to that German cesspool first."

"So must I."

"Ah! Where will you lodge?"

"I don't know yet. But they'll tell you at the Orsov Palace."

"So you know Vera Petrovna? She is a powerful friend to have. You can get a softer bed to lie on than campaigning with me if you ask her."

"I don't want to sit in some office. I want to fight. I hope to meet a man named von Senborn face to face and give him back a little of what he's done to me and my property."

"You're the right stuff. But how war's changed you! You were as plump as one of your own quails a year aback. And sleek as a maid. If we don't meet in Petrograd do you seek me out in Rostov. I have to get a seat on this cattle-train. Many of my children are there."

He hurried into his clothes, rammed the cap well on to his head and went off. They parted the best of friends. Scarcely had his tall, lithe figure disappeared into the summer night when Ostap hurried on to the platform. He had looted a deserted house and they ate heartily of ham, bread, butter and cold veal. He brought a bottle of light Polish beer, too; but Ian would not touch it, saying his head ached. Ostap was much interested in hearing about his talk with the Cossack colonel and asked to see the card. He read it eagerly and looked up, saying with respect in his voice:

"But it is my Colonel, Irmal Platov, of the family that produced the famous Cossack general. They say he will be head of the Pan-Cossack League one day. Where did he go? It will cheer him to know that one officer at least is alive and sound."

Ian pointed to the train, which was now getting up steam, and he was off like a shot. Ian put back his card, reflected that it was a lucky chance to have met this man, whom the Cossacks evidently respected highly. He went back to the station building. It was high time to find out definitely whether or no there would be another train before the Russians left the place. Martin, he ascertained, was still fast asleep on the floor of the engine which had brought them from the camp and nobody disturbed him.

In the ticket-office he met the horse-dealer who was running hither and thither in a great state of excitement, calling Ian's name at the top of his voice.

"What are you yelling about?" he asked. "Has the train come?"

"Oh, thank God, you're here! I feared you had started."

"What is it?"

"One of your friends wants you. He is sick to death. Not a moment have we to lose."

"Who?"

"I know not. But hurry!"

They made their way out of the disorderly, miserable town, which knew all the vicissitudes of warfare, and into squalid suburbs, where only Jews, and the poorest at that, could live. With many puzzling thoughts Ian asked his guide whither they were going and who of his friends lived in this unsavory quarter.

"I know nothing," answered he. "It is a friend. He wanted to send one of our people to Ruvno. But the messenger knew you had left Ruvno. But at the hospital none had the heart to tell him the truth. Just now I happened to see this messenger and tell him my Lord Count was here. So I sought you for a long while."

"Haven't you any idea who is this friend?"

"A gentleman. He sent out a hundred roubles to the messenger, I know."

He did not add that he was the messenger and the hundred roubles now lay in his pocket-book. After a quarter of an hour's brisk walking he led the way to a field. Ian could see the dim outline of a tent.

"A military hospital?" he asked.

"Yes." Hermann stopped. "Here I leave you. I fear the cholera." And he was gone.

Cholera. Ian hesitated. Which of his friends was dying of that loathsome pest? Roman? The thought tore his heart. Joseph? Oh, he hoped not. He hastily prayed it might not be a man at all dear to him. Yet he could think of nobody, friend or foe, whom he wished to watch dying of cholera.

Troubled thus, he made his way up to the tent. No sentry guarded the entry. That was unnecessary; all shunned the place. It was very quiet after the bustle and babel of the station. He heard no voices. The only sign of living man was a faint streak of light that came between the canvas and the ground.

He held up the flap and went in.

It was a large tent and there were many beds in it Some stood vacant, others held shrouded, still masses of contorted humanity. Others again, most ghastly of all, were occupied by men of all ages and many races. Two bearers were carrying out a burden through another entrance, at the far end. He looked around in an agony of disgust and suspense. A nurse and doctor were bending over one couch. He learned afterwards that the medical staff had drawn lots to decide which of them should go with the retreating army and which remain behind with those too ill to be moved and enter captivity with them. It seemed to him that these

two lingered a long time. Then he heard the doctor say:

"He'll live. The worst is over."

Instantly Ian lost his shyness and hastened to them,

"Who is it?" he asked in French, true to the habit of a lifetime which bade him address a Russian in the international language.

The nurse turned and made room for him at the bedside.

"Do you know him?"

A glance at the patient was enough.

"No," he answered.

The doctor hurried away. The woman, attending to the sick man, asked Ian whom he sought.

"I don't know. A Jew brought me. Said a man here wanted somebody from Ruvno. I am from Ruvno."

"Ah! I remember now. One moment." Swiftly she completed her task and turned towards the north end of the tent. He followed her to a far corner, till she stopped before a bed which held one of the shrouded forms.

"Too late!" he cried.

She gave him a look of sympathy.

"He died a few minutes ago."

Unable to utter a word, he signed to her. Gently, she turned back the sheet. He stepped forward; all hatred, all bitterness, slipped from him like a cloak. Joseph was no more. He could marry Vanda.

This was his uppermost thought; his next, as he gazed at that familiar, yet transformed face, a deep relief that Roman had not suffered that death. Then came remorse for the speed of his thoughts towards marrying her this man had loved, and sharp pain that Destiny had taken him in such a way. He wanted Joseph to die fighting, as young men should in war-time, in the open, falling to God's good earth, whence they come, mingling their life's blood with the fountain of all life. That livid, emaciated face, with evil stains on the once healthy cheeks was a reproach to modernity, a seal upon the Cossack's cry of "murdered!"

For a long time he gazed and many an emotion rose and swelled in his heart; scenes of boyhood sprang up again; memories of the chase, of the life they once trod together, as dead for him now as was Joseph himself. And whilst he breathed a prayer for the dead which Father Constantine had taught them all, he thanked God that he had resisted the call of passion a few nights ago, when he sat and watched the summer moon, so sure it lighted Joseph's body on the battlefield. Now, at least, he could look on his remains without remorse for evil action.

The nurse had gone; but two orderlies came up.

"We must bury him," one of them said in the Russian of Moscow.

As Ian looked up they noticed his eyes were dimmed with tears unshed.

"Is there a Catholic priest about?"

The men looked at one another.

"In the town perhaps–not here."

"I'll bring one."

"We cannot wait till you go so far. We have strict orders to bury each poor victim at once. What will you? The infection is deadly and we are working day and night."

"I'll be back before you close the coffin."

"Coffin! There are none left."

Ian passed the one nearest him a fifty-rouble note.

"I know the town. Wait for me." And he hurried out.

He was desperately anxious to give Joseph Christian burial. He felt he must; it might atone for his fault of feeling that great load off his heart now he knew Vanda would be his. Then he remembered the Cossack colonel's card. He had promised to fight, had insisted on being drafted into a hard-fighting regiment. But that was an hour ago. That was when thoughts of Vanda were pain, and he did not so much mind if he got killed. Now, he hated the idea of it. If he got killed soon he would be no more married to her than Joseph had been. He rebelled. Why should he go and get killed? Russia had plenty of men. He had lost enough in the war already without losing the last chance of happiness. Russia had turned him away once and he was not in duty bound to apply again. Besides, he could do war-work without putting on a Cossack coat; could volunteer for a mission abroad; for instance say to the Pope, who only knew what the Germans and their friends told him...

As he stumbled over the road, choked with the debris of a retreating army, he felt particularly fitted to tell the Pope what Poland was enduring. He had an uncle in Rome, a younger brother of his father, created a cardinal during the pontificate of Pius the Tenth. So he could gain the Pope's ear far more easily than many other people. Rome, he argued, had no more faithful children than the Poles, who have suffered much persecution for their faith. And it was high time the Holy Father knew the truth about the Germans. He, Ian, would tell him. Yes; he could serve his country's cause, and the Allies' just as well in Rome as in Colonel Platov's regiment. Rome would be a good place for his mother to live in. If he joined the army she would have to stop in Russia, to be near him. In Rome, they could all live quietly and comfortable together–he, Vanda, his mother. After all, it was fair to them to look after them; and his mother had only him now. And the Allies had millions of men. Russia wanted guns, which he could not make, and organization, which he could not give her.

He reached the house of a priest he knew and very few words sufficed to

tell him what had happened; then they hastened back together.

They buried Joseph in a field set apart as a cemetery in connection with the cholera tent. Ian gave the priest money and instructions for a Cross to be put over the grave. Then he sought the nurse. On hearing who he was she took him to a clerk, who gave him the things they had found in Joseph's pockets: a photograph of Vanda, a packet of her letters, and some money. When it was all over and he had parted from the priest he made his way back to the station. It was nearly ten o'clock. He found that the horse-dealer was right after all. A train, the last one, stood ready to start for Warsaw. The inside was packed with wounded men, the roof with refugees, some of whom were wounded, too. He heard Ostap's voice calling for him and shouted back that he was coming.

"Be quick!" he shouted. "We're on the roof. Third coach from the engine. It's all we can do to keep sitting room for you. Climb up, for these Jews are great pushers."

"Where are my peasants?"

"Here, thank God!" said a voice.

"All?"

"All. Safe and sound. Get up, my Lord Count, for the train is starting already."

Ian clambered up and squeezed himself in between the blacksmith and Ostap, who indignantly asked where he had been hiding.

"We searched high and low. If not for this blacksmith, who sat as broad as he could, we'd never have been able to keep your place." He did not tell them where he had been. Heart and head were filled with new emotions, and a new struggle. The idea of going to Rome fascinated him. He found so much in its favor, so little to say against it. Only that Cossack colonel would ever know he had drawn back. None shared his plans. And the soldier would forget him.

He was no longer the man who urged Platov to take him at the beginning of the war; then, he could not realize the love that had grown with each month of strife and anxiety, till it now overwhelmed every other feeling. Destiny led him to the tent wherein he found a promise of happiness. And a loud voice within cried not to give it up.

It was an endless journey and very uncomfortable. They were perpetually stopping to make way for other trains, filled with troops, whole and wounded. From time to time some of the little party got down to stretch their legs, one keeping the place for another with that ready comradeship which war's vicissitudes breed between men of vastly different race and caste. Jew elbowed Gentile; patrician drank with outcast in their flight before the stupendous Hun. It seemed to Ian that all the trains in Russia passed them; troops in open trucks, who made an infernal noise with their *balalaikas* and their voices. He wondered sadly that

they could abandon Poland to her fate with such light hearts ... and then remembered that they were Russians, brave as lions, but mentally children yet; so the direction in which they traveled was no affair of theirs.

He thought of his ruined home and the many other ruined homes they passed and wondered where their late owners were, that cool, starry night. Some, he knew, lay quiet and still by the wayside, for he had seen such in his flight. Some, like Father Constantine, had found rest in a soldier's graveyard before friends left them, to seek a new life in exile. And, as his memory dwelt on the last year, as he passed farm after farm alight with the fires of destruction, the weakness born of the sudden knowledge that Vanda was free left him. He knew he could not go to Rome; knew he would not have a quiet hour if he chose the easier road; that every devastated home, every orphan in his native land would ring a terrible chorus of reproach into his soul. Roman's words of that evening at the "*Oaza*," came back:

"There is no love without sacrifice."

How little he had known of love then; how much now! He wondered at the craven Ian who had planned a safe journey to Rome whilst his native land was bleeding. There was nothing for him but to fight. Oh, he would marry Vanda, and perhaps live through the war. Then they would return to a free Poland and a free Ruvno, to build and plant afresh for their children, freed from bondage and all persecution. In the trenches, on the battlefield, he would have that lodestar. Now, he knew not how he ever could have imagined the war without himself in it.

These thoughts ran through his mind, accompanied by visions of burning houses, huddled, hungry refugees, suffering, struggling humanity. Through all was the joy of knowing Vanda would be his–and over all came Ostap's voice as he held forth to others on the roof.

"Yes; we spit upon life. So we shall win, in the end. And our children will be freed."

And the Cossack's words gave him comfort.

THE END

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