

Excerpts from

# **I Wonder as I Wander**

by Langston Hughes

Although it was written in 1954, it covers the period from 1931 to 1938

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### 3 MOSCOW MOVIE

#### BANNER AT THE BORDER

Driving as fast as I could from coast to coast, I got to New York just in time to pick up my ticket, say goodbye to Harlem, and head for the North German Lloyd, loaded down with bags, baggage, books, a typewriter, a victrola, and a big box of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington and Ethel Waters records. I was the last passenger up the gangplank, missing all the friends who had come to see me off, for when I arrived visitors had been put ashore.

Crossing the Atlantic on the Bremen, it was wonderful weather. My first two days aboard, I did nothing but sleep. After almost nine months of continuous travel, lecturing from Baltimore to Bakersfield, Miami to Seattle, then a breakneck trip by Ford across the whole country, I was pretty tired. The boat was full of young people, and when I did wake up, the voyage was fun. I practiced German, studied Russian, played deck games, and danced.

I had not before known most of the group going to make the Moscow movie. When I became acquainted with them on board, it turned out that the majority were not actors at all, as I had supposed they would be. Of the twenty-two Negroes headed for Moscow, most were youthful intellectuals—recent college graduates curious about the Soviet Union—or youngsters anxious to see Europe, but whose feet had never set foot on any stage and whose faces had never been before a motion-picture camera. There were only two professional theater people in the group. The one really seasoned actor accompanying us was Wayland Rudd, and the other Thespian was Sylvia Garner who had played a minor role in *Scarlet Sister Mary*, having been one of the few Negroes in that “Negro” drama as performed by Ethel Barrymore, Estelle Winwood and other whites in blackface. These two professionals were also the only really mature people in our group, everyone else being well under thirty and some hardly out of their teens. There were no middle-aged or elderly folks, should there be such roles in the film we were to make. It turned out, however, that as yet no one had seen the scenario, or even knew the story. But that worried none of us. It was fun to be traveling. Besides, at home, jobs were hard to get and wages were low.

Among these young Negroes were an art student just out of Hampton, a teacher, a girl elocutionist from Seattle, three would-be writers other than myself, a very pretty divorcee who traveled on alimony, a female swimming instructor, and various clerks and stenographers—all distinctly from the white-collar or student classes. Although we had heard that the film was to be about workers, there was not a single worker—in the laboring sense—except perhaps the leader of the group (the one Communist Party member, so far as I knew), and he did not look much like a worker. But, at least, he had not been to college, and had no connection with the arts. That most of our group were not actors seems to have been due to the fact that very few professional theater people were willing to pay their own fares to travel all the way to Russia to sign contracts they had never seen. Only a band of eager, adventurous young students, teachers, writers and would-be actors were willing to do that, looking forward to the fun and wonder of a foreign land as much as to film-making. There were a few among them who said they wanted to get away from American race prejudice forever, being filled up with Jim Crow. These hoped to remain abroad. But most of the twenty-two simply thought they had found an exciting way to spend the summer. An exciting summer it turned out to be, too.

When we got to Berlin, we ran into the first of our experiences with the famous Russian red tape: permission for our visas had not been okayed. In fact, it seemed the Russian Consulate had not been alerted as to our coming at all, so it would have to cable Moscow to find out if an American Negro group really had been invited to the Soviet Union to work in a film. In Berlin, Negroes were received at hotels without question, so we settled down to await visas. We ate in any restaurant we could afford. In the German capital, I could not help but remember my recent experiences in the South with restaurants that served whites only, and autocamps all across America that refused to rent me a cabin in which to sleep. Nevertheless, in spite of racial freedom, Berlin seemed to me a wretched city. Its beautiful buildings and wide avenues in the center of the town were ringed with grey slums.

Our hotel was near one of the big railroad stations. There I put a coin into what I thought was a candy-bar machine, but a package of prophylactics came out instead. The streets nearby teemed with prostitutes, pimps, panderers and vendors of dirty pictures. Some of the young men in our group got acquainted for the first time with what Americans in the pre-Kinsey era termed “perversions.” Unusual sex pleasures from beautiful girls were openly offered in no uncertain phraseology on every corner and at pathetically low prices. Some of the young men, not having much money, bargained rather sharply to satisfy their curiosity as cheaply as possible. Data was exchanged in the hotel lobby.

“Man, do you know what a girl just offered to do for me for a quarter—a blonde, too.”

“Aw, fellow, you’d be cheated at that rate. See the chick outside the door? She does what you’re talking about for fifteen cents—or a pack of Camels.”

The pathos and poverty of Berlin's low-priced market in bodies depressed me. As a seaman I had been in many ports and had spent a year in Paris working on Rue Pigalle, but I had not seen anywhere people so desperate as these walkers of the night streets in Berlin. The only amusing incident I remember about my stay there occurred in the Haus Vaterland, a big amusement center of bars, restaurants and dancing halls in the center of town. Among its attractions was a Wild West Bar on the lower floor, and a Turkish Coffee House with red hassocks and rich rugs on an upper floor. There thick muddy black coffee was served in graceful brass pots with long spouts. A blackamoor in baggy velvet trousers, gold embroidered jacket, and a red fez, poured coffee. He looked like a Nubian slave from Cairo, and it did not occur to us to try to talk to him. But as he poured our coffee, he overheard us speaking English. He almost dropped the pot as he cried, "I'm sure glad to see some of my folks!" He was from Harlem. "Say, what's doing on Lenox Avenue?"

All of a sudden one day, our Soviet visas came through. The Russian Consulate phoned our various hotels, saying the visas were ready and that we must leave on the afternoon boat train for Stettin. At the time of the phone call, I was looking at paintings in a museum. I was almost left behind, for when I reached the hotel, the others had departed for the Consulate to pick up their visas, and from there had gone on to the railroad station. I rushed my baggage, books, typewriter, records and victrola into a cab and headed for the Consulate. There, for once, with dispatch (so many things are done in slow motion in the Soviet orbit) my passport was stamped, and I sped for the station. On the way, my taxi ran into a delivery boy on a bicycle. The police had to take down names and numbers and inspect the taxi license. I barely made the train, throwing bags, boxes, and records in the windows to my anxious companions, and leaping on as it was pulling out.

At Stettin we went directly aboard a Swedish boat—beautiful, very clean and spotlessly white outside and in. I have never seen such a white boat. And all the other people were white, too. We were the only dark passengers. But voyagers and crew were so cordial and friendly to us that we might well have been royal guests. The trip across the Baltic to Helsinki was almost like a fairy-tale journey on a boat filled with amiable people. The only thing they neglected—being Scandinavians, I guess they did not know—was to tell us about smorgasbord. Nobody told us that all the creamed potatoes, smoked ham, sardines, salads, sturgeon, hot dumplings, stuffed rolls and other beautiful things to eat, spread buffet style on a long white table in the big white dining room preceding dinner, were not intended for dinner. So, at our first meal, we made the mistake which many foreign travelers in Scandinavia make—while everybody else waited for us to finish, we ate our fill of these wonderful foods intended merely for appetizers. Then dinner was served.

It was June and the time of the "white nights." The further north we got, the longer the days became. On reaching Finland, it was daylight at midnight. Helsinki was a plainly pleasant town with music and dancing in the parks in the long white twilights. The people were friendly there, too. They did not seem to look upon Negroes as curiosities—not even twenty-two together—though some Finns had never before seen so many colored folks, and some had never seen any.

In Helsinki, we stayed overnight and the next day we took a train headed for the land of John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the land where race prejudice was reported taboo, the land of the Soviets. At the border were young soldiers with a red star on their caps. Spread high in the air across the railroad tracks, there was a banner: workers of the world unite. When the train stopped beneath this banner for passports to be checked, a few of the young black men and women left the train to touch their hands to Soviet soil, lift the new earth in their palms, and kiss it.

#### SCENARIO IN RUSSIAN

In Moscow we were quartered in the Grand Hotel, a block from the Kremlin, in the heart of the capital. It had enormous rooms with huge pre-tzarist beds, heavy drapes at the windows and deep rugs on the floors. It had a big dark dining room with plenty to eat in the way of ground meats and cabbage, caviar, and sometimes fowl, but not much variety. Most of the guests at the Grand seemed to be upper-echelon Russians—industrial plant managers and political personages, checking in for a few days then gone—with whom we never became acquainted.

Most of the tourists then coming to Russia were housed at the New Moscow or the National. And sometimes a few Americans stayed at the Metropol, but that aristocratic old hotel seemed to be reserved largely for important political visitors from lands other than the U.S.A., ballet dancers, and beautiful but mysterious girls who some said were secret-service agents. At any rate, the Metropol seemed to be the only hotel in Moscow with any bar-stool girls about. It was also the only hotel with a jazz band, and pretty women available with whom to dance.

"All spies" said some of the fellows in our group, who found the Metropol an agreeable but expensive

hangout. "Spies who can't be seduced."

"Spies or not, they sure look good to me," said others. "And dance!"

"I'm teaching one to lindy-hop," declared one of our fellows on his second day in town, "and she can out-lindy me already. They sure got some fine dancing spies in this town!"

I never found out exactly what was the function of the young Russian beauties at the Metropol. They definitely were not prostitutes, as are many such bar-stool lovelies in other European cities. Prostitutes in Russia were few and far between, since the Russian women, like everybody else, had jobs. Anyhow, the Russians said, prostitution was not "sovietski"—meaning it just wasn't the proper thing to do. "*Ne sovietski*" was a phrase one heard often. If somebody pushed too brusquely into a bus or streetcar, others would turn around and say, "Citizen, that's not sovietski." If two men got into a brawl in the street, the police would say, "Stop! *Ne sovietski!*" If a child snatched another's candy away, the mother would scold, "*Ne sovietski!*" Any form of rudeness or misbehavior might be characterized as not being "sovietski," in other words, not worthy of a Soviet citizen.

Of all the big cities in the world where I've been, the Muscovites seemed to me to be the politest of peoples to strangers. But perhaps that was because we were Negroes and, at that time, with the Scottsboro Case on world-wide trial in the papers everywhere, and especially in Russia, folks went out of their way there to show us courtesy. On a crowded bus, nine times out of ten, some Russian would say, "Negrochanski tovarish—Negro comrade—take my seat!"

On the streets queuing up for newspapers, for cigarettes, or soft drinks, often folks in the line would say, "Let the Negro comrade go forward." If you demurred, they would insist, "Please! Visitor to the front." Ordinary citizens seemed to feel that they were all official hosts of Moscow.

The first thirty days or so in Moscow were all free days, because the scenario had not yet been completed. Our actors, therefore, were at leisure, although being paid for the time. The contracts had been signed a few days after we arrived. But mine, a special contract as a writer, was held up a week or so while it was being drawn in detail. When it was finally handed to me in triplicate at the studio, it was entirely in Russian. I said, "I can't read a word of it, and I won't sign something I can't read."

The officials of Meshrabpom Films assured me it was all right— "Horashaw!"

"That may be," I said, "but I will sign only a contract I can read, in English. I have just come from California where I heard about people signing contracts in Hollywood which they had not read carefully, and—"

"Don't mention Hollywood in the same breath with the film industry of the Workers' Socialist Soviet Republics," shouted the Meshrabpom executive with whom I was dealing. "That citadel of capitalism escapism—Hollywood! Bah!"

"Don't yell at me," I said. "I'll go right back home to New York and never sign your contract."

So I went back to the hotel, leaving the documents on his desk. A week later English copies were sent me, and I signed them—at a salary which, in terms of Russian buying power, was about a hundred times a week as much as I had ever made anywhere else. I had paid my own fare to Moscow, as had each of the others in our group. On my way across the United States, I had left several hundred dollars with my mother in Cleveland to help on her expenses, while I was in Europe. Meshrabpom Films refunded all travel expenses to us in dollars once we had gotten to Moscow, and I held on to mine to use on the return trip home.

In looking back at the saga of the twenty-two American Negroes who spent their own money to go several thousand miles to make a picture with no contracts in front, and, on the other hand looking at a film concern that would bring to its studios such a group without exercising any sort of selectivity beforehand, I am amazed at the naïveté shown on both sides. But I must say there was never any temporizing regarding work or money. We arrived in Moscow ready to work, and we were promptly paid all monies due. Nevertheless, our expedition ended in an international scandal and front-page headlines around the world, with varying degrees of truth in the news stories, depending on the politics of the home paper or its Moscow correspondent.

The script of the film we were to make consisted of an enormous number of pages when I first saw it—entirely in Russian! Just like my contract, it had to be translated. This took two or three weeks. Meanwhile, all of us "Negro-worker-comrades," as Muscovites called us, were almost nightly guests of one or another of the great theaters, the Moscow Art Theatre, the Vakhtangov, the Meyerhold, the Kamerny, or the Opera, where we saw wonderful performances and met their distinguished actors. There was sight-seeing by day, or nude bathing in the Park of Rest and Culture on the banks of the Moscow River. Finally, after weeks of shows, parties and pleasure, I received an English version of the scenario and retired to my room in the Grand Hotel to read it.

At first I was astonished at what I read. Then I laughed until I cried. And I wasn't crying really because the script was in places so mistaken and so funny. I was crying because the writer meant well, but knew so little about his subject and the result was a pathetic hodgepodge of good intentions and faulty facts. With his heart in

the right place, the writer's concern for racial freedom and decency had tripped so completely on the stumps of ignorance that his work had fallen as flat as did Don Quixote's valor when good intentions led that slightly demented knight to do battle with he-knew-not-what.

Although the scenario concerned America, it was written by a famous Russian writer *who had never been* in America. At that time, only a very few books about contemporary Negro life in our country had been translated into Russian. These the scenarist had studied, and from them he had put together what he thought was a highly dramatic story of labor and race relations in the United States. But the end result was a script improbable to the point of ludicrousness. It was so interwoven with major and minor impossibilities and improbabilities that it would have seemed like a burlesque on the screen. At times that night as I read, I could not keep from laughing out loud, to the astonishment of my two roommates, lying at that moment half asleep in their beds, dreaming about being movie actors. But the situation really wasn't funny when I started thinking about my companions and the others from Harlem who'd come so far to perform in a film. But, not wishing to upset them immediately, I said nothing about the absurd script, since I had no idea what position the studio might take concerning my report on it.

I simply took the scenario back to the Meschrabpom officials the next morning to tell them that, in my opinion, no plausible film could possibly be made from it since, in general, the script was so mistakenly conceived that it was beyond revision.

"It is just simply not true to American life," I said.

"But," they countered indignantly, "it's been approved by the Comintern."

The Comintern was, I knew, the top committee of the Communist Party concerned with international affairs.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but the Comintern must know very little about the United States."

"For example?" barked the Meschrabpom officials.

To convince them, I went through the scenario with the studio heads page by page, scene by scene, pointing out the minor nuances that were off tangent here, the major errors of factual possibility there, and in some spots the unintentional portrayal of what amounted to complete fantasy—the kind of fantasy that any European *merely* reading cursorily about the race problem in America, but knowing nothing of it at first hand, might easily conjure up. I made it clear that one could hardly blame the scenarist who had had, evidently, very meager facts available with which to work.

Having red-penciled all of the errors, I said, "Now what is left from which to make a picture?"

The Russians are in general a talkative people, very argumentative and often hard to convince. I had to go over and over it all again, not only with the first officials that day, but several other sets of officials in the studio on subsequent days. They in turn, no doubt, checked with their political higher-ups. These political higher-ups, so I heard, months later, fired about half of the studio executive staff for permitting the mistakes of the scenario to happen in the first place. Meanwhile, as the days went by, nothing was said to the cast concerning the script difficulties. I left up to the studio official announcement of its problems. So our twenty-one actors continued to enjoy the pleasures of Moscow, although most of them began to be a bit restive and a little bored.

The film in English was to have been called, *Black and White*. Its locale was Birmingham, Alabama. Its heroes and heroines were Negro workers. The men were stokers in the steel mills, the women domestics in wealthy homes. The white leading role was that of a progressive labor organizer, presumably a member of a union like the incipient CIO, who wanted Negroes and whites to be organized fraternally together. Its villains were the reactionary white bosses of the steel mills and the absentee owners, Northern capitalists, who aroused the poor white Southern workers against both the union and the Negroes. Its general outline was plausible enough, but almost *all* of its details were wrong and its accents misplaced.

There was, for example, an important scene intending to show how a poor but beautiful colored girl might be seduced by a wealthy young white man in Alabama. The girl was pictured serving a party in the home of the director of the steel mill whose son became entranced by their lovely dark-skinned servant. This hot-blooded white aristocrat, when the music started, simply came up to the beautiful Southern colored girl passing drinks and said gently, "Honey, put down your tray; come, let's dance."

In Russia, old Russia of the Tzars or Soviet Russia, in a gay mood, master and maid quite naturally might dance together in public without much being made of it. But never in Birmingham, if the master is white and the maid colored—even now in this democratic era of integration.

Later, to show what the scenarist imagined to be the delusions of the possibilities of capitalism in the minds of Negroes wealthy enough to have escaped from the working class, and to indicate how, nevertheless, such Negro capitalists because of race must eventually ally themselves with the workers, the scenario had some fabulously wealthy colored men portrayed as owning their own radio studios and broadcasting towers in

Birmingham. When, at the film's climax, a mob of poor white workers have been falsely aroused against their fellow Negro workers, and the white union organizer has been stoned out of town, a great race riot breaks out in which the poor whites attack both rich and poor Negroes alike, stoning them and bombing their homes. Then it is that the rich Negroes rush to their radio station and start broadcasting to the North for help. Who comes to their rescue? Not the Northern white liberals or philanthropists who simply shake their heads and say, "These things take time, education, patience." It is the white workers of the industrial North, already unionized and strong, who jump into their cars and buses and head straight for Alabama to save their Negro brothers. These pages of the scenario presented a kind of trade-union version of the Civil War all over again, intended as a great sweeping panorama of contemporary labor battles in America. It would have looked wonderful on the screen, so well do the Russians handle crowds in films. Imagine the white workers of the North clashing with the Southern mobs of Birmingham on the road outside the city, the red fire of the steel mills in the background, and the militant Negroes eventually emerging from slums and cabins to help with it all! But it just couldn't be true. It was not even plausible fantasy—being both ahead of and far behind the times.

"All I can see to do for this film," I said, "is to start over and get a new one, based on reality, not imagination." "Will you write it?" the Russian executives asked me.

"I couldn't," I said. "I've never lived in the South, never worked in a steel mill, and I know almost nothing about unions or labor relations. For this kind of film you need somebody who knows a great deal about what he is writing. The only thing I know anything at all about in this script are the work songs and spirituals—and of those there is already a good selection."

"We'll keep the songs," said the officials, "and get a new scenario. The cast can start rehearsing the music immediately."

So that is what partially happened. The following week, after a month of leisure, our twenty-two Negroes—including myself—started rehearsing songs. The first rehearsal of the music was funnier than anything in the script. The director, who had been especially imported from abroad for this film, was a young German named Karl Yunghans, who spoke neither Russian nor English well, so he had to work with us mostly through an interpreter. Yunghans had been brought from Berlin for this Negro film because he had successfully directed a recent African travelogue. Like the scenarist, Yunghans had never been in the United States and had never known any Negroes other than Africans. He knew nothing at all about race relations in Alabama, or labor unions, North, South or European. He was an artist. But he was an eager and ambitious young man, very worried about the current delays in his picture, and most anxious to begin to create in cinema what Meschrabpom intended to be the first great Negro-white film ever made in the world. An enormous budget, millions of rubles, had been allotted to its making. Money was no problem. Yunghans had been in Russia several months now, waiting to begin. Meanwhile he had married one of the prettiest women in Moscow, a simple girl with the blondest of blonde hair and the bluest of blue eyes. She was a little doll of an actress, quite unspoiled, whom he hoped to take back to Germany with him and develop into a star. But Yunghans nearly became a nervous wreck after that first singing rehearsal—because almost none of the Negroes in our group could sing.

Europeans, as well as Americans, seem to be victims of that old cliché that all Negroes just naturally sing—without effort. Other than two or three, the twenty-two of us who had come to Russia could hardly carry a tune. Being mostly Northerners, only a few of us had ever heard a spiritual outside a concert hall, or a work song other than "Water Boy" in a night club. I had traversed the South once, but many of our group had never crossed the Mason-Dixon line. They had but little feeling for folk rhythms, and no liking for the idiom. Being city people, college trained, they were too intellectual for such old-time songs, which to them smacked of bandannas and stereotypes. However, in order to become movie stars, they were willing to try to learn "All God's Chillun Got Shoes," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" or the "Hammer Song." But if you can't carry a tune, and have no rhythmical sense for singing in the folk style either, you cannot learn to do so quickly. The discordant sounds that arose from that first rehearsal in Moscow failed to fool even a European. These *Negroes simply could not sing spirituals—or anything else.*

The woman who had performed with Ethel Barrymore saved the day for all of us. Sylvia had a good voice, and she knew many of the old songs, having once been a Baptist choir singer. So at the first rehearsal she sang all the songs in the script herself. To keep the young German director from being too depressed, she also gave an entire folk-song concert herself that afternoon in the big barren studio room. She made many of the younger Negroes there, who had never before appreciated the beauty of the songs of their grandparents, suddenly aware of the power of "Nobody Knows De Trouble I've Seen," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "Go Down, Moses." But Sylvia was a moody woman. At later rehearsals, when she didn't feel like singing, she wouldn't. Besides, she said, the others threw her off key if they chimed in, and this upset her.

Sylvia was a large woman who had gone into the theater in the days of the shimmy-sha-wobble and the eagle-rock which she could dance with gusto. Sergei Eisenstein, after *Potemkin* at the height of his fame as a film director, gave a party for us shortly after our arrival in Moscow, and Sylvia sang. Late in the evening there was general dancing during which Sylvia tried to teach a staid old professor of semantics from the University of Moscow to shimmy. This dignified professor was a very stiff man and not really able to shake like jelly on a plate. But he liked Sylvia's warm teaching so well that he became her constant escort, squiring her to all the intellectual affairs of Moscow. And Sylvia became an American folk-song star on the Moscow radio—except that in doing spirituals they wouldn't let her sing "God," "Lord," or "Jesus" on the air.

At that time in Moscow, although some churches were open and one occasionally saw a cassocked priest on the street, there was an official anti-religious campaign under way. The radio belonged to the Soviet state, so religious songs were taboo on the air. An exception was made, however, of the spirituals—as examples of great Negro folk art—with the provision that when these songs were sung, the words *God, Lord, Christ, or Jesus* were not to be used.

When Sylvia announced that she had been signed to give a series of programs on the Moscow radio, all of us wondered how she would get around this edict, so we got into the habit of never missing one of her programs, just to see what surprises would pop out. Often for the Deity, Sylvia would substitute whatever word came into her head, usually something relating to religion, but sometimes not, if the Christian word in the text caught her unawares. For example, an old spiritual like "My Lord, What a Morning" might emerge simply as, "My Soul, What a Morning." But one day, "My God is so high, you can't get over Him, you can't get under Him," came out as "Old mike is so high, I can't get over it, I can't get under it! Oh, this mike is so high! Hallelujah!"

One day Sylvia said, "Them Russians don't understand English, and I'm tired of faking. I'm gonna get God into my program today."

"How?" we asked.

"Just wait and see," she said.

All of us had our ears glued to the radio receivers in the Grand Hotel when Sylvia came on the air that night. She opened with, "Oh, rise and shine and give God the glory." Only what she actually sang was:

Rise and shine  
And give Dog the glory! Glory!  
Rise and shine)  
Give Dog the glory...

"Ah-ha!" we said with glee when Sylvia got back to the hotel, "you didn't get away with it, did you?"

"What do you mean, I didn't get away with it?" cried Sylvia. "God was in my songs tonight."

"Where?" I asked.

"Where He ought to be," said Sylvia. "What is d-o-g but God spelled backwards?"

## THE MAMMY OF MOSCOW

Among the crowd of Russian actors and writers who greeted us at the station when we arrived in Moscow, there were also four Negroes: a very African-looking boy named Bob, a singer called Madam Arle-Titz, a young man named Robinson who was a technician, and Emma Harris. Of the four, Emma is the one nobody can forget. She was a "character." Everybody in Moscow knew Emma, and Emma knew everybody. Stalin, I am sure, was aware of her presence in the capital. Emma was perhaps sixty, very dark, very talkative and very much alive. She had been an actress, and wherever she was, she had the ability to hold center stage. As our train came slowly to a stop in Moscow that morning, the first person we heard on the platform was Emma.

"Bless God! Lord! I'm sure glad to see some Negroes!" she cried. "Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!"

It seemed she had been wanting to see a sizable number of Negroes for a long, long time. Emma was from Dixie, and she had been in Moscow almost forty years. Since I am always hankering to see more and more Negroes myself, right off I took a liking to Emma.

All of us on the train were glad to see her. Emma made us feel at home. For the next few weeks, while we waited for the studio to start filming, "Let's go see Emma," was the phrase heard most often among us. When we didn't go to see Emma, Emma came to see us. She was a frequent visitor at the Grand Hotel. Official guides were assigned to our group by the theatrical unions and our film studio—but what the guides did not show us, Emma could, including the after-hour spots of Moscow. As old as she was, she liked to stay up all night, and she had incredible energy. Yet, in the middle of the capital of the Workers' Republics, Emma did not work. And, although freedom of speech was felt to be lacking in the USSR, Emma said anything she wanted to say. It was Emma who

first told us the joke about the man who saw a swimmer drowning in the Moscow River. The man jumped in and pulled the wretch out. When the rescued one was revived, the man asked, "Who is it that I have saved?"

The rescued answered, "Stalin."

Whereupon, the man cried, "Oh, my God, how unfortunate!" and jumped into the river himself.

Emma had little use for the Soviet system as compared to Tzarist days. Nevertheless, she was a featured speaker at all of the big Scottsboro rallies then being held in Moscow on behalf of the unfortunate boys under sentence of death in faraway Alabama. Emma could make a fiery speech in Russian, denouncing American lynch law, then come off the platform and sigh, "I wish I was back home."

Emma said she was from Kentucky, but her last stopping place in the United States had been Brooklyn. She had come to Europe at the turn of the century with a theatrical troupe. In Russia she had attracted the attention of a Grand Duke, and there Emma had remained all these years, growing, as she claimed, ever more homesick for Dixie. Naturally, when the Tzar fell, the Duke fell, too. Emma was left with a mansion in Moscow. The Soviets cut up her mansion into a dozen apartments, but permitted her a sizable flat on the first floor, where she lived quite comfortably. Emma said she made her living as a translator, but I never observed her at work, never found her without the time to cook a feast, serve a drink, or talk. She had some of the best food in Moscow. Her table was the only one in Russia on which I ever saw an apple pie or, in a private home, a whole roast turkey. Yet she had only an ordinary citizen's ration card. But Emma knew all about black markets—and speak-easies. In a city where almost nothing was open after midnight, Emma could always find a place to buy a drink. One night she took me, at two a.m., to a cellar den, where vodka and brandy were only a little more expensive than at regulation cafés during legal hours. And the customers in the sub-rosa joint looked just like speak-easy patrons around the world. They all knew Emma and she knew them and, before dawn came, everybody got slightly bleary-eyed.

"I'm like a cat with nine lives, honey," Emma said. "I always land on my feet—been doing it all my life wherever I am. These Bolsheviks ain't gonna kill me."

At the enormous Scottsboro benefits, indoors or out, Emma would be introduced to a cheering audience as "our own beloved Negro comrade, Emma, who before she came to the Soviet motherland, knew the stinging lash of race hatred in her native America." Emma must have been in her early teens when she joined up with a show to leave Dixie. But she could denounce race prejudice in no uncertain terms, in long sentences, in fluent Russian, without taking a breath. At the end of her speech, she would hail the workers of the world, the Soviet Union, and Stalin, in traditional form, eyes blazing in her dark face, and walk off the platform to bravos. Had she been in a play, she would have taken a half-dozen bows after each speech.

"They ought to turn them colored boys loose," she would say, for Emma was truly moved at the plight of the youngsters in Kilby Prison. Her Scottsboro speeches came from the heart. But she had not been home for so long herself that she had lost all personal consciousness of color. When some of the members of our movie group told her that, were she to return to the land of color lines, she would not like it, she did not believe us. She honestly wanted to come back to America. "Things ain't what they used to be here since these sovietskis come in," she said. "Why, I used to have me six servants and a boot boy. Now, best I can do is one old baba older'n me, part time."

It was Emma who first told us that summer that there was a famine in the Ukraine where, she said, the peasants had refused to harvest the grain. Living in the Grand Hotel and eating well, or accepting Emma's black-market hospitality, I never would have known there was hunger a few hundred miles South of Moscow. But Emma said, "Why down around Kharkov, people's so hungry they are slicing hams off each other's butts and eating them. That's no lie! A Russian I know just come from there; he told me folks is turned into cannibals."

Emma lived near one of the large Moscow railroad stations, so she met friends coming and going. She first told us about the many railroad wrecks that later that year were openly played up in the Soviet papers as an urgent problem to be remedied. Emma would say, "Man, last night there was a wreck right in the depot—one train going out, another coming in, both on the same track. These thick-headed comrades don't know how to run no trains. Bang! Fifty people smashed- up-kilt in the railroad yard. Ambulances been going by my door all night long."

Not a word of these frequent catastrophes would appear as news in the Moscow papers. But sometimes journalists in a position to know confirmed Emma's tales. Since the Soviet papers concerned themselves mostly with details of the Five Year Plan or decrees on collective farming, Emma would often say, "I ain't read about a good murder in no paper here in years. And these train wrecks you never read about, but they sure upset my nerves. Don't you think we need a little of this here Georgia brandy?"

The Georgia she referred to being in the Caucasus, not Dixie, Emma would pull out a bottle, almost always of a quality that few in Moscow could afford. Perhaps it was a gift from some foreign diplomat, she might explain

casually, or from an American newspaperman with access to the valuta shops. Emma was a great favorite with the American colony in Moscow—of the right more than the left. The white Southerners especially loved her. Affectionately—and not at all derisively from their viewpoint—they called her “the Mammy of Moscow.” Often to her they brought their excess food rations for a private feast, with the result that Emma’s pantry was always full. She knew many styles of cuisine, having traveled all over Europe in her dancing days, and so could make anything from corn pudding to Hungarian goulash. But for her Southern friends Emma would cook corn bread and greens, spoon bread, also barbecued spareribs, if she could find any.

Emma had been in Russia long enough to know how to find almost anything. What she could not purchase in the regular food stores (which had little), she could locate on the open market, or else beg or borrow from some embassy, ballet dancer, or privileged foreign resident. Her friends were many, and her guests of varied sorts and character. For the dyed-in-the-wool leftist among the Americans in Moscow, Emma was too much of a “mammy,” although they tolerated her. But the Russians of all classes seemed to accept her wholeheartedly. And the nonpolitical foreigners loved her. She was always a good hostess, jolly and full of humor—train wrecks or not. Certainly Emma added a big dash of color all her own to the grayness of Moscow.

#### NEGROES IN THE USSR

Other than the colored students said to be in residence at the Lenin School (the official Communist Party School for foreign students which visitors never saw), there were in 1932 to my knowledge, not more than a half-dozen American Negroes in Moscow, with the exception of our movie group. Paul Robeson came later in concert, also Marian Anderson, and I believe Roland Hayes. Some years before, long before my arrival, the Jamaican poet Claude McKay had turned anti-Soviet and had gone to live in France, so his name was hardly mentioned when I was in Russia and his books were no longer on sale. What few Negroes there were in Moscow, of course, were conspicuous wherever they went, attracting friendly curiosity if very dark, and sometimes startling a peasant fresh from the country who had never seen a black face before.

The slender spectacled brown-skin young technician named Robinson was well liked and was elected by his fellow factory workers to the Moscow City Soviet. Robinson invited me to a performance of Eugene *Onegin* at the Bolshoi Opera House, to which tickets were very hard to get. Being a worker in heavy industry, he could secure priority seats, so as his guest I sat in the orchestra of one of the great theaters of the world and saw a lavish production based on Pushkin’s famous poem.

Pushkin, a descendant of “the Negro of Peter the Great,” is adored in Russia and his mulatto heritage was constantly played up in the press when I was there. His *Onegin* and *Boris Goudunov* are standard in all Soviet schools. In the very heart of Moscow where the main trolley lines meet, there is a statue of Pushkin.

The professional actors in our group were by no means the first colored Thespians to visit Russia. Ida Forsyne had danced the cakewalk in Moscow at the turn of the century, and Abbie Mitchell and Georgette Harvey had had great popularity in St. Petersburg in Tsarist days. As far back as 1858, as the Moor in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, the New York Negro actor, Ira Aldridge, had created a sensation.

Russia, both before and after the Revolution, had a fondness for Negro artists, but after the Soviets came to power, not very many had been there. The reception accorded us twenty-two Negroes who came to make a movie—and whom the Muscovites took to be artists—could not have been more cordial had we been a Theatre Guild company starring the Lunts. The newspapers hailed our arrival with front-page stories and pictures. We were interviewed by press and radio. The leading theaters extended us invitations to dress rehearsals and performances. Bids to concerts, cultural events, receptions and parties were more than we could accept.

Although Negroes of African descent in Russia are few, there are millions of Asiatic peoples in the Soviet Union, so brown-skins in Moscow were no rarity when we arrived to make our film. But, while we were there, the twenty-two colored folks from Harlem were lionized no end and at cultural gatherings we were always introduced as “representatives of the great Negro people.”

Conscious of being wholeheartedly admired, we solemnly decided at one of our first group meetings in the Grand Hotel shortly after our arrival, that we must all do our best to “uphold the honor of our race” while in Russia, and behave ourselves at all times in public. We did pretty well, I think; but occasionally somebody kicked over a bucket, to the embarrassment of most of the others. Then the leader would call a group meeting, speeches would be made, and the culprit chided for “disgracing the race”—usually by being a little too drunk at the Metropol bar. But occasionally something of more serious nature happened.

About a month after our arrival one of the girls in our group attempted suicide in a very unorthodox manner. Affairs of the heart having become complicated, as she later explained from a hospital bed, she came home one night to the Grand Hotel and put two bottles on her night table. One was a bottle of red wine, the other was a

bottle of potassium formaldehyde, also red. She then put on her best lace nightgown, got into her enormous canopied bed and pondered whether to drink the wine and get drunk, or drink the potassium formaldehyde and die. When she thought of her beloved from Harlem with the Russian girl who had taken her place, she reached out and got the poisoned solution, turned the bottle up to her lips and drank. Fortunately, when it began to burn her stomach, she screamed, not once but half a dozen times. In fact, she screamed so loud that everybody in the hotel came running to see what was the matter. She was taken to the hospital and saved. A few days later she was back rehearsing spirituals with us. But the other girls declared that she, a Negro, had “disgraced the race,” creating all that excitement in the Grand Hotel.

#### WHITE SANDS OF ODESSA

Perhaps if we had been hard at work making a film, the near tragedy of the suicide attempt might not have occurred. But by then we had seen most of the sights of Moscow, so there was little left to do except to go to shows, parties, Emma’s house, or the Metropol Bar. Folks were becoming bored. Few took the trouble to try to learn Russian, although a teacher was available. The days were long, and at night public places closed down too early to exhaust the energies of a group of lively Harlemites. One of the boys took up with a female truck driver, very buxom, hale, hearty and wholesome. But the others kidded him so about going with a truck driver that he ceased being seen with her near the Grand Hotel. Another of our intended actors somehow got his dates crossed for, at exactly the same moment one evening, two Soviet girls, not acquainted with each other, showed up at the hotel and asked to see him. The desk clerk rang his room, but before the fellow answered, the girls had begun to pull each other’s hair out. When the young man arrived on the scene, he did his best to stop them, but the episode of hair-pulling spread all over Moscow. This deplorable incident, too, was considered at a group meeting as a “disgrace to the race.”

“We need to be at work,” our leader said. “Singing spirituals every other day is not enough. Idleness is demoralizing!”

Vainly he tried to get from the studio some schedule as to when actual filming would begin, but without success. I, as a writer, could get no information either beyond, “We’re still considering the problems of the scenario.”

Meanwhile, the director of the film, Yunghans, busied himself with the producing staff in casting the white roles. Only one white role was of any real importance to the plot, that of the labor organizer who endangered his life by attempting to organize Negroes and whites together in the South. For the part of this labor leader, an American dancer, John Bovington, had been chosen. When Mr. Bovington showed up at the studio, we did not think he looked like a labor organizer. He was of the school of modern interpretive dancing where every gesture has a meaning, a flow, a nuance. Our film was to be done in a naturalistic, not a stylized manner, so we were a bit puzzled at this selection for a worker’s role.

After rehearsal, at supper with Yunghans and his charming blue-eyed wife, Yunghans asked, “Vot ist matter? Bovington nich look like American worker?”

I explained that American labor organizers, in the public mind, at least, were rough-and-tumble guys, not esthetic looking. Yunghans argued that he had been politically informed by Meschrabpom that progressive American organizers were very intelligent. I granted that they might be intelligent. But since in our film the man was to be portrayed organizing the steel industry, a tough field, he at least should look a little like a worker, and not walk like a dancer.

As Yunghans’ wife made coffee after dinner, he and I went to sit on the balcony of their tall apartment house, the lights of Moscow in the darkness below. The young German was very distressed. After months of waiting to begin his first major picture, here he was with actors who had never acted, Negroes who could not sing, no scenario—and for his leading man, his worker-hero-labor organizer, a dancer! So much time being wasted, so slow, these Russians, so much red tape! In broken English, poor French and voluble German, Karl poured out his troubles on my shoulder. At the studio he was afraid to complain too loudly, to make too much fuss, because when he married one of Russia’s prettiest young actresses, he had been promised permission to take her back to Germany with him. He was afraid this permission might not be forthcoming if he got in bad with the Soviet film-makers. But what can a man do? You can’t make a film from nothing—and with nobody. Such stupidities drive an artist crazy.

In English, scanty French and bad German, I sympathized with Karl. But I also said quite plainly that I did not believe either of us would ever see a film called *Black and White*. Then, almost immediately I was sorry I’d said it. I could see that if the picture were not made, Yunghans would be even more disappointed than the young Negroes who had come all the way from Harlem to work in it. After all, film-making was his profession. He was

young and ambitious. This was to have been his great opportunity. To the twenty-two of us from Harlem, it was partly a lark, a summer jaunt, plus a brief escape from the color lines back home. Only two or three of the Negroes were thinking seriously of a career in films. Most of them intended to get their Master's degrees in college and go into a profession. But Yunghans had come to Moscow to make a great picture. Now, with an absurd scenario, tone-deaf Negroes, and for a labor organizer, a dancer! His voice shook as he spoke of it. His world was going to pieces. I was glad when his wife came out on the balcony with the coffee, for I have never known what to do in the presence of heartbreak.

A few days later an order came from the Meschrabpom Studio that all twenty-two of us were to be transported that weekend to Odessa. We were told that portions of our picture would be filmed shortly on the Black Sea where the cotton fields of the South could be simulated. At the prospect of a change, we were all delighted. We proceeded to pack with alacrity, but we did not leave on schedule. Several days passed before the matter of tickets and train accommodations were worked out by the studio. Meanwhile some of us, at the invitation of the American journalist, Anna Louise Strong, attended a dance recital by John Bovington. Its main feature was a dance composition called *The Ascent of Man* which pictured Primeval Man emerging from the primal ooze to become MAN, with capital letters, in all his physical glory. This dance had originally been done naked. Moscow, although permitting nude bathing in the Park of Rest and Culture, did not condone nudity on the stage. So the night I saw him perform, Primeval Man possessed a loin cloth.

Circulating among the Americans in Moscow there were a number of amusing stories about John Bovington, who, like Isadora Duncan, had come to Russia seeking artistic freedom, only to find that he would be required to put on clothes when dancing. And he was a nature dancer, not a ballet dancer. He believed in the natural grace of the human body, not its distortion by toe-stands or the acrobatics of the entrechat. One of the stories about him was that he lived entirely on raw vegetables, fruits and nuts. He and his wife, Jeannie, were among the early American nudists. Another story about them was to the effect that once, in California, they had been invited to dance at an afternoon tea given by Charles Erskine Scott Wood and his wife, Sara Bard Field, at Los Gatos. Pedaling down from San Francisco to present *The Ascent of Man*, imagining themselves Adam and Eve in primal guise, within the gates of the estate, the Bovingtons dismounted from their bikes, removed their clothing, and proceeded to ride up to the door of Los Gatos unencumbered by raiment. The astonished butler, struck dumb, was unable to question their entry. Sara Bard Field and the Colonel, though surprised, did not bat an eye. The Bovingtons were presented to the guests as young dancers who would show how flesh emerged from the slime to become MAN and WOMAN.

A space was cleared before the stone fireplace and the dance began flat on the floor. But just as man wriggled upward to the point where he walked on his hands, and was about to become half human, somebody laughed. At this affront, Bovington leaped like-Tarzan to the mantelpiece and sat there, glaring at the offender. People thought this a part of the dance at first, as both he and his wife froze into postures of contemplation. Finally, when nothing more happened, someone asked if the program was over, and if they might all have a drink. No answer on Bovington's part. He simply sat like Rodin's Thinker on the shelf above the fireplace. It took a great deal of persuasion on Colonel Wood's part to persuade the dancers to continue *The Ascent of Man*.

When I met John Bovington in Moscow, his wife, Jeannie, had divorced him to marry the famous Russian playwright, Afinogeniev. Without her lovely presence, *The Ascent of Man* was not as thrilling as I imagine it had once been. Nevertheless, Bovington still gave an impressive performance alone. When we met at the studio, it turned out he had never seen the scenario of the picture he was to make. No one had seen the scenario other than Karl Yunghans, myself, the studio executives, and, I presume, the Comintern. My copy had been taken from me for revisions. As to whether the script would be entirely rewritten or not, no official would commit himself. My guess was that the whole matter was undergoing political consideration at the Comintern, and that nothing creatively was being done on it.

When the members of our group asked me what was happening, all I could say was, "Certain changes still have to be made in the script."

"They certainly take their time," was the opinion of the Negroes, "but we should worry."

All of us were being paid regularly, wined and dined overmuch and had the whole theater world of Moscow for our enjoyment. Nevertheless, we were glad to board a train for the Black Sea. On the way south, stopping at Kiev, we heard there was a Negro resident, so we immediately expressed our desire to meet him. Since we were only there overnight, it took quite a lot of doing on the part of our translator-guides to locate him. But finally he was found and brought to our hotel late in the evening to meet us. I have never seen a more astonished human being, for this Negro in Kiev had probably never seen a black face before, other than his own in the mirror. At the sight of twenty-two Negroes all at once, he was struck dumb. His language was Ukrainian, not Russian, and he

was probably of Abkhasian descent from the small colony of former Turkish slaves on the Black Sea. Somehow, during the turbulent years of the Revolution he had gotten tossed onto the streets of Kiev where eventually he became a fireman, riding a big truck through the streets of the city whenever a blaze broke out. He looked to be about thirty, tall, dark and rather handsome, but not at all talkative. In fact, he looked as if he were afraid of us and as soon as he politely could, the Negro excused himself and disappeared.

In Odessa we were housed in a charming hotel near the sea, where an electric fountain fell in vari-colored spray at dinner in an open-air patio. Odessa was a de luxe Soviet resort for higher-echelon workers, and its hotels were very beautiful. I had never stayed in such hotels in my own country since, as a rule, Negroes were not then permitted to do so. Besides, I had never had enough money for such fine living in America.

At that time Piscator was working on a picture laid in Holland, and a whole Dutch village had been built for him on a plateau just outside Odessa. And not far from our hotel were the famous white steps to the sea where *Potemkin* had been filmed. The water front that served as background for portions of this famous film was within walking distance. And there were wonderful beaches all about. There were no signs of any sets constructed as yet for our film, and neither the director nor any of the studio executives had come to the Black Sea with us. We were completely on our own, and did as we pleased, so most of the day we spent in the warm sun at the beaches with crowds of Russians, all in their best bathing suits, since at Odessa it was not considered chic to bathe nude as did the Muscovites on the Moscow River.

By this time, the influence of our group leadership was at a low ebb. The Negro in charge had so often tried to present an optimistic picture as to the date for the making of our film, but weeks had gone by and as yet nothing encouraging had happened. The group had begun to split up into cliques and factions. One faction had begun to feel that the Soviets were deliberately giving them the run-around. So why go out of their way to please the Russians anyhow? As to bathing nude in Odessa, why not? With such wide and wonderful beaches, one faction reasoned, nude bathing made much more sense there than it did on the crowded banks of the Moscow River, where a person might dive under the water only to come up accidentally among the opposite sex a few feet away. The result of this reasoning was that, in spite of the pleas of our group leader, that summer thousands of astonished citizens from all over the Soviet Union, dressed in their best bathing suits, would suddenly see streaking down the Odessa sands a dark amazon pursued by two or three of the darkest tallest and most giraffe-like males they had ever seen—all as naked as birds and as frolicsome as Virginia hounds, diving like porpoises into the surf, or playing leapfrog nude all over the place.

#### THE BITTER END

AS guest of the Theatrical Trade Unions we were invited on a pleasure cruise of the Black Sea, a gay and pleasant trip around the Crimean Peninsula to Sebastapol, Yalta, Gagri, Sotchi, Sukhum, and down the coast almost to Turkey. One of the members of our group had been left behind in Moscow, hospitalized with a minor ailment, so he was not with us on the cruise nor had he reached Odessa when on our return we went back to the hotel where the illuminated fountain played. More days of sunshine and sea bathing followed, but still there was no word of a filming schedule. Then suddenly one morning our entire group was rounded up posthaste for an urgent meeting. Our missing member had just arrived from Moscow with important news. When we were all assembled, the young man arose gravely, faced us for a moment in silence, then solemnly announced, "Comrades, we've been screwed!"

From his pocket he pulled a recent copy of the *Paris Herald Tribune* with a despatch to the effect that our film had been canceled. "And they didn't even have the courtesy to tell us," he cried. "I got up out of my sickbed and went to the studio to check this—*Black and White* is abandoned."

The story had been given to the newspapers a week before any of the cast learned about it. Later the studio claimed that since we were on a cruise, we could not be reached when the decision was made. The day after we got the news, one of the Meschrappom executives arrived in Odessa to inform us officially that there would be no picture, but that we would be paid in full for the duration of our contracts, and that transportation via London, Paris, or Berlin, back to the United States would be available whenever we wished to depart. Relative to the future we were offered three choices: exit visas at any time, an extended tour of the Soviet Union before leaving, or work in the Soviet Union for any who desired to remain permanently. All of us were invited to stay in Russia as long as we wished.

No Negroes went bathing on the Odessa beaches that day. Instead, hell broke loose. Hysterics took place. Some of the girls really wanted desperately to be movie actresses. Others in the group claimed the *whole* Negro race had been betrayed by Stalin. Some said the insidious hand of American race prejudice had a part in it all—that Jim Crow's dark shadow had fallen on Moscow, and that Wall Street and the Kremlin now conspired

together never to let the world see in films what it was like to be a downtrodden Negro in America. From morn to midnight factional group meetings were interrupted only long enough to eat. Almost everyone had a different opinion. There was a general agreement on only one thing—that we should return to Moscow immediately for a showdown with the film company. As soon as accommodations could be arranged, we entrained for the capital, leaving the white sands of Odessa behind us.

We got back to Moscow to find the city filled with late summer visitors, and all the hotels crowded to capacity. A great many English and American tourists were there spending foreign money, so they were given preference as to rooms. There was no space at the Grand Hotel. Finally Meschrabpom was able to get us accommodations at a small hostel directly in front of the main gate of the Kremlin. It was called the Mininskaya. Distinctly third rate, it had no dining room, and no private baths. Very minor officials from the provinces seemed to constitute its guests. But its location was fascinating, just a few hundred yards down the hill from St. Basil's Church, between the Moscow River and Lenin's Tomb, and right across the street from the big gate through which the sleek cars of Voroshilov and Stalin sped past the Kremlin walls. I liked the Mininskaya better than I did the Grand. It seemed much more like an integral part of Russia to me.

Violent dissensions split our group asunder. Tempers flared. Some contended that all of us were merely being used as pawns in a game of international politics. Because Washington's recognition of Russia was rumored in the offing, not only our film, some said, but the cause of Negro rights was being sacrificed to curry American favor. Two members of our group claimed that Colonel Raymond Robbins had urged them weeks ago, over drinks in the Metropol Bar, to withdraw from the cast of a motion picture which, in the colonel's opinion, would be a black mark against the United States. Colonel Robbins was said to have been sent to Russia as a negotiator concerning future diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Certainly newspapers all over the world reported the canceled *Black and White*. The *New York Herald Tribune* story read in part:

NEGROES ADRIFT IN "UNCLE TOM'S" RUSSIAN CABIN  
*Harlem Expeditionary Unit Is Stranded in Moscow*

Moscow, Aug. 11—A sensation has been caused in the American colony here by the sudden collapse of the Meschrabpom project to produce a motion picture depicting "the exploitation of the Negro in America from the days of slavery to the present." As a result of this collapse the future of twenty-two American Negroes, including Langston Hughes, novelist and poet, who was brought here from New York two months ago to play the principal role in the film, is uncertain.... The correspondent understands that the Soviet authorities suppressed the film for fear that its appearance would prejudice American opinion against the Soviet Union. Since the occupation of Manchuria by Japan the Soviet authorities more than ever have been eager for a re-approachment with the United States as a means, among other things, of strengthening the position of the USSR in the Far East.

Another American newspaper said:

...It was persistently rumored among Americans in Moscow that the film would never be produced. It was known that many influential Americans were actively working against the project. Foremost among these was Colonel Hugh Cooper, builder of the recently constructed Dnieperstroi Dam, the largest engineering feat of its kind in the world. Cooper is reputed to be the one foreigner who has free access to the offices of Joseph Stalin.... Upon hearing of the project, he hastened to Moscow for a conference with Stalin. Finding the Soviet Dictator out of the city, the engineer secured an interview with V. M. Molotov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Those Russians and Americans close to the source of information in Moscow insist that the film was ordered off within twenty-four hours after this interview.

Some of the newspapers at home certainly made the physical situation of our group in Moscow seem much worse than it really was. One representative of a leading American news service cabled to New York—and the world—stories to the effect that all of us were stranded, starving in Moscow, unfed, unpaid and destitute. He knew better, for he saw some of us spending money daily at the Metropol Bar or lunching in its expensive dining room. But the papers for which he wrote were anti-Negro and anti-Soviet, so when we showed him the clippings after they reached us by air, he simply grinned. It was the first time I realized that a big-name correspondent would deliberately lie to conform to an editorial policy. We were neither stranded, unpaid, nor destitute and he knew it. But the result of his stories was a flood of frantic cables from relatives in America, worried about our

fate.

The Meschrabpom officials finally informed the group officially that the scenario was inadequate. They said it was unfortunately not worthy of the kind of picture they had hoped to make. They also indicated politely that the Negro actors were not quite what they had expected, either—which did not soothe tempers any. But most of our group brushed these explanations off simply as false excuses to cancel the film. About half of our group leaned strongly to the contention that its cancellation was a betrayal of the Negro in exchange for diplomatic relations with Washington. I stated in a group meeting that, in any case, no decent film could have been made from the scenario, and had we made that particular film, all of us would have been ashamed of it in the end. Whereupon, one of the members of the group arose to call me a Communist Uncle Tom. He solemnly stated that my books in the United States had never amounted to much, so for that reason I had come to the Soviet Union to build a new literary career. And he closed his speech by terming me an opportunistic son-of-a-bitch. I arose to call him a similar name—so the meeting broke up in general vituperations. But later we laughed about it, made up, and from then on everybody jokingly called all of our meetings "son-of-a-bitch meetings."

As to what to do about the situation—since it seemed impossible to gain immediate access to Stalin as some wished—we argued loud and long in the Mininskaya Hotel. Sometimes during our discussion, across the street beyond the Kremlin walls, we would hear Stalin's guards at rifle practice.

Someone would say, "Hear that? They just shot another Russian." Somebody else would joke, "Shsss-ss-s! I found a dictaphone behind the radiator this morning. Do you want to be liquidated?"

After several days it was agreed by unanimous vote that we would present our case to the Comintern, which was said to be, next to the Kremlin itself, the last word on international affairs. So a delegation including myself, was chosen to go to the Comintern. There we were received by several old Bolsheviks sitting at a long table in a gloomy room. Some of our delegation arose and denounced Meschrabpom, Communism and "the Soviet betrayal of the Negro race" in no uncertain terms. I took the position that it was regrettable no film was to be produced, but since the script had been so mistakenly conceived, it seemed to me wise to make none. However, I hoped that at some future date a picture dramatizing race relations sympathetically—in a way which, up to that time, Hollywood had not chosen to do—might be brought to completion. Gravely, we were thanked for our statements, and told that the Comintern would take the whole matter under immediate consideration and give it the most serious attention. So far as I know, however, no such picture as *Black and White* has yet been made in the USSR—or anywhere else in the world. The problems of organized labor and race in the Deep South are still to be brought to the screen.

## 4 SOUTH TO SAMARKAND

### FORBIDDEN TERRITORY

Most of my life from childhood on has been spent moving, traveling, changing places, knowing people in one school, in one town or in one group, or on one ship a little while, but soon never seeing most of them again. So it happened between me and the twenty-one other would-be movie-makers. When our contracts with Meschrabpom Films were terminated, we scattered to the four winds. Some returned to the United States almost at once. Others lingered in Berlin or Paris, taking advantage of their trip to become acquainted with various parts of Europe. Some stayed in Moscow until the November seventh celebrations. Three of the members of our group remained in Russia permanently—the actor, Wayland Rudd; the artist, Lloyd Patterson; and the former postal clerk from Minneapolis, Homer Smith. All three, so I was informed, eventually learned to speak Russian well and took an active part in the life of the Soviet capital.

Wayland Rudd appeared in the leading Moscow theaters as well as in motion pictures, and during World War II he performed for the Soviet troops at the various fronts. Lloyd Patterson, a graduate of Hampton in Virginia, married a young Russian who was a scene designer and together they created the sets for a number of Soviet plays. They had two beautiful children who, when brown youngsters were needed for plays or films, were often given such roles. But in the early 'forties Patterson died and was buried in Moscow. Homer Smith supervised the installation of the first special-delivery service in the Russian post offices, and helped modernize their postal-money-order system along American lines. At the same time he acted as Moscow correspondent for various American Negro newspapers and, during the war, went to Ethiopia in that capacity. Smith also married a Russian woman. So, of the twenty-two of us, three adopted the soil of the Soviets as a permanent homeland. And one, of West Indian nationality, was denied entry on his return to New York; so, as a result of his movie ambitions, he was forced to return to his native island in lieu of the residence he had hoped to establish in the United States. Eighteen, however, eventually came back to the U. S. A. I remained abroad for more than a year as a writer and journalist. Others stayed in Europe even longer.

When the theatrical sections of the Soviet Trade Unions offered us a tour to any section of the Soviet Union we might be interested in seeing, some of our group—those who felt most deeply that we had been betrayed—indignantly rejected the invitation. Others felt they had seen enough of the USSR, so were more anxious to go to Paris. But about half accepted the travel invitation before applying for exit visas. It did not take us long to agree among ourselves that the portions of the Soviet Union we would most like to see were those regions where the majority of the colored citizens lived, namely Turkmenistan in Soviet Central Asia. This gave our trade-union hosts pause because, at that time, this part of the Soviet Union was forbidden territory to foreigners. Only a very few selected journalists, and no tourists, were permitted there. It was said to be a land still in flux, where Soviet patterns were as yet none too firmly fixed, therefore it was not open to general inspection. But we stuck to our expressed desire to see it, and I applied for a press permit not only to tour, but to remain in Central Asia long enough to write about it for publications in America.

*The official Guide Book for the Soviet Union which I had purchased in Moscow clearly stated in italicized letters: A permit granted by the Consulate of the USSR to visit the Soviet Union is not valid for the territory of Turkmenistan. Foreigners who intend to visit Turkmenistan must have a special permit.*

Fortunately one of the prettiest girls in our motion-picture brigade had attracted the eye of the Soviet head of foreign press relations for the Kremlin, Constantine Oumansky, then a debonair young Muscovite. Since he spoke English and was friendly and cosmopolitan in manner, some of us came to know him quite well. The beautiful girl herself was frequently squired about Moscow to supper or the ballet by Comrade Oumansky, who later became the Russian ambassador to the United States, and some years thereafter was killed in a plane crash in Mexico. It was through Oumansky that I got my press card for Soviet Asia and, I think, due to his influence that the rest (including the girl he liked) were enabled to tour the regions beyond the Urals and travel almost to the Chinese border. So, with two representatives of the trade-unions, an executive of Meschrabpom Films, and our translators, about a dozen of us entrained for the long five-day trip to Tashkent, the regional capital of Soviet

Central Asia. Loaded down with cheeses, sausages, teapots and enormous loaves of black bread, we departed. The Moscow-Tashkent trains were not deluxe express trains, and we were warned that the trip might not be so comfortable a one as a tour somewhere within European Russia. But I did not find the trip nearly so unpleasant as many I had made on Jim Crow trains at home, where I could not eat in the diner and was segregated in a single coach.

On the Moscow-Tashkent express, we had the run of the train, soon knew everybody and everybody knew us, so we had a lot of fun. Russian travelers, men and women, are great joke tellers. They spend hours telling witty stories, mostly smutty, and some downright obscene. Their jokes often put translators at a loss to convey the point in decent English. The first day everybody talked politely about such things as the Five Year Plan, Voroshilov's horse, or the new ballet at the Bolshoi. The next day folks inquired about conditions in "starving America" where, they had heard, the depression had reduced everyone to skin and bones. But the third day as the train rocked along into Asia such tame subjects had worn thin. By then, too, mandolins and guitars, balalaikas and accordions had set everyone to dancing in the aisles, and friendships had become more intimate across political and national lines. Russians are great folk singers, hand-clappers and dancers. Unfortunately, we were unable to meet our fellow travelers song for song. But I had brought along my victrola with Louis Armstrong and Ethel Waters, so I contributed some lusty canned music to the long ride through the Ural Mountains and the Kizyl Kum Desert.

With our new and interesting companions, the days on the road passed quickly. First, the rich farm lands of the Black Earth region slid by our windows with stations where buxom peasant women from the kolkhozes sold chickens and cheese and eggs; then the Volga at sunset, famous old river of song and story; later, Orenburg where Asia begins and where we saw camels in the streets; then the vast reaches of the Kirghiz steppes and the bright tip of the Ural Sea like silver in the sun.

On the day we passed through the Kazakstan Desert, the fortieth anniversary of Gorky's literary life was being celebrated throughout the Soviet Union. The passengers and the crew of our train organized a meeting. At a little station where the train stopped in the late afternoon, we went onto the platform where short speeches were made in honor of Gorky and his work. Even in the heart of the desert, Russia's most famous living writer was not forgotten. Nomad Kazaks, the men in great coats of skins, the women in white headdresses, mingled with the passengers. A young student poet spoke; then a representative of the train crew; and someone from the station staff. My speech in English was translated first into Russian, and then into the Kazak tongue. Before we climbed back into our coaches, a telegram to Gorky was signed by all the passengers.

On that five-day trip I drank tea constantly. At every stop men and women would leap off the train and run with a teapot to the hot water faucet protruding from the wall of every station. Then they would jump back on the train and brew tea. So, singing, joke telling, dancing and tea drinking, we gradually emerged from the desert one afternoon to speed through a fertile oasis of water and greenery, cotton growing, trees in fruit, then crowds of yellow-brown Uzbeks in brightly flowered robes, waving from village stations. At evening we came to Tashkent, the regional center of Soviet Asia. As we pulled into the depot, there stood a young Negro resplendent in a stiff white shirt and black tuxedo.

Having since been around the world, I have learned that there is at least one Negro everywhere. In the crowd of Asiatic writers, artists and theater people who came to meet us at the station, stood Bernard Powers, a graduate of the Department of Engineering at Howard University in Washington. Powers said he hadn't had a chance to put on his tuxedo for months, so he'd gotten all dressed up to meet us. Sweaty, dusty and tired from our long train ride, we were a bit embarrassed, not only at the elegant young man but also at all the exotically clothed Uzbeks, Turkomens and Tartars in their national gowns and veils, who crowded about us with gifts of fruit and flowers. In the night air there was the smell of the Orient—a kind of mixture of musk, melons and dust that seemed everywhere a part of the East. This smell, the tiny flares that in the early darkness augmented the street lights, and here and there the sound of a muted lute, were my initial impressions of Tashkent as we drove to a party.

Ten days had been allotted to the Central Asiatic portion of our trip. Then, leaving me behind to write, the

group intended to go across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaidzhan to visit Tiflis, Rostov-on-the-Don, Dneiproistroi Dam, and Kharkov, then back to Moscow. Our Central Asian itinerary included the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bokhara, Ashkhabad and the Asiatic port of Krasnovodsk where the boats sailed for Baku.

At Tashkent we were luncheon guests of the Women's Club. Then the President of the Uzbek Republic, Achum Babief, and the Vice President, a former veiled woman, Jahan Abinova, received us at tea in the offices of their modern new government building. For three days, everywhere we went, delegations greeted us with speeches in Russian, Uzbek, Tartar or Turkomen. Between the sight-seeing and the speeches—Soviet speeches are often very serious and very long—by nightfall we were worn out. After the free and easy life we'd led in Moscow and Odessa, unregimented all summer long, the earnest and intense hospitality extended us in Tashkent with its day-long schedule of planned activities was almost too much to take. All of us were glad to get on the train and move on to Samarkand. But that fabulous old city was almost as full of Soviet socialist zeal as Tashkent had been. The famous Mosque of Bibi Khanum and a few other lovely sights were granted us. But most of our time was taken by a visit to the University, an inspection of the first medical school in Central Asia, then under construction, and by trade-union teas where statistics galore were relayed from one language to another, and expectantly aimed at our nonabsorbent heads by enthusiastic Communists. Before the week was up most of the members were weary of welcoming committees, weary of speeches, and weary of Central Asia, even if it was full of colored Orientals.

The native officials everywhere tried too hard to convince us of the progress made under the new regime. Perhaps they were afraid we might think that not much had happened in Central Asia. A great deal had happened, as I was to learn in a more leisurely fashion later. But thousands of women were still in harems in spite of the new decrees, and veiled from head to foot in public. Muezzins still called to prayer from tall towers. Bazaars were still filthy. The streets were dusty and it was very hot. For us, this intensified bird's eye view plus a ton of statistics made our tour seem much like trying to do the Metropolitan Museum in half an hour—leaving a daze in the mind and a haze before the eyes. By the time we reached Bokhara, the Negroes in our group were ready to go back to Moscow, or anywhere else outside of Central Asia.

"One more speech *triple* translated, and one more statistic on anything will kill me," declared the pretty girl whose influence had gotten us entry into this forbidden territory. "No wonder they refuse to let tourists come to Turkmenistan!"

The last stop on our Asiatic schedule was to have been Ashkabad where we were to have spent two days. Then the group was to leave me there. With the help of our guides and translators, I expected in two days to be safely settled in a hotel with contacts made for a more extensive exploration of the region. In a city where the prevailing language was Turkoman, of which I had never heard a word, I would need the help of a translator at first to get my bearings. But now most of the members of our group expressed a desire to eliminate Ashkabad. I asked if they would stop with me for just a day, but a group meeting to consider this was held on the train between Bokhara and Ashkabad, and everyone—but myself—voted to cut Ashkabad out. Enough was enough, they said, of dust and sun, statistics and speeches. Furthermore, they tried to persuade me to give up my idea of remaining in Soviet Asia. For them a week had proved sufficient. With Tiflis and Moscow (where the Metropol Bar had ice-cooled drinks) in the offing, why linger in a dusty, sun-struck desert like Turkmenistan? Come on back to comfort, they argued.

I seldom become angry. When I do, I usually don't say a word. I just get sick inside. So after the group decision, I got sick and couldn't (or wouldn't) eat the luncheon of bread and cheese, fruit and wine that the others shared as the old train rocked and rolled across the Kara Kum Desert. The least my companions might do, I thought, was to stop overnight in Ashkabad—so that the translators and trade-union officials might help me get settled.

Come to think of it, maybe the Russian trade-union officials and the Meschrabpom representative on the train didn't think well of my staying in Central Asia, either. Maybe they had influenced the group's vote in the hope that I would not insist on getting off there without guidance and remaining to look too closely at this rugged part of the USSR, so far from Moscow. Certainly they hinted strongly that other portions of the Soviet

Union which I had not yet visited—the Volga River region, for example—might be of more interest for writing. The Russians made no effort to persuade my companions to change their decision and get off the train with me for a look at Ashkhabad which, said the guide book, was in one of the oldest sections in the world, washed by the mighty tides of history. Old or not, nobody wanted to see it. And none of them did, for suddenly, almost without warning, the train came to a stop in the middle of a sandy plain, and there on a sign above a little wooden station was the word: Ashkhabad.

Surprised at being at the station so suddenly, and angry with the others anyhow, I jumped off the train without handshakes or farewells. A couple of fellows were decent enough to toss my bags down. With a hoot, the train pulled away, gathering speed across the sands, leaving me alone. Dark heads from open windows cried, “Goodbye! So long!” But I did not say a word. Instead, I turned the other way and walked toward the station. As the last coach rattled by, to myself I said, “To hell with all of you! I hope I never see any of you again.”

Then I looked around and did not see a human soul. The platform was utterly deserted. There was no town anywhere in sight. The city was miles away. I had been told that in Asia in Tzarist days, the Russians did not build colonial railroads for the convenience of travelers. They were military highways. Across this desert the tracks had been laid in a straight line between one garrison center and another, regardless of how far off the lines the towns might be. To the eye of passengers, Ashkhabad was only a wooden depot in a dusty desert. Today it seemed deserted.

But presently an old Turkoman in a shoddy black robe and a moth-eaten turban appeared to pick up a mailbag that had been dropped from the train. He said not a word as he shuffled around a corner of the depot, then back out of sight. I quickly walked in that direction to see where he had gone. But his tiny one-horse cart with the bag bouncing around inside was already off in a cloud of dust down a long straight desert road that seemed to lead only to a curved and very distant horizon. I went inside the station and found behind the wicket a man who seemed to be the station master. He spoke Russian. I showed him my foreign press card. He asked me if I were German.

I said, “No, *niet*.”

“French?”

“No,” I said, “Amerikanski.”

He replied in Russian that he would phone a man who spoke French, the editor of the newspaper. The telephone on the wall was like those I remembered as a child in Kansas before the First World War. He cranked it with a little crank, then he spoke with someone—evidently far beyond the curve of the dusty horizon. Then he said to me, “Sit down. He will come soon, perhaps.”

I knew that to a Russian soon might mean anytime between morning and night, so I went down the track in the blazing sun and gathered up my baggage, bringing it piece by piece into the station—first my heavy bags, then the smaller bag and a lunch box, then my typewriter, my victrola and the record box. The records seemed heavier than usual, and I had no help to carry any of these things. All of my friends (or rather *former* friends) had gone speeding over the horizon toward the Caspian, heading for the gardens of Tiflis, then Moscow, Berlin, Paris and New York—while here I was in the middle of the Turkmenian desert with nobody to help me even carry a bag. It took three trips before I had all my luggage inside the station. A scorching wind filled the air with dust and sand. I was wet with sweat and sticky with dirt. But I was not sorry for myself, nor did I feel sad. I was just mad as I looked down the long empty track.

“You don’t need to stop with me in Ashkhabad, you low-life Negroes! You dirty Russians! Double-crossing movie-makers! You trade-union Communists! I’ll get along! I damn sure bet you I’ll get along! Right here in the middle of this God-forsaken desert, I’ll make it!”

As I dropped my last piece of luggage on the depot floor, the station master offered me a cigarette. I took it. Together we lit up. He must have noticed the frown on my face.

“*Nichevo*,” he said with a grin.

*Nichevo* can mean a hundred different things in Russian, depending on the inflection. In this case, there in the middle of the desert, I gathered that it meant, “So... Well?... What’s the difference?... Anyhow, to hell with it!”

“Nichevo,” I grinned back at him.

We both laughed.

#### ASHKHABAD ADVENTURE

After a while, through the dusty haze of the afternoon, I saw approaching away off on the rim of the horizon, a cloud of dust. Then with—through—and out of the dust came a battered old car. From the car jumped a European in shirt sleeves, “Bonjour, comrade.” He was the editor. Helping me pile my bags into the back of the car, we headed for Ashkhabad, a dust-laden city of some forty thousand Turkomans.

On the way I told the editor about myself and our movie of which he had heard nothing. The foreign papers had carried the news of its cancellation, but not the Soviet press. I told the man I wanted to stay in Ashkhabad awhile, get acquainted with the people, and write, and that I hoped I would find a Turkoman-Russian-English translator. He said he thought there was a man in town who spoke English, a teacher; he would locate him and send him to me. Meanwhile, he must find me a place to stay—and, more important, a place to eat. He telephoned the OGPU, which, everywhere I went, I learned was to be my greatest source of help. When the editor hung up his phone, we went out to the car again and I was driven to a small Soviet guesthouse not far from the public square of the city. I was told that I could eat at the OGPU restaurant and that someone would come for me in time for dinner. Then the newspaper man left me to relax and wash up.

Water was out in the yard somewhere, and one fetched it in a big old-fashioned white pitcher that sat in a china washbowl on a stand in the corner. The toilets were far out in the back yard and they were full of stinging white lime, strong enough to make one’s eyes water. The guesthouse was very quiet when I arrived, and it remained that way most of the time. At first nobody in Ashkhabad seemed to be doing anything. In contrast to Tashkent and Samarkand, it was a sleepy old town. The big billboards of Stalin and Lenin in the park were veiled with dust. When I looked out of the guesthouse door that afternoon, all I saw passing in the street was a lethargic donkey with a pile of faggots on its back, whacked occasionally on reluctant haunches by a sleepy-looking little Turkoman boy. So I went inside, cranked my victrola and put on a good loud Louis Armstrong record which lit up the house with trumpet lightning. As the record ran down, I must have dozed off across the bed.

The next thing I knew, there was a vigorous rap and, without ceremony, in came a bright-eyed, grinning Oriental youth in a spick- and-span Red Army uniform, smartly cut, his boots gleaming. Caught half napping, before I could rise from across the bed, he had reached out his hand. A stream of musical inflections filled my ears—but I had not the least idea what he was saying. The language was one I had never heard. I took for granted, however, that he had come to take me to dinner, so I got up, ran a comb through my hair, and put on my jacket. He motioned that it wasn’t time to eat yet, so I motioned him to sit down. Since he kept right on talking in his musical tongue without a word of Russian mixed in, I began to talk in English. Thus we carried on a conversation in which neither understood the other.

I would have thought understanding under such conditions impossible, but I learned differently. Later, when the teacher came to call on me, it turned out that he spoke not English but Flemish. There was at that time no one in Ashkhabad who spoke English—not a human soul. My Red Army friend came from the high Pamirs away up near the Sinkiang border, and spoke only his own strange language. He was a captain of the border guard, and looked like a Chinese Negro, very brown, but with Oriental eyes. He was my friend for weeks, in fact my boon buddy, yet I never knew a word he said. However, when the ear gives up and intuition takes over, some sort of understanding develops instinctively.

That evening when it came time to go to dinner, he talked all the way. The OGPU restaurant was a big, bright, spotlessly clean place. It seemed to be air-cooled, so pleasant was it in contrast to the hot, dusty streets. There were white table cloths. Dinner, Russian style, was good, and the room was filled mostly with Russians. More than half wore Red Army uniforms. I supposed all of the men were of the Russian Intelligence Service. The few whom I met were cordial, welcomed me to Ashkhabad, and said they hoped I would find it interesting. In the days that followed, I developed a speaking acquaintance with several, but never came to know any well, other than my Mongol-looking friend of the unknown tongue.

He was a very outgoing fellow, this captain, lots of fun, intensely active, crazy about my Ooo-wee Harm-Strung records (as he termed Satchmo), a stout vodka drinker, good at wine, a woman chaser and an acrobat. He invited me to the circus, and afterward came back to my room and did half of the flips and flops that the circus folks did. Another thing that intrigued me about this hard-as-nails little soldier was that at dinner, when apricots were served, he ate not only the boiled fruit, but cracked open all the seeds with his teeth, and ate them, too. He ate the seeds of everything, from melons to peaches and plums. I never did get his name straight, but it sounded like Yeah Tlang, or Yaddle-oang, or Ya-Gekiang. He said it so fast and matter-of-factly, as if I must be familiar with it, that when I slowed him down, it didn't sound the same at all. As nearly as I could gather, it had two and a half or three syllables. I finally settled for a nickname of my own coining, Yeah Man, and he called me Yang Zoon which seemed to be the best he could do with Langston. Yeah Man was a bright fellow, though I think he was allergic to languages. But after a while each understood everything the other said—or implied—without strain, and with laughter.

Yeah Man's Russian was far worse than mine when he would try to speak it at all. And only a woman could persuade him to try. Yeah Man had been in Ashkhabad about a month and he already knew half the women in town, married and unmarried, Russian, Turkoman, Uzbek and Tartar. He seldom slept in his barracks. Yet most of the women never knew a word that he said. When I met him, he was smitten with one of the wire-walking girls in the little circus that had somehow gotten away out in that desert. He brought her around to my room one night to hear my Ooo-wee Harm-Strung discs. When he called her a few sweet things in very comical Russian, she almost lost her balance, since she wasn't on a wire, just on his lap.

Yeah Man was not what one would call a gentleman in so far as women went. To kiss and tell was the least of it. He loved to describe his conquests in full, by gestures when words failed, with a play-by-play description of what happened the night before. He graciously told me that, should I ever come to visit him in his high mountain pass, one of his wives would be mine. (It seems he had several wives.) Thinking this strange, I read up on the high Pamirs in an old English history of Tzarist Asia that I found in the Ashkhabad library and, sure enough, it said there was a tribe on the Singkiang frontier whose hospitality was not complete until the host had offered each guest a wife for the night. Had I been able to jokingly convey my meaning to Yeah Man, I would have asked, "Is that sovietski?" But it would have been just a joke—for I knew that many things were still happening in Soviet Asia that were not what the Soviet idealists wished. So I simply indicated that I would be delighted to accept one of his wives were I ever to visit him. Then he proceeded to outline to me the sizes and shapes of the women in his harem.

Some guy, that Yeah Man! We saw the circus together five or six times that fall, and we went calling on various girls with gifts of bread or brandy. Sometimes girls came with us to the guesthouse to dance to my records. The days went by swiftly; October came—and I still hadn't the first note on the Turkoman cotton quotas or anything else of significance for the articles I intended to write. My conscience began to get the better of me. So one night I dismissed Yeah Man after our OGPU dinner, said good night loudly and indicated I was going home to sleep—eyes closed, palm to cheek—since by gestures I didn't know how to indicate home to work. At any rate, that cocky captain went his way, no doubt a-courting, and I returned to my abode alone intending to do a little writing. I opened my typewriter, putting a record on the machine meanwhile, and started searching around in my bag for some typing paper. But I have found the world over that, just when a writer finally gets in the mood to write, something happens. I had decided after the disc ran out, not to play another record, when a knock came on my door. Thinking Yeah Man probably had come around again in spite of my rather positive good night, I yelled without moving from my typewriter, "Come on in."

The door opened and an intense-looking young white man, in European clothing, with a sharp face and rather oily dark hair stepped in.

"Excuse me," I said in Russian as I jumped up, "I thought you were someone else. I don't believe I know your name."

"Arthur Koestler," he said in English.

"Where from?" I asked, since I'd never heard of him before. "Berlin," he said. "I heard music playing and

thought I'd knock. I just got here today."

"Well, sit down," I said. "I'm sorry I haven't got a thing to drink."

"I'm not drinking," he said, "but I like jazz."

So jazz it was—and that was the end of writing for the evening. I played half of my records. As I played, I learned that he had been to the North Pole with the Graf Zeppelin as a reporter for the giant Ullstein chain of German publications. Now he had come to the USSR to do a series of articles on socialist achievements. When I told him I was a writer, too, he asked what material I had gathered in Ashkhabad. I was ashamed to tell him, "Nothing." He had many questions about the city, but I was of little help.

"No matter," he said, "we'll start digging up facts together tomorrow. A writer must write."

So it was Koestler, really, who started me to work in Ashkhabad. He wasn't happy unless he was doing something useful—if happy then. Even listening to music, Koestler would be thinking about work. But he spoke English—and I was glad to find somebody in the Kara Kum Desert who did. Together for weeks we tracked down what was happening in Soviet Asia.

Perhaps it was because of music that my room became a kind of social center. Everywhere, around the world, folks are attracted by American jazz. A good old Dixieland stomp can break down almost any language barriers, and there is something about Louis Armstrong's horn that creates spontaneous friendships. Among those who often dropped by my room, was the head of the Turkoman Writers Union, a frail parchment-colored little poet, Kikilov. Since his first name sounded like a cross between Cherie and Charlie, I settled for Charlie. Kikilov looked like a quizzical canary, or an esthetic Charlie Chan. His complexion was about that of a canary bird's feathers, and he had a sweet but doubting smile as if the world were "too much with him, late and soon." He seemed to me to be the Asiatic equivalent of the Russian word *nichevo* at the negative end of its scale. He had a very bad cough most of the time. He looked consumptive. My notes say he was born in the desert near Merv.

Once Arthur Koestler got to Ashkhabad that old-hand journalist began taking down everything, including the names of everyone he met, so that is when my note taking began, too. Shamed into action, I bought myself a half dozen of the only kind of notebooks available in Ashkhabad, oilcloth-covered with lined yellowish paper. Squired by Kikilov, Koestler asked for and was granted a series of meetings with various Turkmenian and Russian government officials and factory heads. And we were invited—often practically dragged (for even Koestler, the energetic, sometimes wearied)—to most of the public meetings. Through it all I dutifully took notes. Koestler was a great one for making contacts and, being a Communist Party member, very conscientious about uncovering all the facts at hand regarding what the Communists had done in Turkmenistan. But he did not seem to like the people much, and he did not like Ashkhabad at all, nor the dusty, uncomfortable guesthouse, nor the toilets full of lime. He had a German sense of sanitation, and neither Russians nor Turkomans were very hygienic. In fact, Koestler complained that Russian and Asiatic dirt together made a pretty thick layer. And every time he came back to our hotel he would wash. I had not known him long before I heard him say what I was often to hear him repeat, "If the Revolution had only occurred in Germany, at least it would have been a clean one."

Koestler was particularly perturbed at the unsanitary tea-drinking customs of Central Asia. At first I was a bit taken aback, too, at the general use of the common tea bowl passed from hand to hand, but I soon got over such squeamishness. However, I never really liked to drink after Charlie Kikilov. That pleasant but wizened little Turkoman had a hacking cough and a frequently running nose. But, as my official host, he always sat next to me at every gathering. And at every gathering, tea was served in little porcelain bowls. Kikilov would pass the bowl to me first. I would drink and pass it back. Then the man on the other side would pass his bowl. This interchanging of bowls was a part of the ritual of friendship. Convinced that Kikilov had tuberculosis, I became resigned to catching that disease. Koestler, however, was not reconciled to any such fate. He would curse in German, English, French and Hungarian every time he was subjected to the ritual of circulating tea bowls.

"Slobbering in each other's bowls," said Koestler, "a bloody disgusting filthy habit!"

I simply went ahead and drank and re-drunk with the others, and forgot about it. But I must say that on days when Kikilov's cough seemed worse, I might busy myself more in his presence with taking notes than in drinking tea.

My notebook shows that Koestler, Kikilov and I attended quite a few tea conferences at various City Soviets, Trade Union Councils, factories and schools, and that a great many words and figures were translated by Kikilov from Turkoman into Russian to Koestler, and by Koestler from Russian into English to me. Together we attended the Turkoman National Theatre, inspected the new cotton mill, took notes on the Botanical Cultures Institute where native plants were for the first time being studied and a new food for camels developed. We dined at a landscaped workers' village on the edge of the desert, then visited a school for future railroad workers, where Asiatic boys learned all about engines and block signals, which rather puzzled me since not more than one train a day in each direction crossed the desert. "But more will come," the students said. "New railroads will be built in Turkmenia."

Another school, already three years old, which looked toward the future, was the film-workers' institute, where practice films were made under Russian directors. Illiterate actors from the nomad tribes of the desert were being taught to read and write at the same time as they were being taught to act, to operate movie cameras, and to develop films. There were among the students, one patriarchal old man with a splendid white beard, and a brown young girl with a desert tribal mark on her head. This interested me enormously because here were colored people being taught by white men, Russians, about the making of films from the ground up—the building of sets, the preparation of scenarios, acting, camera work—and I could not help but think how impregnable Hollywood had been to Negroes, and how all over America the union of motion-picture operators did not permit Negroes to operate projection machines, not even in theaters in Negro neighborhoods. Negro-owned establishments had to employ *white* projectionists. When I told this to Koestler, he said he could hardly believe it. But I was trying to make him understand why I observed the changes in Soviet Asia with Negro eyes. To Koestler, Turkmenistan was simply a primitive land moving into twentieth-century civilization. To me it was a *colored* land moving into orbits hitherto reserved for whites.

#### DARKNESS BEFORE NOON

The Atta Kurdov trial in Ashkhabad, which involved a group of Turkmenians accused of crimes against the state, was the first of the purge trials which Koestler saw in the USSR. I had been to the Atta Kurdov trial before Koestler came to town, and I'd found it boring—even to the accused and to the judge—all of whom seemed half asleep in the dusty chambers. But the day I called Koestler's attention to the trial, he hauled Kikilov in with him to take a look. I sat in the public square where formerly no colored folks were allowed, and waited for them to come out. Koestler, however, was so fascinated by this sleepy-eyed trial in which everyone looked half hypnotized, that he stayed until court closed. He seemed very much upset when he came back to the guesthouse. I guess that was the beginning of *Darkness at Noon*.

To me, Atta Kurdov, sitting on trial, looked like a portly bull-necked Chicago ward boss connected with the numbers rackets, so I judged him guilty as soon as I knew he was the defendant. Had he looked woebegone and frail, like little Charlie Kikilov, I would probably have gone to court every day, since emotionally, I would have been on his side. But I did not care much about Atta Kurdov because I didn't like his looks. My notes are scanty:

TRIAL ATTA KVRDOV: Communist (formerly White Guard) who went into Party and became President of City Soviet. Had many relatives he favored. Allowed his friends to come into district kolkhozes and exploit others. Letters from peasants to him complaining about conditions were tom up. Charges were brought against him at a Party meeting but he was defended by the head Workers and Peasants Inspector whom he had promoted to this office. Meeting ended in a resolution demanding removal and trial of the Inspector, as well as Atta Kurdov. Twenty-eight persons arrested, all of his clan. Their defense is that indictment is Russian chauvinism directed against the Turkomans.

Koestler took down a good deal of the testimony during the hours he spent in court, and he went to the Party offices later to get further data on the charges. I said, "Atta Kurdov looks guilty to me, of what I don't know, but he just *looks* like a rogue." But Koestler did not think much of my reasoning and said so quite seriously. I knew mine was not proper reasoning either and had nothing to do with due process of law. But when I saw that it upset

him, I repeated that night just for fun, “Well, anyhow Atta Kurdov does look like a rascal.” Koestler went to his room and I didn't see him any more until the next day, although I thought he might come back to listen to some jazz or to share a hunk of camel sausages with me around midnight. But he didn't come back. The trial disturbed him.

#### ONCE THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Koestler was a restless young man. After ten days or so of continual activity in Ashkhabad, he was ready to move on. By the end of October, I, too, was ready to leave Ashkhabad mainly because it was getting cold, and there were no signs of heat, nor any way to make heat in our guesthouse. It was my intention to retrace my steps by way of Bokhara and Samarkand to Tashkent. Koestler was headed in the same direction, so we decided to travel together. I don't remember now whose idea it might have been that a Writers Brigade be formed in Ashkhabad to visit a series of collective farms before we left that Republic. But that is what happened. Headed by Charlie Kikilov, and including Kolya Shagurin, the four of us were cleared through the Writers Union for a trip to the ancient city of Merv—where almost no one ever went—and to a group of collective farms in that region. The oasis of Merv, Kolya said, had been the cradle of civilization, the place where the world began, and the site of the original Garden of Eden. The women there, he declared, were still beautiful.

On the long desert train ride to Merv, Koestler and Kolya did most of the talking, in Russian. Kikilov's Russian was limited so, when not translating, he did not strain himself to converse. I had learned hardly a word of Turkoman, so Kikilov and I, who sat together on the train, just ate or slept most of the way to Merv, sharing a tea bowl whenever we woke up and found hot water available. Kolya was amusing looking, but not very amusing. He was somewhat earnest and I thought dull, except for the tattoos on various parts of his body, including a nude lady on his arm who did odd movements when he flexed his muscle. This never ceased to entertain him. He would always laugh at his cootch dancer's sly undulations. Then his blue eyes would twinkle behind his glasses and his tobacco-stained teeth would show in his big mouth. It must have taken considerable time to learn to twitch his muscle this way.

But Kolya had more useful tricks up his sleeve, too. He had once been a sailor in the Soviet merchant marine. I think maybe he had been a *bezprizorni* before that—one of those ever-resourceful wandering boys of the road. Kolya was like Emma in Moscow—he usually got what he wanted when he wanted it anywhere he might happen to be. He possessed only an ordinary food ration card—not a special foreign writer's *propusk*—yet he often managed to get extra pounds of bread or cheese. He knew how to climb over, crawl under, or walk through red tape, so he was a handy fellow to have around. Besides he spoke Ukrainian, Russian and some Turkoman, and he had a great deal more energy than the ailing Kikilov. Kolya and Koestler were about the same age, I think, twenty-six or twenty-seven. I was a little older. And nobody knows how old Kikilov was. He might have been thirty-five or fifty-five. Sometimes he looked very old, and at other times more weary than aged. He had a shy smile and a sensitive nature. Perhaps he composed good poetry—I have always wondered—when he didn't have to rhyme the Five Year Plan.

When we got off the train at night near Merv, it was in the desert cold that seems so chilling. My teeth chattered. Merv, at least the part of it that had been a Tzarist garrison town in the old days, was as drab and ugly a city as I have ever seen, and even more dust-covered than Ashkhabad. The two-story hotel looked like a fourth-rate flop house in a slum. Like all hotels in the Soviet Union, it was crowded. There was only one room available. That had one big bed and one little bed. To Charlie Kikilov it seemed courteous that the guests from Europe and America have the big bed and he take the cot-like small one. So Kolya, Koestler and I slept in the one big bed. At least, we were warm—and so tired from our long ride that we all went to sleep at once. I perhaps would never have awakened had I not heard Koestler stirring around the next morning. Then I heard Kolya laughing, his white arm sticking straight up in the air from under the covers and his shake dancer shaking. No matter how drab a town might be, Kolya always had her with him.

Koestler was most unhappy that morning. There was dust all over everything and a film of dust on the water in the pitcher. The washbowl itself was grimy. The whole ugly barren room reminded me of cheap Negro hotels

in the South where such hotels are the only ones in which colored travelers can stay. Here I was not segregated, but it was certainly dirty.

"This filthy hole!" said Koestler. "It will take more than a revolution to clean up this dive. I can't wash in this stinking water. It's been here a week."

Kikilov roused himself and went with Koestler to find some fresh water. Kolya got up and dressed without bothering to wash at all. I stayed in bed and waited to see if anyone said anything about breakfast. In that part of the world, as in most of the Soviet Union, you couldn't just drop into a restaurant and order a meal. Since we had gotten into Merv so late, no one had contacted the local branch of the Writers Union (if there was one) or the Communist Party headquarters which would look after Koestler—and, I hoped, the rest of us. Kikilov, as host, once he saw Koestler engaged briskly in washing his face and neck, departed to make arrangements for food. He was some time coming back, but when he did, a car came with him and we were taken to a co-operative dining room to eat enormous chunks of black bread with cups—this time—not bowls of black tea.

Our Writers Brigade stayed in and about Merv for several days, so I tore up an old shirt and took a scrap of my precious American-made soap and gave our room a good cleaning, washing out the pitcher and bowl, dusting everywhere, and polishing up the brass on the enormous bed. Koestler thought some mysterious attendant had gotten ashamed of the appearance of the room and had cleaned it. I never saw a maid or any other servant around that hotel in Merv, just a rather surly desk clerk of indeterminate nationality. But I knew that when people are sensitive to dirt, it can make them miserable indeed. Koestler seemed unhappy enough of the time without having to bear the burden of a filthy room for a week or more, so for his sake, I cleaned it.

I have known a great many writers in my time, and some of them were very much like Koestler—always something not quite right in the world around them. Even on the brightest days, no matter where they are. Richard Wright seemed like that in Chicago. Wallace Thurman in the Harlem of the 'twenties, Myron Brinig in California, and Ralph Ellison in New York—all friends of mine whom I liked for one quality or another, and certainly for their talent—seemed unhappy fellows, too. No matter where, under what conditions, or when, something was always wrong. There are many emotional hypochondriacs on earth, unhappy when *not unhappy*, sad when *not expounding on their sadness*. Yet I have always been drawn to such personalities because I often feel very sad inside myself, too, though not inclined to show it. Koestler wore his sadness on his sleeve.

My feeling was that not even Merv could be as bad as it seemed to us the first few hours after our arrival. And, sure enough, our expedition to the collective farm turned out to be, at least for me, a thrilling experience. I heard some wonderful music—Turkmenian flamenco. The trip to the Kolkhoz Aitakov in a battered and steaming old car was hot, dusty and long, for we left town in a dust storm. There were only twelve cars in Merv, and the car in which we went across the desert must have been, I think, the *oldest* of the twelve. It shook, it rattled, it rolled, it smoked, it steamed, it gave off heat like an oven, and it stank. It was built for five people and there were six of us in it. It caused me to swear that I would never travel any place again. Yet, when we reached the cotton farm which was situated in an area, such as I'd always imagined an oasis should be, all green and leafy, I was suddenly happy, gazing at a whole new world of fascinating people. Perhaps this *had* been the Garden of Eden. Here were handsome women with the tallest hats I had yet seen, enormous bright hollow cones, some fully three feet high, covered with gay silks in odd patterns, bangles and coins adorning the tall crowns. The men, too, had on great high hats of shaggy Karacul, black wild-looking headgear. And some had fierce-looking mustaches like Oriental brigands out of the Arabian Nights.

There were wide fields where the cotton grew waist high in bolls of bursting white at the Kolkhoz Aitakov. Through one field moved a group of women picking cotton and stuffing it into their skirts or bosoms. Their foreman, Medshur Baba, was brought to meet us. I took a picture of him and his helper, a younger Turkoman, quite chocolate of skin, who looked as if he might have come from Harlem. That afternoon I also took snapshots of Koestler picking cotton, or lying on the ground taking notes. Kikilov, when not called upon to translate, just sat in the shade. And Kolya followed the women down the cotton rows. The women didn't pay any attention to Kolya or myself either, it being immodest in Central Asia for a woman to look at a strange man. Not even when Kolya bared his muscles to show his tattoo did they pay him any mind. He was very disappointed.

## TURKMENIAN FLAMENCO

Arthur Koestler asked me one day why in Moscow I did not join the Communist Party. I told him that what I had heard concerning the Party indicated that it was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept. I did not believe political directives could be successfully applied to creative writing. They might well apply to the preparation of tracts and pamphlets, yes, but not to poetry or fiction, which to be valid, I felt, had to express as truthfully as possible the *individual* emotions and reactions of the writer, rather than mass directives issued to achieve practical and often temporary political objectives. Koestler agreed with me that it was very difficult to write both politically and individually at the same time, especially when the political lines were applied from above by bureaucrats who had no appreciation of creative impulses. But he said that, at certain historical periods, collective social aims might be worthy of transcending individual desires. However, Koestler did not press the point nor try to change my position.

In Turkmenistan, outside of official conferences and statistical sessions, Communism was hardly mentioned. I don't believe I ever heard Yeah Man say the word communism, although I am sure he was a loyal Red Army officer who enjoyed the achievements of the Revolution. In Moscow, where we twenty-two Negroes had been hailed so widely and where propaganda relative to the Negro's hard lot in America was played up, almost everyone took for granted that all Negroes were, or eventually would be Communist Party members, so it was seldom discussed with us there either. But good Muscovite Party members were usually amazed when they found out that only one of our number claimed Party membership.

Once I gave as my reason for not joining the Party the fact that jazz was officially taboo in Russia, being played only at the declassé Metropol hotel, and very badly there.

"But jazz is decadent bourgeois music," I was told, for that is what the Soviet press had hammered into Russian heads.

"It's my music," I said, "and I wouldn't give up jazz for a world revolution."

The Russians looked at me as if I were a decadent bourgeois writer and let it go at that. But they liked my jazz records as much as I did, and never left the room when I played them.

While I was in Moscow my third book of poems, *The Dream Keeper*, was published in the United States. When copies reached me, I gave one to Ivy Litvinoff, the cultivated English woman who was most gracious to members of our movie group, and whose husband later became Soviet Ambassador to Washington. Mrs. Litvinoff said that she liked my poems, all save those in the religious group. When I informed her that they were based on the old folk forms of the spirituals, she said that such poems had no place in the class struggle and were not worthy of a Party member. When I told her I was not a Party member, she asked why, and I gave her the same reasons I gave Koestler. She said gently that she felt I should be a Party member, that the Party needed me. But, oddly enough, I heard later that she herself was not a Communist, although her husband stood high in Party councils. At any rate, Ivy Litvinoff was not dogmatic, and did not run my spirituals through so harsh a wringer as some of the American Communists did.

The party given for our Writers Brigade on the Kolkhoz Aitakov had nothing to do with the Communist Party, so far as I could tell. The Kolkhoz had only ten Communist Party members. There were forty or fifty men at least at our party, and that many more milling around outside after the room was filled. I supposed only eight of the ten Communists were there, since two members on the farm were women, and there were no women present that evening. Turkoman women did not share the social life of the men.

After supper the party folks started arriving, mostly on foot, but some galloping up on stunted Asiatic ponies, and some riding high on camels. Most of the Turkomans were big fellows, and their tall shaggy Karacul hats made them look enormous. In soft boots and padded robes and baggy trousers, that night they looked to me for all the world like figures out of Omar Khayyam's poems or the *Arabian Nights*. There were fierce old fellows with black mustaches, stout pincushion farmers in two or three padded gowns, Mongol-like youths with slanted eyes, and paler lads who looked like Persian figures on old vases or drawings on parchment scrolls. A couple of shepherd boys came garbed exactly as if they had stepped out of the Book of Moses. Their black Karacul hats alone saved them being Sunday-school characters of my Protestant youth, perhaps bearing the Lamb of God.

Balls of melons hung from the rafters in groups like yellow balloons and gave the room a sweet smell. But as the place filled up, clouds of smoke from the odd-smelling mahorka tobacco, which the men smoked wrapped in newspaper cones, gave off a ranker olfactory atmosphere, mixed with the scent of sheepskin and camelskin and sand and padded robes. Windows and doors were tightly closed for after sundown it got cold outside. Everyone sat on well-worn but beautiful old Bokhara rugs that Park Avenue might envy, drinking tea from bowls that went from mouth to mouth, around and around in the customary ritual. Koestler got away off on the edge of the crowd so that he would not be in the main circle of tea bowl passing, and thus could avoid drinking from bowls that dozens of strange mustaches had touched. I had given up on this problem weeks before, so I sat in the middle and drank from everybody's bowl. But fortunately Kikilov with his cough went to squat beside Koestler and share his bowl.

The men all sat on the floor. There was very little walking around, and no cocktails, wine, or hard liquors, just tea. Although I didn't understand a word of anything, I observed that as the tea bowls went around and around, the party was becoming more lively. Groups of men began laughing and joking together, and others shouted over a forest of heads to friends across the room. In all this hubbub, it was impossible to get from Kikilov via Koestler any accurate idea of what anyone might be saying, so I gave up trying, and started talking in English plus signs to those around me, which amused them no end. I would say to a fellow who handed me a tea bowl, "Man, why didn't you bring your girl friend?" And outline with my hands the shape of a woman. Whereupon, he would answer God only knows what, but I would laugh, and everybody would laugh. Somebody would roll me a mahorka cone, and around would come another tea bowl. The next day when I ran into some of these fellows digging irrigation ditches, they greeted me like an old buddy. We had made friends.

There was a roaring fire outside on the ground and over it hung a copper pot big enough to hold a giant genie. It was full of boiling water from which the smaller teapots were continually replenished. There seemed to be a party going on in the yard, too. It was alive with shadow shapes in the chilly night. After a while some fellows arrived with long-necked two-string lutes, and a shout went up. These were the bakhshis, favored singers of the region, who had come from another oasis to entertain us. And in a few minutes they had my hair standing on my head. Spanish gypsy music at its wildest never surpassed theirs.

Twang went one of the shaggy-hatted men on his lute, then sang softly in a semi-recitative a few short phrases, whereupon he threw back his head and, without warning, uttered one of the loudest, longest, most spine-chilling cries I ever heard. This was followed by a song that must have been about the end of time, for surely nothing else could inspire such a wail or such a song. Succeeding verses were interspersed with lesser wails from time to time as someone else in the crowd would utter a similar musical howl. I never heard madder music anywhere, utterly weird and bloodcurdling, a kind of cross between the Chinese scale at its strangest and gypsy flamenco at its wildest. To start a song the leader might make an odd clucking sound in his throat a few times, pluck a string, rock, hum, cluck again, then finally in a high monotone, begin a line. Sometimes two men sang together, sometimes they took turns, sometimes one or two fellows sitting cross-legged facing each other on the floor contributed a verse or punctuated a song with a single long cry. But most of the singing was solo, with high drawn-out earsplitting wails to accentuate the interlude.

I could have listened all night to this singing, but in due time food arrived, and the music gave over to feasting. Just before the food was brought in, a number of men left. Perhaps they had not contributed to the feast, or maybe there was not enough to go around.

We had not had much to eat on that farm all day, mostly camel stew and melon. But now in our honor, tonight they had slaughtered a sheep and made piles of hot unleavened bread in flat round discs. I was hungry, so when two men brought in a huge copper drum filled with steaming mutton swimming in juice, I was happy. Another kettle followed of the same fare, and in two groups, we gathered around them on the floor. Pleasant heat and a fine aroma arose from the pots. Into each a single large wooden spoon was dipped, filled with broth, and offered to Koestler and me first, then a spoonful each to Kolya and Kikilov. This was the first course, each man taking his turn at a spoonful of soup right out of the kettles. There were fifteen or twenty men and only two spoons. Turkoman hospitality, even to spoons, is based on sharing.

By now the food kettles had cooled enough for our hosts to reach in with bare fingers and pick up chunks of meat and tear them into smaller bits which they dropped back into the soup. This was so that we might more easily dine from these common bowls without having to pull the meat apart ourselves. Politely, the Turkomans motioned for Koestler and me to help ourselves, so we put our hands into the warm liquid and fished around until we found a nice piece of mutton, pulled it out and ate it. Then everyone else dived in, too, and sometimes there were several hands in a pot at once until all of that sheep was gone. Then we soaked the bread in the juice until the juice was gone, too. Full and happy, about three o'clock in the morning, I rolled up in a rug and went to sleep.

#### KOESTLER WASHES HIS HANDS

The day before Koestler and I left Merv I shall never forget. It was spent in going to and coming from a distant outpost of hell—a place called Permytab. Just to get to Permytab would try the soul of the devil himself. Why we went, I will never know. Kolya had better sense. He did not accompany us, having gotten acquainted with a lanky Turkmenian girl and gone into hiding. We never saw Kolya anymore. Kikilov, claiming he had to get back to Ashkhabad, did not go to Permytab either. Only Koestler and I and a tall Russian Communist Party official traveled across the broiling Kara Kum in the direction of the Afghan border to an ungodly spot fifty miles from civilization.

We were going to visit a collective farm established for Baluchis, peasants who came over the borders from Afghanistan and India, so we were told, fleeing oppression of the native princes and the English to seek sanctuary on Soviet soil. Naturally, for refugee guests of the Soviets, I had expected to see something even more pleasant than Kolkhoz Aitakov, and perhaps more exotic, too. So I put a fresh roll of film in my camera at dawn that morning and set out through a dusty haze into the desert. On the way, however, I got my first shock. As we bumped along the sand outside Merv our guide and driver said, "At Permytab, we shall not stay overnight. It's dangerous."

The Baluchis, he explained, were from the wildest tribes in the Afghan mountains and they might take a notion to kill us. In the night, in the dark, he said, they could easily toss our bodies into the desert where sand drifts would cover us and nobody would ever find us again. At first I thought the man was joking, but he did not smile. When I saw the people at Permytab, I realized that he might very well be concerned for our safety and his own, too.

Evidently it was not this Russian Party official's desire that we take this trip. The directive must have come from higher up the political ladder. Why such an excursion was suggested to Koestler and me is still a mystery. Probably no one would ever have heard of Permytab had not we been driven there. Its existence seemed unknown to most of the people of Merv. The desert trip itself was torment, and when we got to Permytab it was nothing but a treeless village of fifteen or twenty mud huts and sheepskin tents blistering in the sun—the most Godforsaken place I have ever seen, the dirtiest, and the hottest.

In our ancient Ford struggling across the roadless desert, we negotiated gulches without bridges by making detours for miles until we came to a place a car could negotiate. Sometimes we used the planks we had tied to the top of the car to make a hazardous bridge, the two planks placed like rails the same width apart as the car wheels. Then Koestler and I got out to walk or wade across the gulch while the Russian very slowly and carefully drove the car over. Then we picked up our plank bridge and tied it atop the Ford again. Twice a tire was punctured by desert thistles. Several times we were stuck in the sand and had to push and shovel our way out under the broiling sun. I said to myself, "If I ever get back to Merv and on to Moscow, thence to Harlem, home I will stay forever." Koestler was even more disgusted than I that we had elected to take this particular trip.

"In Germany," Koestler said, "strangers would be told what they'd be getting into before commencing anything like this. What a hell of a part of the world to have a revolution!" With this I agreed.

Sometimes we would pass on the barren sands a collection of nomad tents called *yurts* or *kibitkas*, with a few Arab-looking men about, in the company of dirty children and half-veiled harem women who would run and hide. Sometimes a gust of wind would pelt the car with sand and fill our eyes with it, too. But we could not close

the car windows unless we wished to roast in its oven-like interior. The Russian, who was born in that part of the world, did not seem to mind the sand, the punctures, and the hazards of the route. He was more concerned about the welcome we might get at the end of our journey. "But," he said, "there's a rather pretty Russian gal out there."

"What?" exclaimed Koestler.

"A Ministry of Health nurse in charge of the clinic," said the Russian. "She's been there a year, with two more to go."

I knew that in the Soviet Union, medical students, nurses, engineers, and other trained personnel agreed that after their training was completed, they would serve a period of three years in any region of the USSR where their services might be needed, before settling down in a location of their own choice. This was their ardent and (I presume enforced) contribution to the building of socialism. So here, in the heart of this desert near the most primitive part of the Afghan border, we would find a lone Russian girl.

"What a book she could write," I thought to myself.

Koestler and I agreed that we would interview this Soviet pioneer of progress. But where was Permetryab? At that moment all around us was nothing but the burning desert—not a tree, not a house, only sand to the sun-hazed horizon. We had drunk up half our tepid water and poured almost all the rest into the steaming radiator. Still we seemed to be in the heart of nowhere.

"Suppose the car were to break down! What would we do?" I thought. "Die here in the sun for the buzzards to pick our bones?" But I did not even see a buzzard in the fiery sky. Permetryab must be, I concluded, across the borders of life, somewhere in Hades.

It was well after noon when we got to our destination, our throats dry with sand and the hard bread we had eaten on the way. The heat was such that I felt the film in my camera probably had melted. My clothing was soaked with sweat. Yet when we reached Permetryab the air seemed chilly, for a mean sharp little wind was blowing across the dunes. My eyes were red with sun and sand and my mouth full of grit. My legs were stiff and the soles of my feet burned. My head ached. Koestler had lapsed into complete silence as the Russian drove doggedly on. But the moment we got to Permetryab my European friend took out his notebook and began writing. I admired Koestler.

The village of Permetryab consisted of more sheepskin yurts than houses. What houses there were had only one or two rooms, walled with sun-baked bricks of thistle and mud. The floors were dirt. Mangy dogs bounded forward with hyena-like snarls as our car drew up, then slunk away whining as if used to severe beatings if they lingered too near a human being. Dirty old sultans (or so I was inclined to imagine each elderly Oriental male), smoking water pipes, sat in some of the tent openings. The women, like dogs, immediately scurried out of sight, as if they too were used to being beaten. A few half-naked children peeked at us. Almost everybody was barefooted, their clothing ragged, their turbans filthy. These were the most depressed people I had yet seen in the Soviet Union. If this were freedom for them compared to Afghanistan or northern India, what could their life have been across those borders? Their language not even our native-born Russian guide understood, but he located someone who could translate for him into Turkmenian from the Baluchi, or whatever they spoke. So the few notes I took were fourth hand—from Baluchi to Turkoman to Russian to Koestler to English to me. I soon gave up trying to understand anything and contented myself with visual impressions. These fierce-looking men did not object to photographs, so I opened my camera and took a few. A one-eyed man lent me a turban that I put on my head to pose, but Koestler, for fear of vermin, refused to don such headgear, so in their midst I photographed him looking quite European. Eventually they invited us into one of the huts and squatted down on the floor for the ritual of the tea bowls. There were three or four bowls, which about twenty men shared. The water had been scooped up from a filthy irrigation canal, and there was mud in the bottom of each bowl after the tea was drunk.

"Koestler," I said, "we are all going to die of cholera germs."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Koestler, although he had scarcely touched his lips to any of the bowls. Not even the Russian drank much of this tea. Shortly he commanded the translator to get into the car, and we drove

away in the direction of the kolkhoz. Why the farm center and village were not in the same spot, I never knew. It was two or three miles to the cotton collective, which seemed a more lively center than the village, with a sprawling mud-brick structure which was the administrative center, the school, nursery and clinic all in one. There we had luncheon of canned meat, bread hard as stone, melons and tea. And there we met the Russian woman doctor-nurse, who was young, and not bad-looking. She was the only European in this fantastic desert community, inhabited by evil-appearing sore-covered, dirty people. I looked at this young white missionary on the dark frontiers of progress with wonder and admiration, and I asked Koestler to translate into Russian my compliments, "How brave you are!"

The little woman—brisk yet feminine in appearance—smiled at me and said, "*Spaceba*," thank you. Then she told us about her work. She said, "Childbirth is a problem. Since the women have no say about anything here, some of these men still buy their wives in spite of Soviet decrees. There are men who will not permit me to attend their wives when a baby is coming. They believe an axe or a sabre under the mat on which the woman lies aids childbirth, or firing off guns over the mother speeds delivery. Some of the women bite off the umbilical cord themselves, as their mothers and grandmothers did before them. Since water is scarce in this desert land, it's an old custom to wash a newborn child in sand. I have trouble with babies' eyes festering. Sometimes children lose their sight. But I have been at Permytab long enough now for some of the women (and men, too) to see how the babies I've been allowed to deliver thrive and are healthier than most of the others—so, in time, in time, I hope... It takes time."

The conference with the doctor-nurse took place just after luncheon. The food we had eaten had been handled by Baluchis whose hands were none too clean and some of whom had runny eyes and scabby faces. They had cut our melons with the same dirty knives with which they cut tobacco. We had drunk from their grimy bowls. So when the nurse at the clinic told us that all of the health problems there were aggravated by the fact that ninety per cent of the population of Permytab had syphilis, Koestler almost keeled over. I was a bit upset myself.

"I try to save the children from it," she said. "But then they have other venereal diseases, too, just as bad."

"Syphilis!" Koestler exploded looking at me. "Ninety per cent syphilitic! Why didn't they tell us what we were running into?"

When, about midnight, Koestler and I were dropped at our hotel in Merv, where now we had a whole room to ourselves and a bed each since Kikilov and Kolya had gone, I was so tired and so cold that I got to bed quickly. But in the chill night air, Koestler began to wash his face and hands, his mouth and teeth—not once, but three or four times—emptying the water after each washing, until he had used up the whole pitcher. Then he went to the outside faucet, got more water and washed his body, then rinsed it in a second bowl. Finally, he washed his hands again. Syphilis, dirt, Permytab, the frontiers of revolution, ugh!

Perhaps from the chill of his unheated bath, or the cold night air, or the memory of that desert day, Koestler shuddered as he emptied his last bowl of water and finally went to bed.

#### HIGH HOLY BOKHARA

When Koestler and I reached Bokhara in early November, we went to the same hotel where I had stayed when I came through with the movie group, and where I thought the desk clerk might remember me. He acted as if he had never seen me before, and said with a shrug that anyhow all the rooms were taken. Finally, after much showing of documents, he muttered that a room was scheduled to be empty at noon and Koestler and I might have it. Meanwhile, the two of us left our baggage with him and went looking for something to eat.

When we came back, the clerk said the room was empty and to go upstairs and down the hall and we would find it. There were no bellmen or porters, so with Koestler's help—for he was traveling light—we lugged my bags, my typewriter, my victrola, and my box of records up the stairs and found the room. The door was open and a barefoot Tartar maid was sloshing all over the stone floor with a big mop. We could not immediately occupy the room, nor even get in without wetting our feet. So we decided to go back into the street again. We asked the maid if she would please transfer our baggage from the hall into the room when she had finished. She said,

"Niet," no, and went on mopping. Koestler exploded.

"Why?"

"Because I am a maid," she said, "and my work is not that of a porter to move luggage."

"What a hell of a place to have a revolution," said Koestler, or words to that effect.

Afraid to leave our belongings unprotected in the hall, we waited until she had finished cleaning. After fifteen or twenty minutes without a word, the maid passed us and went downstairs. Her attitude I often encountered later in other portions of the Soviet Union. One did what one was supposed to do, no more—and that was that—no matter what inconvenience to others such rigid interpretation of workers' rights involved.

At least, our room was fairly clean and cool, and the hotel, although very plainly furnished, was a palace after the dirty hostel in Merv. And for me it was a relief not to be running on schedule for a while, not to have to go anywhere or see anything. A few days of just not having to do anything was all I wanted.

"Don't tell anybody I'm here," I requested of Koestler, for I knew he would be on the quest of notes again immediately, since he had never been in Bokhara. He promised he would leave me out of his expedition for a while, and he did. That afternoon I took a nap while he went to a union hall. My first night in Bokhara I went alone to see a movie, several reels of a popular Soviet serial called *Miss Comrade Mend*. (The comrade being a woman, the word in Russian had a feminine ending which we do not have in English, so in translation, I suppose, it would have to be *Miss Comrade*.) The theater was filled with turbaned males, smoking what smelled like hashish. The episodes on the screen were long and tedious. But I had rather have been at the cinema than listening to the production plans of the Bokhara Rug Artel. After the movie I found a wine-house and had a few drinks, then went for a long walk alone in the starlight through the silent streets of the Old Town, out to the very edge of the city where a group of camel drivers were loading their beasts for a pre-dawn start into the desert. The camels snarled and, as they shook their long necks, their bells tinkled in the darkness. The drivers cursed and groaned and strained at the sacks of grain being secured on the backs of the smelly old animals. As I watched, nobody said anything to me.

When I got back to the hotel, it was after midnight. Koestler was worried. He thought maybe I'd gotten lost. He did not think much of my wandering around alone in the streets of a dark Oriental town, especially when I couldn't speak a word of its native language. Suppose I did get lost, how could I ask my way back to the hotel?

"*Nichevo*," I said, grinning. "What kind of notes did you get today?"

He showed me. Always, if he had any notes I wanted, Koestler would share them with me—which saved me a good deal of work. In Bokhara I did not try to keep up with Koestler during the week that followed. I mostly wandered around by myself. I watched the Oriental auctioneers in the bazaars calling for bids on quilted robes, silken shawls, embroidered eating cloths in bright reds and greens, hand-wrought jewelry, brass pitchers, bowls, and long-stemmed water pipes, tin trunks, bunches of carrots, onions, peppers, caps, hats and cloth for turbans, almost anything. I was told the auctioneers got five per cent of the sales, the remainder going to the owners who instead of doing the merchandising themselves, stood by and watched while their goods were sold.

I wandered again, as I had done on my first trip to the city, through the rooms of the palace of the former Emir, partially destroyed by the Basmachi counter-revolutionaries who did not wish it to fall into Communist hands. It was enormous, built in 1912, and not especially beautiful. There were panels of mirrors, glossy mosaics or gilt everywhere, and in the Emir's bedroom was an enormous brass bed that might have been made in Grand Rapids.

The harem quarters, where the Emir kept his many wives, were like dog kennels, separated from the palace proper, a series of rooms around connecting courtyards. Nearby was the Emir's Rest House with a balcony facing the private pool in which, at his command, his dozens of wives bathed nude before him. He had so many wives that he did not know them all by name. But when he fled to Afghanistan before the approaching Communists, he left most of the women behind to take with him, instead, his harem of boys, for male harems were not uncommon among emirs in those days.

Bokhara of the Many Mosques, more than three hundred—Bokhara the Mullah Ridden—as the Communists termed it, had been a great Moslem city with hundreds of muezzins calling to prayer in the name of Allah! One of

Asia's most religious cities—High Holy Divinely Descended Bokhara. At the same time, the histories say, it had been as corrupt as Chicago and more dangerous. Its Raiz, or official Protector of Religion, once walked the streets with a whip quizzing people as to the tenets of their faith. Woe betide those who did not answer to his satisfaction! Between tithes to the mullahs, taxes and semi-serfdom, the masses lived in abject poverty. Infant mortality was appalling. The streets swarmed with beggars. The Emir was one of the most despotic of monarchs anywhere on earth, and his tax collectors reputedly the cruelest in all Asia. Yet, instead of money, they would sometimes accept little daughters of the poor for their harems. And in these things the Tzars protected them.

When our movie group, a few weeks before, had visited Bokhara's Museum of the Revolution, the handsome old Uzbek in charge had told us a great deal about the last Emir, and showed us the whips, torture irons and chains with which this despot punished his prisoners in underground dungeons. Then the venerable curator showed us a photograph of himself—his back raw from the whip marks of the Emir's jailers—taken just after he was charged with revolutionary activities and ordered beaten to death. A secret sympathizer among the Emir's henchmen saved his life. But beneath his quilted robe the scars of his beating (in the form of great welts across his body) he still bore. This old man's name was Haji Mir Baba Murcin—Haji meaning one who had been to Mecca. On my return to Bokhara with Koestler, I took him to meet Haji, and they spent several hours together. Koestler took down his story and devoted a chapter to him in *The Invisible Writing*, for the old man had many memories. Haji Mir Baba had been to Moscow in the early days of the Soviets, and there he had met Lenin. When Lenin asked him how he had happened to become a Communist, Haji turned around, slipped out of the upper part of his robe so that his back was bare, and Lenin saw his scars.

#### SYNAGOGUES AND PENCILS

Arthur Koestler's father was a Hungarian Jew in Budapest, and young Koestler in his teens went to Palestine. Among my classmates at Central High School in Cleveland had been many sons and daughters of orthodox Jewish families, and I had gone a few times to their synagogues. Once I went to a mass prayer meeting for the victims of a Polish pogrom, where the old people stood beating their heads against the walls of the auditorium. When I came to the Soviet Union, I sometimes saw on the streets of Communist cities, orthodox Jews with curled sideburns, black hats and long ankle-length form-fitting black coats. In Bokhara I saw such Jews, too, and I became interested in learning how they fared in this sovietized city of the Orient. With Koestler's help, in the old Jewish quarter of the town, I gathered a book full of notes.

Jews, of whom there were about ten thousand in Bokhara, could now live anywhere they wished, but formerly under the Emir they had been segregated in a ghetto section. One of the peculiar regulations of the city formerly was that the doors of Jewish homes had to be less tall than the men who lived within, so that Jews were forced to stoop when they entered their houses. No Jewish windows could open on the street. Jews were permitted to have no schools, and they took no part in the official life of the state. The men all had to wear a special kind of belt designating them as Hebrews, and they were permitted to ride only on donkeys, not horses. Those Jews who disobeyed the Emir's rules might legally receive up to fifty lashes on the bare buttocks, and the Bokhara tax collectors preyed upon the Jews even more heavily than they did on others.

With the coming of the Soviets to Turkmenia, all forms of minority discriminations were abolished, so when I reached Bokhara, there were Jews in the City Soviet. Jewish, Uzbek and Russian children all went to the same schools. A large number of the teachers were Jewish. Attached to the *Bokhara Proletarian*, a daily paper, was a young native-born Jew who spoke both Russian and Uzbek. This young Jew had become a Communist Party member.

I am afraid I found myself then taking much the same position toward Asiatic Jews in relation to Party membership as many Russians in Moscow took toward Negroes in that regard. Since Communism had brought about such a change for the better in the status of Jews, abolishing the old stigmas formerly applied to them, why were not all Jews Communist Party members? The young reporter explained to me that many of the older Jews resented the Party's anti-religious tenets, which included attacks in the press upon not only mullahs, but rabbis as well. These old people, this young man said, put religion above social, political, or industrial progress. They

clung to the Ark of the Covenant and still wanted their synagogues where, said this young Jew who no longer ate kosher food, "Life is a wail and an outworn prayer."

There was a synagogue just around the corner from the hotel where Koestler and I were staying. It was a beautiful building, a hundred or more years old, in a winding lane shaded by plane trees. Its interior was hung with tapestries and rich rugs in the Oriental manner. On its wooden columns were typical Bokharian designs. The day I visited the synagogue there were some very old men with beards, dressed in patriarchal robes. They kept their skull caps on in the temple, and their caps were black, not varicolored and embroidered as were the *tibitekas* of the Uzbeks. These were hospitable old gentlemen who took great pride in showing Koestler and me about the building and the rooms of the Hebrew School. They showed me the high prayer seat in the temple to which a man had to be lifted. And they unrolled from gorgeous ancient leather holders the heavy parchment scrolls. Their altars of stone engraved in Hebrew they said were over three hundred years old. It was quiet and peaceful in this old synagogue, and I went back there more than once during my days in Bokhara. But I saw other former synagogues, which had been turned into storage houses, offices, or trade-union centers, and where, over the Star of David had been superimposed the Hammer and Sickle.

After about a week in Bokhara, Koestler became restless and wanted to move on to Samarkand and Tashkent. Because I liked Bokhara, I decided to linger awhile, promising to meet him in Tashkent before the end of the month. So we parted company. But before Koestler left Bokhara an incident occurred that is still vivid in my mind, I suppose because of the human qualities involved—possibly, too, because it had a direct connection with note-taking. It concerned my last American pencil.

Certain items such as soap, toilet paper, silk stockings and lead pencils were very scarce in the Soviet Union. It was impossible to buy a good lead pencil. I had brought with me to the USSR a big box of pencils, nice long yellow pencils with erasers. Soviet pencils had no erasers, and were of such soft lead that the points wore down no sooner than you had written a few lines. Resharpened, it soon wore down again, so you had to keep sharpening Soviet pencils after every fifty words or so that were written. You had to carry a penknife for just this purpose. Soviet pencils were a nuisance. But, by the time I had gotten to Bokhara, I had used up all my American pencils but one.

The afternoon before Koestler was to leave for Samarkand, the young Jewish newspaperman dropped in. As he sat in our room talking his eye lit on my pencil lying beside the typewriter. He said, "I would love to have a souvenir from your faraway country, America. Could I perhaps have this pencil?"

"Oh, why, of course," I said, not thinking at the moment how valuable that pencil was to me. "Please accept it."

"I will give you my pencil," said the young man, "and I will keep yours forever as a souvenir from your country. Thank you very much!"

When the young man had gone and I started typing, I picked up the pencil he had left on the table to make an erasure, but it had no eraser. This irritated me a bit. Later when I started to write with his Soviet pencil, after a few words the lead wore down so quickly that I really became upset. Here I was without a single decent pencil in the middle of Asia where there were only Russian pencils like the one I had in my hand.

"Gee, Koestler," I said, "I wish I hadn't given that fellow my last good pencil."

"Your last pencil!" Koestler exclaimed. "Why did you give it to him?"

"Because he wanted a souvenir from America," I said. "But I'd much rather have given him a shirt."

"Nothing's more valuable to a writer than the tools of his trade," said Koestler. "That fellow's a newspaperman. Souvenir from America—so much camouflage! He knows Soviet pencils are no good. He tricked you. That Jew!" Koestler said, "I'm ashamed! Ashamed! Langston, I'll get your pencil back for you."

"Oh, no, man!" I said. "Let him have it for a keepsake."

"Keepsake, bah!" cried Koestler in a rage. "Can you write with the pencil he left you? No! He didn't want a souvenir, I tell you—he wanted your pencil!" With that Koestler grabbed his coat—he never went out improperly garbed—and stormed off to retrieve my pencil.

I was embarrassed. I had not intended to make an issue of it—a mere pencil. In high school with hundreds of

Jewish youngsters I had learned how sensitive some Jewish people can be when another does something considered shameful—just as many Negroes feel keenly any sort of behavior which they think “disgraces the race.” But I had not thought of Jewishness at all when I mentioned wishing I had back my pencil. Yet, as soon as I saw Koestler’s face, and heard him explode, “That Jew!” I felt that he thought one of his own had misbehaved, so he set out to do something about it. It took Koestler two or three hours to find the young reporter. But when he returned he had my pencil.

#### DESERT CARAVANSERAI

Left in Bokhara without a translator, I managed to get along. My small Russian vocabulary stood me in good stead and I don’t recall speaking a word of English with anyone there after Koestler left. No longer note-taking, I spent my time soaking in the atmosphere, or just sitting across the street from my hotel in a latticework of sun and shade on the edge of the enormous square cistern dating from the days of antiquity. Watching the turbaned old camel drivers in their padded robes and the young sovietized citizens in Russian blouses and embroidered caps passing up and down the narrow street through the Old Gate of the city to or from the Citadel and the Tower of Death, I mused upon the turbulent history of ancient Bokhara, a city so old (hat it is said to have been mentioned in Chinese manuscripts as far back as 200 b.c. I was intrigued by the harem wives in long horsehair veils, like walking bundles, who passed completely hidden from all eyes, still slaves to the old customs. But sometimes sitting on one of the slightly raised platforms of a new trade-union teahouse in the late afternoon, squatting on an old soft well-worn Bokhara rug with a pot of green tea before me, I watched a modern Bokhara woman who had escaped from a harem, burned her veil, and gotten herself a job as cashier there. She was now taking in cash and coupons for tea and cakes, as the camels of old Asia and the new motor buses of the Soviets passed in the busy streets outside. Each day when Rakhat Razik finished her work, she got on one of the new motor buses and went her way, free to go and come as she wished.

For almost a month I lingered in Bokhara. On the day of my departure from the old town that I had grown to love, I took a motor-bus to the railroad several miles away, arriving there about sunset. The first thing I learned, as I lugged my bags and baggage to the station platform, was that the train for Tashkent was late. The bulletin board said five hours late. That should make its arrival about eleven p.m. But by midnight no train had come, and nobody knew when it would come. The stationmaster stopped chalking up anything on the board. The station was packed and jammed with men, women and children, for it had turned quite cold. There was not even standing room within. There were no empty benches anywhere to sit on, inside or out, and it was too cold to sit on the ground. I had been on my feet for hours and was very sleepy and very tired. Far down the road through the pitch-black dark, I could see the dim flicker of the lights of a *chaikhanna*, so I *decided* to head for that distant tea house, leaving my luggage in the hands of fate.

As I approached the *chaikhanna*, there were no signs of life. It was bitter cold and so dark that, as I turned off the dusty road, I could not see the single stone step that tripped me at the entrance to the building. I stumbled toward a crack of light and fell against a heavy door that opened as my body struck it. A blast of fetid air rolled out—but at least the air was warm. The big murky room was filled with men sleeping on the floor and on shelves, huddled together in the light of two or three flares that fluttered and smoked. Smoke or no smoke, I was glad to see light and people again!

I could not find a clear space anywhere so finally I went down like a stone wedged in between two sleepers I had never seen. But it was good to sleep.

The next thing I knew, a man was walking on my head. I blinked as a rain of sand from some soft anonymous boot obscured whoever I might have seen as I looked up. The room had begun to move and stir. Then I smelled tea, so I sat up. Near at hand a little bowl gleamed hot and white. It steamed. At the end of the room, pale through the open door were stars. Folks stretched, talked, moved, went in and out. I heard the sound of camel bells. Gusts of clean cold air cut the smoke. It was dawn in the East. Dawn in Middle Asia!

A hand with a bowl of tea swung toward me in a matter-of-fact way. I drank and passed the bowl on to a shadow of a fellow in the murk next to me. He drank, too, and the bowl moved around from hand to hand and

then returned to the pot to be refilled. Life came back to us all, warm and conscious. Turbans were rewound, lost *tibetkas* recovered, belts and sashes tied, noses blown, as everybody began to move. I got to my feet, stretched, and went to the door. It was almost day with the desert a mulatto-brown under the last stars wan in the fresh blue sky.

I looked down the road—and suddenly remembered that nobody had known last night when the Tashkent train might come. Panic-stricken, I began to run. Had it come—and gone? Left me? And were my bags still piled in the corner of the platform alive with people— \but no train? Nevertheless, I hurried.

My bags were there, a baby asleep on top of them, golden like a little Buddha. The waiting room was still packed with people, for the sun was not yet high enough to warm the world without. I went back to the platform and looked around. Under the eaves of the station, there was a big sign in two languages, Uzbek and Russian:

Bokhara, Uzbekistan, USSR

A smaller notice chalked on a blackboard below now simply said:

TRAIN LATE

There was no expected time indicated for its arrival. The station-master had evidently given up.

I looked up and down the track gleaming long and lonesome in the morning sun. No sign of a train. If that baby Buddha wasn't sleeping on my suitcases, I'd open one and see what small and meager lunch the Bokhara hotel wrapped up for me last night. It couldn't be much, for food was scarce in Central Asia. The wise thing to do would be to control my appetite until I got on the train. There probably would be no dining car and, since it took all day to reach Tashkent, I would be very hungry later. Restless, I got up and walked to the edge of the platform.

"*Drasvoti, tovarish,*" I said to a young Uzbek in half-European, half-native clothing—an English-type coat, a tibeteka cap of bright embroidery, and soft heel-less boots. "Good morning."

He answered in a glow of guitarlike syllables that certainly weren't Russian. I grinned and shook my head. We began with signs. Hand to belly: *hungry*. Fingers pointing down the track with a frown: *disgust, train late*. Hands across brow, then pretending to fan: *hot, sun getting hotter*. He pointed at my face, then at his: Brown, same color. But myself, *ni* Uzbek.

"*Russki?*" he asked.

"*Niet,*" I said. "No. Me, *Americanski.*"

He shrugged. More guitarlike syllables. I thought I might as well speak English since it really didn't matter. Neither of us understood a word, but it was fun to talk. So I said, "American going to Tashkent. Then, by and by, next week, next month, I'll go to Moscow. Then home to America. I'm a writer. I write articles and books. What do you do? *Konsomol?*"

"*Da,*" said the youth, affirming that he was a Young Communist. He knew two Russian words anyhow. Then back into his own tongue, *king-ting-a-ling-ummm-ding*, which is about the sound of the Uzbek language—a kind of musically tinkling tenor speech, as decorative to hear as Persian script is to see.

It is constantly amazing to me how much one can understand of a language of which one knows not a word. Before the train came I had somehow gathered that my Uzbek friend lived near Bokhara, that he had never been even to Tashkent, let alone Moscow, that he was going to be a student of medicine in the newly formed medical school at Samarkand, and that he was learning (or rather intended to learn) Russian and German. In the Uzbek tongue there were no modern medical works as yet.

When the train came, with the customary courtesy of most young Soviet citizens, Asiatic or European, the Uzbek student helped me with my baggage, pushing and scrambling in the thick crush to board an ancient coach and find a seat before all were taken. Then he stood on the seat he had secured in the middle of the car and waved and shouted until I saw him. There was but one place. He insisted on giving it to me. I refused in every language I knew, then took it, thanked him and offered him half of my lunch, which turned out to be a single large but very hard sandwich of cement-like sausage in brickbat bread. The Uzbek boy imitated a dog with a bone, squatting in the aisle. Everybody laughed. A Russian in the coach, a Red Army man, joined us in the aisle,

miraculously producing a pot of tea which we shared, so our luncheon became a jolly affair.

Nobody on the trip had a balalaika or accordion, nevertheless, after a while the Russians began to sing and clapped their hands and probably would have danced but the coach was too crowded with people sitting on the floor in the aisles and everywhere. The student got off at Samarkand. So did the Red Army man. I slept the rest of the way into Tashkent.

It was dark when I reached this largest and most important town in Soviet Central Asia, the regional capital of all that section of the world, where there are streetcars, bright lights, European shops, theaters and even night clubs. I went directly, bags and baggage, to the largest hotel where I found Arthur Koestler. The hotel was filled, so I could not get a room there, nor find anything to eat. But Koestler had a lot of bread, cheese, and camel salami, which he graciously offered for supper. He spread a newspaper on the bed and shared his food with me. It was my second cold lunch of the day—if the half sandwich on the train could be called lunch. I was hungry, but in a nauseating sort of way. My head ached. I forced the dry food down my dusty throat. Koestler had no tea.

"Tea's hard to find," he said, "and there's no sugar in town. A train wreck held up the shipment."

As we ate, I asked Koestler how he found Tashkent.

"Dirty and ugly and dusty," he said, head down over our meal. "This disgusting part of the world! In Germany at least we'd have a clean revolution. Besides, people are starving here. There's famine. Folks are living on grapes and melons."

"Tashkent can't be as bad as Permytyab," I said. He smiled wryly. "At least I didn't see a prison out there in the desert." Suddenly Koestler looked up and stared at me intently. "Here in Tashkent the jails are full of people, the Atta Kurdovs of Asia."

"Don't you think that some of them belong in jail?"

"Not so many," said Koestler. "Not all—maybe none."

I had shared with Koestler the Atta Kurdov trials at Ashkhabad, then Permytyab in the desert, and now Tashkent—traveling with him through the heart of Asia along the old caravan trails at the crossroads of the East. Were I a socio-literary historian, I might hazard a guess that here in 1932 were Koestler's crossroads, too—his turning point from left to right that was to culminate a few years later in his bitter attacks on communism.

Shortly after I reached Tashkent, Koestler left for Moscow. I never saw him again until he had become world famous.

#### LITTLE OLD LADY

When I left Koestler's hotel, the next one I tried took me in, but all they had was one large and very expensive room filled with heavy furniture, including a canopied bed from the days of the Tzar. I registered and went to bed. My bones ached. The cold, the hard benches of the train, the previous night passed on the dirt floor of the caravanserai, no decent food, all caused me to feel sick, very sick, inside and out.

In the morning I woke up even sicker. I couldn't eat, nor was I able to go anywhere, except to get my papers okayed—which was absolutely necessary in order to receive a food card in case I ever should want to eat again. I also managed to see, as I had promised to do on my return to Tashkent, the State Publishers about a book of mine, *The Weary Blues*, then being translated into Uzbek—a book of poems about Negro life in America. The Uzbeks were interested in this because, under the Tzar, they remembered they had been treated by the Russians as Negroes are treated in Mississippi. Before the Soviet revolution in Tashkent, there had even been a Jim Crow section for Asiatics on streetcars. The old partitions were still there now, but segregation itself had gone since the Uzbeks control the affairs of their autonomous republic.

The State Publishers of Uzbekistan gave me a check for six thousand rubles as an advance on my book, enough money to buy thirty camels. Had I not been ill, I would have been jubilant—so many rubles and a book of mine coming out that would be read in Samarkand, Bokhara, Kokand and Fergana, after I had gone back to Harlem. But my head was splitting that morning, my tongue was coated with camel sausage, and my stomach felt like lead.

At the hotel, a group of Tashkent writers awaited me. But when they saw how ill I was, they busied

themselves to see that I was looked after. So that I would not be alone, it was arranged that I move upstairs and share an apartment with a young man who, it turned out, was the Physical Culture Director for the city of Tashkent. His name was Yusef Nishanov (the *ov* being a Russian termination which the younger Uzbeks were adding to their names as they began to speak Russian). Yusef was a muscularly handsome youth with skin as brown as my own and very black hair, crew-cut, heavy and shiny as silk. His eyes were jolly, his smile broad and bright, and his disposition sunny. Nichan knew about a hundred words of Russian—our only language in common. But he could tell that I needed a doctor, so he sent for one.

All the tallow in all the cold mutton I had eaten during my past weeks in the desert, all the fat of all the camel's meat, and all the sand, silt and dirt of the irrigation ditch water I had drunk on barren collective farms and silk artels between Merv and Tashkent, all the hard sausage and rocklike bread of which I had partaken, plus Koestler's salami of the night before, seemed to have rolled into a single cement boulder in my belly, weighing me down flat on my back in a strange bed in a strange room with a strange Uzbek boy bending over me asking, in a language that sounded like guitars, "What hurts? What is the matter? Where did I feel sick? How come? *Sto ta koy?*"

About sunset a doctor came. I never knew what nationality that doctor was—a Tartar perhaps—but I pointed at my head, at my stomach, and groaned. He tapped me a bit, took my temperature, held my pulse, and left a prescription which my host took to a pharmacist to be filled. Shortly Nichan returned with a big bottle of bright green liquid with a flaky white sediment at the bottom. I took a dose, and in a few minutes I almost died. So I took another dose. Then all I had ever eaten in all my life came up. As the night wore on, the more I took of the medicine, the worse I got. The next morning I resolved to meet my Maker—for no sicker could a mortal be, and live.

About noon a group of Uzbek writers came to visit. When they saw me, they were frightened. I could hardly raise my head. They immediately sent for the most famous doctor in Middle Asia, the personal physician to the President of Uzbekistan. He was a Russian of the old school, educated in Berlin. In bits of German, French and Russian I explained my case, showed him the bottle of green liquid, and told him how, a few minutes after each dose, I had thought it was the end. He looked at the bottle.

"Is there anything the matter with your heart?" he asked.

"*Nein*," I answered.

"No wonder you are sick," the doctor stated holding up the bottle. "This is arsenic—for the heart."

The big stone in my stomach turned completely over. I groaned, "Will I live?"

"*Nichevo*," he said, in such a way that I couldn't tell if he meant, "So what? It's nothing that you're going to die." Or, "It's nothing to worry about that you've taken arsenic." Or, simply, that nothing was nothing.

"Well," I said, "*Nichevo*, too!"

I threw the arsenic out the window. But a new problem intrigued me—to find the required diet. The doctor had prescribed a list of rare, delicious and delicate dishes—nourishing soups, fowl, and wonderful custards—but practically none of them, nor the ingredients for creating them, were to be had in the state food shops or at the meager bazaars of Tashkent. I consulted with Nichan. Chicken, Nichan said, could be gotten from the farmers—but at banquet prices. Besides, who would cook it? That was another puzzle—there being no dining room in the hotel. But Nichan set about solving things for me. A day or two later he brought into the room a little old Russian lady who looked like Ouspenskaya. She said she would cook my chickens. And she lived right there in the hotel where I was.

Her name I have forgotten, but I remember that since she did not like to be called *tovarish* (*no* comrade, she) we always called her *grasdani*, citizen. I arranged to give her a certain sum of money every week for chickens, plus a modest salary agreed upon. To her I turned over my convalescence. *Grasdani* took excellent care of me. She even made pancakes for breakfast—thin Russian blintzes with sour cream.

She was a kind, sad, wisp of an old lady—a remnant of the upper classes—who had been living in that same hotel since the days of the Tzar. The Soviets let her stay, permitting her a small apartment where she had her own cooking facilities. She had been a woman of means once. Now—well, she said, it would be a pleasure to nurse me

and help me back to health, a mere courtesy that any Russian would pay a stranger ill in a foreign land. But, regretfully, as things were, she would have to accept the payment I offered her. The sum I suggested (for at first she was mute on the subject) she cut by half. Too much, she said. So, for what seemed to me woefully little remuneration, she prepared my meals, nursed me back to health, and talked to me by the hour in a flow of Russian, which I began to understand more and more. She aided me greatly in acquiring a better working knowledge of the language of the Muscovites while living in the land of the Uzbeks.

The burden of her conversation (and Grasdani made no bones about it) was that she had grave doubts concerning a regime that permitted wild and unwashed nomads, just out of the desert, to live in a hotel such as this one where once barons, diplomats, colonels, majors and rich merchants from Moscow used to stay. Now the rooms were all cluttered up with Tajik commissars, Tartars, young Kazak Communists, Russian mechanics sent to teach the natives how to service tractors, and former camel drivers from yurts in the desert now delegated to the Regional Soviets to make laws.

The old lady snorted and gave vent to her favorite verbal illustration of the general hopelessness of all this. "They don't even know," she said, "how to use the toilet. They throw tin cans in it, these *tovarishi*, then pull the chain!" She looked at me lying in bed and added her final coup. "Ever since the Soviets came to power, the plumbing has been out of order."

After that, or a similar statement almost daily, she would gather up the luncheon dishes with such force that, had they not been solid Soviet-made cement china, they surely would have broken. Then the old lady would stalk indignantly down the hall with my tray, leaving the fragrant scent of chicken broth and sour cream trailing after her. I knew that every day a line of such old Russian ladies stood outside the OGPU prison in Tashkent with baskets of food for relatives within—political prisoners who had not yet reconciled themselves to the new regime and who fought it verbally or physically, dangerously and violently. In my heart I was sorry for these irreconcilables (just as my slave grandparents must have been sorry for certain of the gentler aristocrats of the South when the Yankees came). Yet, as the little old lady went muttering down the hall, I could not help thinking, "She has had her day." Something hard and young in me could not help thinking, now had come the hour of those from the desert, who once had to work seven years for the beys in order to afford a wrinkled worn-out old wife that some richer man had first enjoyed, in the days when women were bought and sold like cattle. Today women are free, and men, too, for now has come the time of those who formerly had to till the overlord's vast acres in return for the use of just a little water to irrigate a single barren acre of their own. The overlords have fled, along with the Emirs, the Khans and the Tzarist officers. Now it is the turn of those who in former days had to beg of the Cossacks, "Please, master! No more lashes, please! White master, no more! Please!" Of course, in those days the Uzbeks had had no toilets.

As dusk approached, that vast hotel room where I lay would fill with the shadows of Cossacks and soldiers, adventurers and barons, tax collectors and colonial officers from St. Petersburg, who once ruled Turkestan for the Little White Father—spice dealers and silk stealers from the North who supported the despotic Emirs—the men who had once wined, dined, danced with, and courted this little old lady who now brought my dinner and remained to talk with me as I ate, mourning the passing of the Romanoffs, the old culture and the days of no tin cans in the toilets.

But as the afternoon faded into darkness, Nichan, the Uzbek, would come bursting in full of news of the great Sports Festival he was arranging where Asiatic peasant boys and girls who, a few years ago, never knew what it was to play, would exhibit their youth and strength in the new stadium at Fergana. "And here, next month," Nichan said in a mixture of his wild musical language, "Fut-bal! Here in Tashkent. Fut-bal! You go. Get up, *tovarish*, get well, we see fut-bal!"

Ten years ago Nichan himself had been a homeless orphan, an Oriental besprizorni, dirty, ignorant, scab-covered, wandering the caravan trails of Central Asia. The Soviet government had corralled him into one of their schools and had found him eager and alert, with qualities of leadership. Now, Nichan was in charge of the athletic activities of thousands of boys and girls who, like himself, until recently had never had a chance.

But my sad kind little old lady, who had had her day, resented these things, and was very critical of young

Uzbeks like Nichan. Change is seldom enjoyed by the aging, whether they be individuals or nations. However, for her sake (as well as mine), I took it upon myself to explain to Nichan the general incompatibility of tin cans and modern plumbing. Since Grasdani perhaps still had a number of years to live under the new system, I wanted her to be as happy as she could and to get along with these nomads from the desert. Certain things we enjoyed in common. For instance all of us, the old lady, Nichan and I liked blintzes with sour cream. It was our good fortune, as part of my diet, to have them every day. So sometimes the three of us dined amiably together.

#### HOOLIGANS OF THE ROAD

Nichan, my host, the former homeless boy, was now living in what had been a private banquet room for the entertainment of Tzarist officers in the old days. It was a large corner room on the second floor at the front of the hotel with tall French windows opening onto a long balcony. The room was called an “apartment” now because a portion of it, about a fourth, had been boarded off with a partition slightly taller than a man. This made a small bedroom in which, on two narrow cots at opposite sides, Nichan and I slept. In the main room there was a large leather sofa which often served as a bed, too, for Nichan had many friends, visiting athletes from other parts of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and even the Pamirs, or Red Army men in Tashkent on leave, or various cousins and peasant relatives from the country oases. Sometimes two or three pallets would be spread on the floor, which was agreeable to the Uzbeks, as they were not used to beds, anyhow.

In the center of the room when I moved in, there was a sculptor’s stand and a big box of damp clay. On the stand an athletic figure, a third life size, had begun to emerge under the skillful hands of Nina Zaratelli, a Georgian sculptress, who was modeling Nichan from life, to be enlarged into a gigantic figure of *Uzbek Youth* to adorn the entrance of the new stadium being built in Tashkent. Nina Zaratelli modeled two or three times a week, depending on when she could catch Nichan long enough to persuade him to pose.

So, with a statue being made in our room and student-artists often gathered to watch this process, visiting athletes dashing in with soccer balls, tall Red Army men pulling off stiff boots to rest their feet, country cousins unrolling bundles of bedding for a nap in a corner, and the little old lady coming in and out to look after me—with all this going on every day, the room in which I lay ill was not unlike Grand Central Station in New York at rush hour. Conversations in Uzbek, Tajik, Russian, Georgian and Tartar flowed around me continually. At times bedlam could hardly have been more linguistic than this room in the former Tzarist—but now Soviet—hotel in Tashkent.

It was very cold in Tashkent by the end of November, although Muscovites considered the climate of Central Asia almost tropical. But to me the temperature was much like that of the wind-swept plains of the Kansas of my youth. By the end of November there was snow on the ground. Russian sleds with horses and bells sped through the streets past slow humping camels whose breath rose like clouds of steam to float above the burdens on their backs. In Nichan’s room the air was often like ice. Even ill and covered up in bed as I was, I got cold, for the hotel had no central heating, fuel was scarce, and our room was vast. Built in the wall was a ceiling-high porcelain stove, white and beautiful, but quite empty of fire. This stove had a narrow little door and thick inner walls of brick. The few times that we had fuel—sent by the Writers Union during the first week of my illness, I watched the process for heating this stove. I was appalled because, it seemed, the height of warmth to a citizen of Tashkent was to get a little glow inside the stove, then shut the door tight and let the thick brick walls get barely warmed through. This in turn slightly took the chill off the room, but gave out no real heat at all. In fact, you could still see your breath in the air. I began to study how to remedy the situation.

Coal was not to be had. Wood, in a largely desert country, was very expensive. It was then that I learned that, even in the Socialist Soviet Union, money in large amounts is a blessing. For what seemed to the other residents of the hotel a prohibitive sum, it was possible for me to buy from private dealers a whole camel load of wood—two or three loads if I wanted to pay the price. Fortunately, I had just received the rubles for my book, so I paid out a large handful of them to a camel driver who unloaded from his beast in the snow in front of the hotel a big pile of wood. An Uzbek porter stacked it on our front balcony for me. Promptly I filled the big old white porcelain stove full of wood and lit it. The door of the stove I left open like a fireplace—so the heat rolled out! It was very

jolly. Everybody loved it. Result: Nichan and I had more company than ever. So, with a roaring fire, pretty Nina Zaratelli modeling in the center of the room, the nice old Russian lady serving chicken and blintzes, my Harlem victrola playing Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong and Ethel Waters—plus Uzbek athletes demonstrating handsprings, and Red Army men, local authors and native university students, both girls and boys, paying calls—my convalescence was anything but dull.

To further enliven my recuperation, there came two besprizorni, dirty little white-skinned wanderers in oversized men's coats down to their heels, whom I discovered looking up at my balcony one day when I went out to get an armload of wood.

"*Kleb*," one of them said, "bread," motioning toward his mouth. So I threw down the bread left from my luncheon, and also the wing of a chicken. Every day after that, for a month or more, the two boys came back about the same time to stand across the street looking up at the balcony until I appeared. They never came into the hotel, and as soon as I tossed them some food, they disappeared. I never knew their names, but they were not Asiatics. When they took off their caps to catch whatever I had saved to throw them, their matted hair was ash blond. They spoke Russian, or at least they said bread and thank you in Russian.

Besprizorni were wandering delinquents, a problem to the Soviet authorities and a source of amusement and irritation to ordinary citizens. These were the homeless children of the Revolution, children of passing armies, death, broken homes and maladjustment, who refused to stay in the schools assigned to them. If there were old people like Grasdani, who could not adjust to Soviet society, there were young ones, too, who could not—or would not. My roommate, Nichan, had adjusted brilliantly after his years of wandering, and had become an inspiring and useful citizen under state guidance, helping others along the path of progress. But many young vagabonds had refused to accept—or accepted only temporarily—the aid of institutions established for them. These determined little hooligans were making a last stand for freedom.

I first became aware of the besprizorni in Moscow, where I was warned that such homeless boys might pick my pockets in the tram-cars. Nothing of the sort happened, but I was wary of tattered teenagers who came too near. It was not until I got to the Black Sea that I had a chance to become acquainted with such youngsters. The first one I knew was only a child. He turned up at sea on the excursion boat bearing our movie group toward Yalta. Laden with summer travelers from all parts of the Soviet Union the ship softly undulated through the smooth water off the Crimean coast. I was seated on the boat deck sharing bread and chocolate with a girl from Harlem when suddenly, from beneath the bench, up popped a besprizorni—ragged, dirty, hard and wizened, yet with a smile like a million rubles—this small jack-in-a-box of humanity. He might have been ten years old, he might have been fifteen. There were several years' difference between his head and his body. He looked like a little old wise man in the face.

"*Drasvouti*," I said, meaning good morning but perhaps pronouncing it so badly he thought I was speaking a foreign language.

"*Kleb*?" he asked.

The girl beside me held out a piece of bread. The besprizorni took it, went behind a rope hamper as a dog might do, ate it, then looked at us and smiled.

"Ask him what his name is," we said to a Red Army man standing near the ship's rail, who knew a little English.

"Kola," said the besprizorni in answer to a stream of Russian from the man in uniform. (Kola means Nick in our language—short for Nikolai.)

The Red Army man asked Kola where he was going, and the boy replied casually, "For a trip."

The military youth laughed, and he and Kola began to banter each other in a flow of Russian. Other passengers gathered around laughing and questioning. The little old boy in rags was holding high court on the boat deck when a sailor came up the stairs. Behind the rope hamper fled the besprizorni, but the sailor saw him and laughed. The group of grownups scattered, smiling. By and by, Kola's hatless head peered over the top of the hamper, bobbing up and down. The coast was clear. The little stowaway came out. We fed him more bread and chocolate, and talked with him in our limited Russian.

These vagabond boys were one of the major problems of the Soviet government, roaming across the Union, making a desperate stand to continue the wild life to which, as children in the tempestuous years following the Revolution, many had become accustomed. These youths roamed in bands, begging, stealing, sleeping in doorways, holes and corners, and riding the rods or stowing away on boats when they tired of a place.

For these pitiful and half-savage children of upheaval, there were many communes. In these school-homes, the wild boys of the road were taught to read and write, and trained in trades, citizenship, music and dancing. From such homes, I was told, they might run away if they chose, then come back, and no questions were asked. So long used to their precarious freedom, Soviet psychologists knew that, even when well housed, these boys must still feel free. Therefore the door was open for them to go back to the highway if they chose. And some did. Some got tired of comfort and regularity. Some wanted the sting of road dust in their eyes again, or to feel the cinders from an engine blowing in their faces as they hopped a boxcar. Some loved the thrill of purse snatching in theater crowds. But, like Gypsies, the besprizorni, in spite of their tendencies toward gangsterism, had acquired in the eyes of the people a sort of romantic aura. Of these young hooligans, as the Russians termed them, many strange and amusing tales were told.

One of my interpreters told me of her mother's experience with some besprizorni in the early 1920s. Every day, one cold winter, a little group used to come to the window for bread that the old woman would place on the sill. But the boys would never come in. Nor would they come too near the house if the door were open, for fear of being captured. They slept in a railway station. Their clothes were rags and tatters. By winter's end, this kindhearted grandmother was able to make friends with the leader, a boy of fourteen. One day she persuaded him to come into the house to warm himself and drink a cup of hot tea. Gradually the youth began to trust her. But in the spring, when it was becoming warm enough to ride the rails again, they came one morning to say goodbye. Shyly, the boys presented the old woman who had been kind to them with a beautiful traveling bag that they said they had stolen from a foreign lady at the station.

Some of the besprizorni had a highly developed technique for extracting what they wanted from an unwary passer-by, even in broad daylight. One of their famous and frightful tricks was the Saliva Threat—which usually brought results. It was commonly believed that all the besprizorni were diseased and that the scabs and sores that filth produced on their bodies were indications of the worst venereal infections. The besprizorni knew almost everybody believed this, so they capitalized on it. A ragged little boy would suddenly walk up to a man in a crowded street and hiss into his horrified ear, "Gimme five rubles—or I'll spit in your face! I'm full o' disease." The boy, being a crack shot at spitting, usually got the five rubles.

In Moscow, a band of homeless girls were said to have broken into a large department store late at night and arrayed themselves in the choicest garments to be found. Then they began to eat cheese and drink vodka in the food department. It was so nice and warm in the store that they lay down to rest awhile but, due to the potency of the vodka and the heaviness of the cheese, they slept until the astonished manager came to open the store in the morning. Then their wanderings were arbitrarily curtailed by the police.

When the Torgsin stores were first opened (shops where one might trade only in gold, silver, or foreign currency) a young besprizorni is said to have appeared one morning with a human head full of gold teeth. This legend is indicative of the kind of colorful tales to which the besprizorni lent themselves. Some of the stories had a Robin Hood-like quality. Often the vagabond boys were said to give their bread, gotten by begging, to professional beggars, saying, "We can steal ours. You only know how to beg." And to people who had been kind to them, they would often say, "Can we swipe something for you?"

Once in Moscow I saw a half-grown besprizorni caught stealing from the counter of a little shop. A huge piece of cheese was removed from the boy's shirt front. Two good citizens held him while a third went for the militia. (The police in Russia are never called police. There is too much Tzarist terror about the word police, so they are called militia.) A young militiaman arrived, not much bigger than the teenage boy he was to arrest. The besprizorni refused to go with the militiaman. Such scenes were fairly frequent in the Moscow streets—the arrested refusing to be arrested, with long and lengthy arguments ensuing, since in the Soviet Union the ordinary militia used no clubs, believe it or not, nor were they allowed to beat prisoners (at least, not in public). Today the

little cop argued with the boy. The citizens in the shop argued with him. A sort of forum was held.

"After all, my lad, you took the cheese," they said, "you should go and be punished."

"Yes," agreed the militiaman, "come on."

Suddenly the boy's knees got so purposely weak he could no longer stand. He wilted to the floor. The little cop tried to pick him up. The boy would not rise. Finally, in desperation, the young militiaman asked for the help of the citizens in taking his prisoner to the station house. The boy wriggled, screamed and cried. The policeman took a foot, a clerk took the other foot, two men took an arm each, and thus they carried him off to explain to the judge.

"It must be spring," a man in the crowd said. "The besprizorni are on the road again."

On the station steps in Tashkent, in the summer, as our movie group was leaving, I saw an amusing little hooligan of not more than twelve, doing antics to attract the attention of travelers. With our interpreter, we stopped and asked the boy jokingly what train he was waiting for.

He said, "The train to Moscow."

"Have you got your ticket?" we asked.

"Sure, ten of 'em," he said, and held up his hands, indicating that he intended to hang on to the blinds.

Our interpreter, interested in the boy, asked him how he—obviously a Russian child—happened to be way down there in Asia.

The little boy proceeded to give a long, witty tale of his exploits, mentioning a dozen cities he had visited, and ending up by saying that he had been taking a ride on the Caspian Sea in a steamboat when the mate got orders to push him off. He ran and hid in a big barrel of pickles behind the galley door, intending to stay there until the port was passed. The heat of the galley and the fumes of the brine got the best of him. When the cook, reaching into the barrel for pickles for supper, pulled him out, he himself was nearly pickled.

We laughed. A girl in our group gave him a chocolate bar—a rarity in Asia. He regarded it with a quizzical expression, and remarked that he wished it were a chicken leg.

"Our train is leaving," we said, hearing the bell. "Goodbye."

Some of the girls patted the pert little youngster on the head—to his disgust. He ducked. As a more manly gesture of friendship, I held out my hand. He eyed it solemnly.

"If you give me a ruble," he said, "I'll shake it."

"Don't be a hooligan," scolded our interpreter, frowning at such impudence.

## TARTAR RENDEZVOUS

When Nichan burst into the room, a dynamo of life always came with him. He was one of the most energetic of young men, happily occupied most of the time with sports, dancing, girls, or talking to his scores of friends in that ting-a-ling-gong-ling language of his. Yet Nichan never got on my nerves with too much energy as some people I've been around have done. In Asia, Nichan was in his way as amiable and as thoughtful a host as had been Mrs. Bethune in Florida, Amy Spingarn at Troutbeck, or Noel Sullivan in San Francisco.

As I got better, my appetite came back in leaps and bounds. Grasdani's boiled chicken and blintz-thin pancakes once or twice a day were not enough to fill me. I could almost relish camel sausage again. In the evenings Nichan would bring me a broken disc of Asiatic bread or some goat cheese from his worker-teacher-student restaurant. Then we would sit in front of the ceiling-tall open-door stove, drink tea, eat and talk until some of his student friends came bounding in to roughhouse the evening away. When the other young folks were gone Nichan would fall on his cot opposite mine and sleep like a log.

The big front room in the old Tzarist hotel in Tashkent was quiet all day when Nichan was out of town sometimes, no students about, no athletes bouncing soccer balls, no statue being modeled. Only Grasdani coming in with my meals, of which I now partook more and more heartily, leaving little to share with others. Sometimes the Negro engineer, Bernard Powers, might drop by for a chat. But in the gray quiet of those long lazy afternoons, I had time to remember many things and to think back over my past at leisure, from Topeka to Tashkent, Cleveland to the Congo, Mexico City to Moscow. In my first thirty years I'd been around quite a little,

and I'd known a great many people in many towns. Now my best friend and boon buddy was a tousle-haired Uzbek named Yusef Nichan. Yusef had just borrowed a thousand rubles from me.

A delayed vacation period had been granted him, and a long-planned hunting trip to the foothills of the Pamirs was about to take place. But his monthly salary did not come through on schedule. Nichan held off his departure for a week or more, but still no money. His voucher was all tied up somewhere in red tape, going through channels—meanwhile, no cash. Finally, Nichan asked me abashedly if perhaps I would lend him a few hundred rubles. We agreed upon a thousand. During my illness he had been so attentive that this was a loan I was happy to grant. Nichan said his brother would repay me within a week or so, as he was giving this brother a properly stamped authorization to receive his salary for him when the delay got straightened out.

I had met Nichan's brother but once. He was an older fellow, hard, leather-tanned, tall and gaunt, whose work was the loading and stabling of camels at a caravan station on the edge of the city. This brother had never been educated, could not speak Russian, and lived and dressed as an ordinary Uzbek peasant in thick padded robes, whereas Nichan usually wore a European coat and trousers. Nichan was very fond of his brother—they had found each other after years of being apart, quite by accident coming face to face in the Tashkent bazaar. He particularly admired this brother since he was a worker—an honorable thing to be in the Soviet Union. But to me Nichan's brother, on first acquaintance, did not seem nearly as wholesome a citizen as Nichan—who had had, by a lucky turn of fate, many more advantages. However, I accepted Nichan's word that his brother would surely bring my money back to me. What happened is another story—indicative of the problems of transition in an old land faced with a new set of values.

Toward the end of November, Nichan went away to the Pamirs leaving me almost recovered from my illness. I was able to get about a bit and explore the town. During my convalescence, Nichan often had guests sleeping in his rooms overnight, sometimes for several days—visiting athletes from Fergana or Samarkand, or desert relatives occupying the couch, or spreading pallets on the floor of the big room, while Nichan and I kept our cots in the partitioned dormitory. Sometimes Nichan's cot opposite mine was empty since occasionally some amorous Uzbek girl—an emancipated sovietized girl, of course—shared the couch with him in front of the ceiling-high porcelain stove. Nichan and his girl would usually just lie there and talk quietly for a long time. But then, if I were still awake, beyond the partition I might hear in the middle of the night a terrific rolling and wrestling, scuffling, pushing, pulling, leaping and running about—which, when I first overheard such sounds, I thought must be indicative of rape. Later I heard that it was just the way Uzbeks make love.

My personal experience with the details of such love-making came about through the good offices of a dashing young Red Army man from Tajikistan. One day during Nichan's absence a tall fair-skinned Asiatic soldier showed up with a properly stamped propusk permitting him to share Nichan's room for a month, since it contained an empty bed. He had come to Tashkent to take a special course of some kind at the Red Army School, and so was out all day. This young Tadjik soldier did not even speak Uzbek, so there was scarcely a word we could say to each other, yet we got on very pleasantly. He slept in Nichan's cot opposite mine. Sometimes at night we would lie there talking—after a fashion—in the few Russian words that each of us knew. He was, among other subjects, taking a course in Russian. But even with my meager knowledge of that language, I could teach him something. Hajir, however, was interested in instructing me in certain other things he thought I ought to know. He wanted to take me to meet one of the local girls. He had shortly after his arrival become acquainted with two Tartar lassies who were, so he indicated, *oh, boy! Wow! Ummm-mm-m! Arbors of delight! Tartar girls! Come see, we go now—tonight!*

But I didn't take him up on his proposed introduction for several days. It was too cold and snowy outside for me to be going where I was sure there would be no heat, on the off-chance of a blind date with a girl I probably couldn't exchange a word with. I had no idea what language a Tartar spoke. Some nights Hajir did not come home at all. He stayed with his Tartar. But when I saw him, he would give me a graphic pantomimed description of the evening before. He aroused my curiosity to the point where I agreed to go with him to visit these girls from the Kyzyl Kum desert. I gathered they were sisters or cousins and lived together.

"*Kleb,*" said Hajir, "and something to drink," he pantomimed.

Bread and brandy, I gathered, were in order as gifts to the fair ones. So I took my foreign food coupons to the single big store in town—open only to executives, engineers and foreign workers—where a person might be reasonably sure of finding something to eat and drink for sale at most times. Tashkent shops were all "controlled," with ration books required, but most of them were also mostly empty. The famine of the Ukraine and Volga regions seemed to have penetrated into Asia. Citizens who did not eat in co-operative restaurants and had to buy in food shops were having a hard time filling out their menus. And there were no shops at all where a person could just walk in and buy something without coupons and stamps. My coupon book was almost intact, since, being flush with rubles during my illness, Grasdani had done most of my shopping on the open market or directly from peasants selling in the bazaars. This was expensive, few could afford it, and there was little offered save chicken, eggs, or wild game, even there. Now I had no objection to using up several of my extra ration coupons for bread and brandy for Hajir's enamorata and her Tartar sister, cousin, or friend. I was never quite sure what, if any, relationship existed between the girls.

On the night of our romantic hegira from my warm fireside, fresh snow had fallen over Tashkent, and all the somber old brown-gray buildings and mud-brick houses of the city were flecked with white. The streets were almost trackless, for few persons were abroad, even so early as nine in the evening. The camels all seemed to have laid down their burdens for the night. We waited a long time at a cold corner for an ancient streetcar to rattle by, almost empty of passengers. I did not know where we were going but, with a heavy loaf of black bread and big bottle of cognac, my friend and I were on our way. Hajir sat up very straight in his becoming heel-long Red Army greatcoat, with his polished leather belt and gleaming boots. He was a handsome young man, more Persian-looking than Mongol, with ivory skin, a lean, strong face and very black hair. He was at least six feet tall, perhaps more, wiry and tough, from the high mountains near the point where India almost touches the Soviet border. He was not as capable of communication as Yeah Man had been in Ashkhabad, so I did not learn much from him about life in the wild cold hills in the heart of Asia from which he came. But he called me *tovarich*—comrade—and behaved toward me as any good buddy in America might. Now we were headed for a festive evening with the Tartars.

As the old streetcar rattled along, my teeth chattered with cold. Tashkent is a big town, the streets are dark, and I had never been so far out on the edges of the city before. In time only a few bedraggled Uzbeks were left on the car. Where on earth were we going? We must have been riding for an hour. Finally the tramcar stopped and the turbaned motorman and everyone else got out. We were at the end of the line.

"Come on," Hajir said, or its equivalent. Rapidly he started off marching like a young general through the snow, carrying the big round loaf of bread, while I tagged along behind with the cognac. Now there were not even street lights or sidewalks, just rows of sleepy-looking mud houses in the snow. I finally decided we were heading for a yurt in the desert, a nomad tent fleetingly anchored in the remote wilderness. I'd heard that many Tartars were still nomads. The road was full of ruts and the snow had gotten into my shoe-tops, and even walking rapidly, I was cold. It was hard to keep up with the tall young army-trained Hajir. But I had no intention of being left behind in the darkness on that suburban road with no idea of how to get back home. Panting through the sticky snow, I kept up fairly well. Finally I saw, vaguely silhouetted against the night in the distance, what looked like three or four sawed-off American skyscrapers. A housing project! I'd heard there was a large workers' apartment village newly constructed on the edge of Tashkent. This, I took for granted, was it.

"Is that where those broads live?" I shouted at Hajir a dozen yards ahead of me. He must have understood my question for he answered, "*Da*," yes. Was I glad! One more mile and I would have dropped of cold, weariness, and breathlessness together. But Hajir in his greatcoat and boots did not mind the weather or the snow at all and, accustomed to maneuvers in the high atmosphere of the Pamirs, he would never get out of breath. Besides, he was heading for a familiar romance. I was headed for I knew not what. Maybe that girl's sister or cousin or friend was sixty-five years old. As a Tartar, I envisioned a wild-eyed woman from the steppes with sand in her hair and fingernail-claws. Who knows what? To brace myself, I opened the bottle of cognac and took a drink there in the road.

"Hey, fellow, have one," I said.

Hajir understood perfectly. He halted his pace for once, turned the bottle up and drank like a trooper. Then he pointed at a high window where a light was visible. The tall, barren, boxlike buildings had no elevators. We had to walk up several flights. Hajir took the steps two at a time, singing. When I got where he was going he was already there—in an apartment consisting of a single room with an alcove where there was a single bed. A vague aura of warmth came from a built-in wall stove, just enough to take the extreme chill off the air. Sitting by the stove were two drab red-haired women. On a cot against the wall was a sleeping child, a girl of maybe nine or ten. The women, since neither Hajir nor I understood Tartar, talked excitedly between themselves as they unwrapped the bread, opened the cognac, and poured us all drinks. The black bread they hacked off into thick hunks and ate like cake with the cognac. Hajir grabbed his girl as she stood cutting bread and gave her a bearlike squeeze that caused her to scream, "Ow!" He motioned for me to attack mine in the same manner, but the other woman was busy putting a knot of desert wood on the fire. With this warming procedure I did not wish to interfere as my feet were wet with snow and I was chilled to the bone.

I simply said, "More power to you, boy," and lifted my glass, grinning at Hajir and his Tartar mistress.

The girls were not good-looking. Hajir's sweetheart was the younger, a squat solidly build female in her twenties, I judged, with a round Mongoloid face and a bush of coarse auburn hair of a wiry nature. She was rather thick-lipped, heavy-lidded, and of a sullen cast. The other woman was skinny, big-eyed, and rather anemic, with reddish wiry hair, too. Both looked as if all the grime of the steppes of Asia had been imbedded in their hard, leathery skins. With poker faces, they wolfed down big chunks of black bread as if they had missed their supper that day. The cognac they hardly touched. Instead, Hajir emptied their glasses down his own singing throat.

When most of the bread was gone, he pointed toward me, the older woman, and toward the bed—then toward the door again, the bed, the door—then me. I shrugged, not knowing exactly what he meant in relation to the door. So he got up and took my arm and indicated that he wanted me to come outside. He led me down an ice-cold corridor to a big dormitory at the end of the building where there were perhaps twenty cots in rows. The room was both dark and empty. I learned later that most of the Soviet housing projects had such large dormitory rooms where residents might house relatives and guests when they came from a distance to visit, since the small apartments had no guest rooms. That night I gathered that Hajir was asking whether I wished to stay in the room where the stove was, or come with the skinny Tartar girl to this enormous empty icebox for the night.

I shook my head violently, "Nyet—no! I stay where the stove is." I turned immediately and went back down the hall where the girls were. By this time they had either eaten or hidden the remaining hunk of bread, and had refilled our glasses with cognac.

Hajir grabbed his girl around the waist again and squeezed the breath out of her. Then he took her by the hair, turned her around, slapped her soundly on the buttocks, and pushed her with his knee out into the cold hall as she screamed. He turned back for a final swig of cognac, then departed for the Siberia of the dormitories. I was left alone with the skinny redhead and the sleeping child. Not one word did we know in common. Not a single sentence could we say that either of us understood. But the Tartar pointed unsmilingly toward the alcove, took off her boots, turned out the light, and went to bed, indicating to me to do the same. She had taken off nothing but her boots—the soft high-topped Asiatic boots that most women in the Tashkent area wore. Otherwise, she went to bed fully clothed, sweater, skirts and all. This did not surprise me, as cold as it was. I took off a minimum of outer garments and lay down beside her.

The skinny Tartar rolled to the far side of the bed with her back toward me. After a while she moved a little closer, then closer still. I put my arm around her. But when I tried to unbutton her sweater, she struggled violently and pulled away. Puzzled, I desisted. In the silence I heard the child stir on the cot near the stove. After a few moments, the skinny one again got very close to me, and this time I managed to unbutton one sweater button, when she brusquely removed my hand and kicked. Thinking perhaps that she had only accepted me as a house guest because of the other girl's interest in the Red Army man, I gave up. I was embarrassed, too, by the presence of the child on the cot. But as soon as I had turned over to go to sleep, she turned over toward me for the first time, and put her arms around me. I kissed her, whereupon, she sat bolt upright, vaulted over me, and jumped out of bed.

When I made no move to pursue her, she came back, rolled over beside me, and squeezed me with a grip of iron. But when I in turn squeezed her, she gave me a push that almost sent me onto the floor. Each attempt to undo a sweater button, of which there were at least six or eight, set up the most determined resistance—kicking, pushing, hunching—and a flood of what sounded like Tartar curses.

Finally, I said, "Oh, woman, I give up! I'm going to sleep." I rolled over on the far side of the bed this time, face to the wall and went to sleep. The next thing I knew, Hajir, and his girl were banging on the door. It was dawn. By eight Hajir had to be at his studies.

The Skinny One of the still unbuttoned sweater brewed some tea, which we all drank, spiking it with the residue of the cognac. The sleepy-eyed child on the cot woke up, blinked, then turned over and went to sleep again. I wished I could, too. But Hajir motioned for me to get dressed. He and his Tartar girl were grinning and frolicsome, and I gathered they had had a whopping good time in the enormous dormitory room. Tramping the long two or three miles to the car line, Hajir indicated to me that his night had been a night of delight— sleep, no, just love, no sleep.

"And you?" he pointed at me.

"*Nyet*," I said, "not me."

Hajir looked puzzled. We had no language in common for me to tell him how strangely that Tartar woman had behaved. All I could do was shake my head glumly and say no, *nyet*, nothing had happened. When we boarded the streetcar, we both lapsed into silence. Even at the end of the carline, in the morning, going into the city to work, the tram was almost full of Uzbeks in padded robes, Russians in fur caps, and an assortment of other Soviet nationalities in all sorts of headgear and clothing. After a few stops, the car became more tightly packed than a New York subway train at rush hour. Before we reached the heart of Tashkent, folks were hanging all over the car, inside and out, packed like sardines and clustered like bees. Hajir battled his way to the door somewhere near the site of his studies, and left me to return to our hotel alone. By now I knew the heart of the city fairly well, so I reached home safely, tired, sleepy, cold, and ill-humored. Why had he led me on such a wild-goose chase? Was it a gag? Or a ruse for the sake of the bread and brandy? At that moment my opinion of Hajir as a friend was very low.

That evening, fortunately, the American road engineer, Bernard Powers (he who had greeted the arrival of our movie group in Tashkent dressed in a tuxedo) happened to drop by my hotel. I told him of my experience of the night before. He laughed fit to kill, as did the various Uzbeks and Tadjiks gathered. Powers said that the same thing had happened to him the first time he had attempted to make love to an Asiatic gal.

"Man," Powers said, "these women never take off their clothes in this part of the world when they go to bed. It's bad manners or something. And they won't let a man take them off either, without a struggle. That's bad manners, too, not to resist. A man might think the girl is a prostitute. Women have to fight every button of the way. If they give up without a struggle, they aren't considered nice. But they don't really mean it when they kick you. A fellow is supposed to keep right on unbuttoning, and pulling, and hauling until he gets down to the last garment. Then he fights to get whatever that is off, if he can. In Tashkent even a prostitute doesn't take off her own clothes for a client. The man has to do it. It's a ritual, that's all. Next time you'll know."

I understood then why so much commotion went on with Nichan and his girls in the middle of the night. Nichan wasn't raping them. He was just trying to unbutton their sweaters or untie a sash.

When Powers, via a two-or three-way translation, later that evening, had made Hajir understand my lack of success with the Tartar lass who had eaten our bread, and when Hajir was told that women in America did not usually behave with such violent modesty once a man was permitted in the boudoir, Hajir indicated that he could have very little feeling or respect for a barefaced female who just *took her own clothes off* and got on into bed with a man, no matter how well she knew him. How shameless can a woman get? Hajir asked a Tadjik- \Uzbek speaking friend in the room to explain to an Uzbek-Russian speaking friend to explain in Russian to Powers to explain to me in English that if he, Hajir, had known that I didn't know how to just kick back after unloosening each button—and to keep on kicking, tugging, pulling, and struggling until I got the girl's sweater off, then go through the same struggle with her blouse, then her skirt—he would have told me. Hajir couldn't imagine that

men didn't undress women by force in America.

"So sorry nobody explained to our visiting comrade," said Hajir. "But tonight, we'll go back out there—now that my friend knows what to do. Come on, Langston, we go—right now!"

Still fresh as a daisy after an amorous night of no sleep and a long day in school, Hajir reached for his greatcoat, raring to wrestle a Tartar again.

#### WEDDING IN TASHKENT

When Nichan returned to Tashkent from his vacation in the Pamirs with a string of wild ducks about his neck, he asked me if his brother had brought back the money he had borrowed. When I said, no, that I had not seen him nor heard of his brother during the month, I could see that Nichan was deeply hurt to think that his brother would behave in such a fashion. He might at least have come by to see me. Flinging his brace of wild ducks on the floor under the couch—in all their soft russet and gunmetal plumage with their limp dead heads—Nichan rushed out in search of the man who had failed to repay the loan for him. In vain I protested that I did not need the money then; I had not been worried about it at all. And I tried to convey to Nichan how glad I was to see him back. But I could tell that Nichan was angry and distressed. When I looked out the windows, I saw him disappearing rapidly down the street in the direction of the caravan stands at the far side of town.

After an hour or so Nichan came back, flung himself down on his bed, and began to cry. Frightened, I thought that perhaps his brother was dead—or, even worse, arrested by the OGPU for some political crime. But nothing of the sort had happened.

What made Nichan weep, I did not know. But I sensed it might be too personal a matter to discuss through an interpreter. Then, too, he might not wish anyone to know that he had borrowed money from me. At any rate, I did not fathom why this usually merry boy just back from duck hunting with a fine lot of fowl should be lying in the dusk crying. I left him alone and went down to the Engineers Club looking for Powers, who could speak both Uzbek and Russian. Powers was not there, but I left a message for him to come to see me after dinner. When I returned to the hotel, I found Nichan sitting gloomily in front of the porcelain stove.

"Nichevo," I said, "don't worry about it, fellow." But he was worried.

That evening when Powers came, I found out what it was that troubled Nichan. His brother had gotten married. But it was not that he had gotten married while Nichan was away, nor that he had not kept his promise to repay my money that distressed Nichan. It was that this brother had taken the money—the largest sum he had ever had in his life—and had *bought* a wife! Not wooed and won a woman, but bought one. It was this that hurt my roommate so deeply. His brother had gone to the black market, to the bootleggers in women, in defiance of not only the law but of all that Nichan respected and loved in the new society that had given him his code of values. In defiance of Soviet ethics, this brother had bought a wife. Still not able to take it so seriously as Nichan, at first I wanted to laugh, but I am glad I didn't.

Being curious to find out if she was beautiful, I asked, "What does she look like?"

"Like a camel," said Nichan.

"Where is she?"

"In his house," said Nichan, "in the back room—as they kept women in the old days. My brother is not sovietized, *ni sovietski*." The tears started to roll down his cheeks again.

Powers and I both did our best to comfort him, but the fact that his brother would do a thing like this, revert to the old customs, buy a woman—who herself must be *ni sovietski*, too, to permit it—made a most unhappy homecoming for this simple youth who wanted so much to be a part of the new world, not the old. Now his generally sunny face was clouded with hurt and disappointment and tears. I came near wanting to cry myself as I realized his feelings. Instead, I sent Powers with my ration book for a bottle of cognac. When he got back the Red Army man from Tajikistan came with him, and later in the evening other friends dropped in, so eventually Nichan stopped thinking about his brother, and smiled as he pulled his ducks out from under the couch and started telling us about his trip. The ducks, ten or twelve of them, he displayed proudly, and they were beautiful. Then he put them under the couch again.

By morning in the tightly closed room—for no one opens a window anywhere in the Soviet Union in winter—I could smell dead ducks, a smell at first not unlike that of a wet dog. Upon arising, I jested to Nichan that he put the fowl out on the balcony in the snow where the stove wood was piled, but Nichan shook his head, no. The Tadjik soldier agreed with him, no. Leave the ducks where they were under the couch. So, not being in my own home, I complied with my host's desires, and the ducks remained on our living-room floor, a pile of limp heads, dark feet, and glossy softly colored feathers on heavy bodies.

Nichan disappeared early that morning. When I saw him again, he had five hundred rubles for me. Again I told him not to worry about the money, but he indicated he soon would have from his brother the remaining half due me. In the meanwhile, he called his brother a few choice names like *swolosh* in Russian, and a few bass-chord guitar sounds in Uzbek that I took for granted were as vulgar as *swolosh*, or worse. Now, on my part, it was safe the morning after to laugh about this brother who bought a wife who looked like a camel. Nichan laughed, too, as he pantomimed her stupid modesty, indicating how she had pulled a scarf about her face like a veil when he met her at his brother's house before the groom shooed her into the back room like a chicken—just as if there had never been a revolution!

"*Ni sovietski*, the two of them," Nichan said, indicating backwardness.

Meanwhile the ducks were smelling to high heaven. I pantomimed, when are you going to cook and eat them? Nichan shook his head, meaning I presumed, that he didn't know when. I motioned against to the balcony. More headshaking, no! And off he went to instruct young athletes in boxing and tumbling or fut-bal, and I didn't see him any more until that night. By that time, I had taken the ducks and piled them out on the balcony myself. Their gamy decomposition and dead eyes were upsetting my stomach, still a bit queasy from my recent illness. Besides, I thought they should be out in the cold rather than in our warm room. But as soon as Nichan missed them on his return, he cried, "*Gedieh?*" Where? I pointed to the balcony, and Nichan went right straight and got the fowls and brought them back, this time to put them under his own bed in the partitioned cubicle where we slept. I gave up.

"*Nichevo*," I said to myself. There was nothing else to say.

That night Nichan did some of the dances he had seen in the Pamirs, with the peculiar side-to-side glide and quick snake-like darting of the head, movements seen in Balinese and East Indian dancing, too. Nichan danced very gracefully with that minimum of gesture and movement characteristic of the Asiatic dance. Others in the room sang Uzbek songs, much softer and sweeter than the wild melodies I had heard in the Turkmenian oasis near Merv. In Uzbek singing there seemed to be no sudden heartbreaking flamenco cries such as the Turkomans emitted. All was gentler, sweeter and more civilized. The second evening of Nichan's homecoming would have been delightful had not the air been heavy with ducks under the bed.

But a few days later Nichan came bounding in to invite me to his brother's house for a feast. He dragged out from under the bed, thank God! the ducks—by now at their most gamy, smelling very high—and off he went with them slung around his neck.

"Cognac," he said pointing to me and then in the general direction of the food store. I knew he was asking if I would use my coupon book for drinks.

"Sure," I said, as he departed. He could have made use of my entire ration book had he wished, in return for removing those ducks. Nichan was a good fellow, anyway, and had never before asked me to get anything for him on my ration book. But now, I guessed, he and his brother had made up, so he was taking his ducks to prepare a belated wedding feast for this camel-loading relative with the camel-faced wife. I was curious to see the bride.

I never did see her. When Nichan returned and took me to his brother's house, the purchased female was in the back room attending pots and pans, and she was never asked out to meet the company. Obviously, Nichan's brother was entirely of the old school, not sovietized. All his guests were men, squatting on the floor around a big copper dish full of pilaf—not mutton this time, but wild duck pilaf—a great steaming mound of rice and raisins with bits of duck all through it—into which everybody dived with bare hands, washing it all down with bowls of tea that went around and around the circle of fellowship.

Many Moslems do not partake of strong drink—no true Moslem should—so at Nichan's brother's house the

cognac did not disappear as rapidly as had the bottle which the Tadjik and I took to the Tartar girls. Only a few of the men drank at all, and they but little, so we had cognac left to take back with us to the hotel. Full of pilaf and tea, I went home early, leaving Nichan to enjoy the evening with his newly married brother and friends. Had it not been so cold sitting on the floor of his heatless home, I might have stayed to see what an ordinary Uzbek worker's party became as the evening grew late. No doubt there would be singing, and perhaps dancing. Having no heavy padded robes such as they wore, and unused to sitting cross-legged on the chilled floor so long, my limbs were stiff and my haunches frozen when I got up to leave, and my hands were coated with cold grease from the pilaf eaten with the fingers.

"Good night!" I bowed to Nichan's brother who had bought a wife with my money—in whom I still had a half interest of five hundred rubles, not as yet paid back. "Good night," I said. "May you have a happy marriage."

I wanted to add, "May Allah bless you both," which I think he might have liked, but I was afraid Nichan might feel I was making fun of his brother. I would not have been making fun of him—for the camels of this man's dreams, I suspected, still headed toward Mecca. Nichan's headed toward Moscow, yet they were brothers.

#### LIGHT FOR ASIA

Not all of those who were being made over for the better in Central Asia were Asiatics or former people of the poorer classes. My interpreter was of the once-aristocracy, and her parents were Russian. She was a rather prim middle-aged widow, very serious-minded, who looked like a New England school teacher in spite of her long fur-collared coat, Russian style, and Asiatic boots. Born in Tashkent, but educated in St. Petersburg, she had lived a life of genteel leisure, French novels and embroidery, before the revolution. Now she went to work every morning as a translator-aide to a German engineer. She seemed happy, having found a life of usefulness under the Soviets. As an expert translator working on highly technical material with foreign engineers or scientists, German or American usually, she lived for months at a time at some of the most important construction works—dams, mining, irrigation or electrical projects in the desert—and was familiar with all the ambitious new building being done or in the planning stages throughout Central Asia.

Assigned to me by the Writers Union, her services were of great help, evenings or on her free days, in gathering information and interviewing people for my articles. Never in her conversations or in her translations did she intrude—as some interpreters were not averse to doing—sly insinuations against the Soviet power, nor show scorn for the native peoples who now ran the city of her birth, Tashkent, where formerly Uzbeks had no power. Her speech and her work indicated only respect for the struggling new society and a deep personal interest in its development.

"My child will grow up under this modern, dynamic, forward-looking kind of life," she said. "It is better than the old. Now children learn to be interested in the whole world, too, from Scottsboro to China."

Certainly children in Uzbekistan seemed to me to know more of world politics than American children. They would stand on strong little legs, independent and confident, and comment on subjects as big as war, colonies, lynchings and world revolution—things many a New York child had not even heard of before adolescence, if then. The schools of Central Asia were filled to overflowing. And thousands of sturdy Asiatic young men and women in their early twenties were in positions of trust as representatives of the people. Kurbanov, chairman of the City Soviet of Bokhara was then only twenty-eight years old. Fifteen years before, he had been a herd-boy in the mountains, who couldn't read or write his name.

But, other than Nichan, of all the new citizens I met in Central Asia that winter, I think I shall remember best a simple teenage worker at Chirchikstroy, the site of a new dam under construction. I am not even sure of the youngster's name. I think he said Tajaiv. I didn't take notes, and I wasn't speaking with him long. But the glow in his face, the pride in his voice, as he told me about the construction of his barracks, the very first building on the dam site, sticks in my head to this moment.

About an hour's ride from Tashkent, I had driven out with my interpreter and the manager of construction to the site of the great dam that was to be the enormous Chirchikstroy Electrical and Chemical Development. It was only just beginning then. Until that very month they had not even had a barracks for the laborers on the site,

only tents. So the young men working on excavations said, "We will build our own barracks." In their spare time, they did. That is why I went motoring through the snowy dusk along a rough country road across the steppes, to attend the opening of these barracks.

Tajaiv, the brown-skin Uzbek lad, didn't welcome me at the door or anything like that. Nor did he speak on the program, and nobody introduced him to me. He was not one of the official committee. But once inside the big warm wooden barracks with its many cots in a row like a Red Army dormitory—red banners and ribbons of red and blue crepe paper hanging from the rafters in honor of the occasion—it wasn't long before I saw Tajaiv. He wasn't a big fellow. He was shorter than the other young workers about the room, but he had on an *udarnik's* badge, and a very clean shirt, and he wore a big smile. Just a hard little Uzbek boy of perhaps sixteen or seventeen, a youngster who had probably never seen a bed of roses—but tonight he was happy. He felt himself to be one of my hosts, so he came over near the stove to greet me. And my translator told me what he said.

"Look what we have built," he cried, "the first barracks at Chirchikstroy. Here all of us will live while the dam is made. Before we built this, there was nothing on this land. Nothing at all. This is the first building—our work! We made it after hours in our spare time as a contribution from the youngest workers here, like me. We are not skilled—but we could build this. And next year when the dam is built, we will have light."

His dark, round, young face was aglow with this achievement—this crude wooden barracks—and with the much bigger achievement to follow, Chirchikstroy, meaning light and power and chemicals for all that section of a once-backward Asia. Tajaiv would build it—his hard young hands with their power to transform the future of this wilderness. He would build his dam to light his Asia.

The ceremonies began and, beneath the dim oil lanterns, there were speeches of which I understood almost nothing. Everyone talked too rapidly for my translator to be of much help. But I gathered that the gist of the speeches was that Chirchikstroy would make such a light that it would blaze across all the borders of the East and shine not only on Uzbek lands alone, but far over the Pamirs into Afghanistan, India and China. Tajaiv sat beside me, his eyes glowing with pride in what he, a simple Uzbek youth, was helping to create. Although I only met him once, I accepted him as my host for the whole of the Soviet Union. Ten years before, a brown young Uzbek like Tajaiv would have had to ride in the back of the streetcars in Tashkent, for previous to the revolution in Asia there had been Jim Crow streetcars in Uzbekistan. The old partitions that once separated natives from Europeans, colored from white, were still there when I arrived—I saw them. But now anyone sat anywhere in the Tashkent trams. In ten short years, Jim Crow was gone on trams, trains, or anywhere else in Central Asia. Russians and Uzbeks, Ukrainians and Tartars, Europeans and natives, white or colored, all went to the same schools, sat on the same benches, ate in the same co-operatives, worked in the same shops or factories, and fussed and fumed at the same problems. Gains and defeats were shared alike. In Tashkent, whenever I got on a street car and saw the old partitions, I could not help but remember Atlanta, Birmingham and Houston in my own country where, when I got on a tram or a bus or a train, I had to sit in the colored section. The natives of Tashkent, about my own shade of brown, once had to sit in a colored section, too. But not anymore. So I was happy for them. How had this change been brought about in so short a time? At the City Soviet I asked Kurbanov about it. He said, "Those who don't like it are almost all in jail—or dead."

By dead, I knew he meant liquidated. Koestler and Grasdani both had told me that the jails of Tashkent were full of political prisoners. I, myself, had seen the long lines of relatives outside the OGPU prison, waiting with food for their loved ones on visiting days. Perhaps, as Grasdani claimed, many there were unjustly imprisoned. But some behind bars, I felt sure, were those who had not wished to see the Jim Crow signs go down—both whites and Asiatics who would prefer that the old freewheeling days of plunder and power came back, when the strongest lived in luxury and devil take the hindmost, when a rich man might have a hundred wives and a poor man no wife at all, when a kid like Tajaiv could never dream of the building of a dam to light his world. Life in Tashkent was far from comfortable and perfect, and the nearest approximation to comfort was only in the upper-echelon hotels or the homes of the very top commissars, engineers, writers, or dancers. But I could not bring myself to believe, as Grasdani did, that life was not better for most people now than it had been in the days of the Volga boatmen, the Asiatic serfs and the Jim Crow signs.

To me as a writer, it was especially interesting to observe how art of all sorts—writing, painting, the theatre—was being utilized as a weapon against the evils of the past. To be sure art, put to such use, often degenerated into propaganda. But even propaganda in talented hands took on dramatic dimensions. In Tashkent, talented Russian directors were using all the folk elements of Uzbek music, poetry and dance in aiding to create an Uzbek national theatre where there had been none before. About these new theatres in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bokhara and Fergana, I heard a great deal from the leading native dramatist, Ismailov, who told me, "We try to use the theatre to teach people how beautiful life can be if we destroy the old ugly selfish customs of the past. And we try to show our varied nationalities how to get along together, Turkoman with Uzbek, Tadjik with Tartar, and Russian with Asiatic. I try to say in my plays that we must all be comrades."

Only a few nights before this talk with Ismailov, I had sat in a motion-picture theatre with Nichan looking at a powerful new Soviet talking film, *My Motherland*, the story of a clash on the Siberian border between the Red Army and Manchurian troops over the Chinese Eastern Railway. This picture, I was told, due to the complex international situation, would not be released for foreign showings—a pity, since it was a most beautiful film with a powerful musical score played by the Leningrad Symphony. In the early portion of the picture there was a scene that especially impressed me with the Soviet way of teaching friendship between peoples of varying colors and races.

It is night. Snow. Across the Siberian border the soldier-provocateurs of Manchuria are firing into the Soviet defenses where Red Army men stand guard. The scene changes to the inside of the Soviet barracks. Officers and men are shown fraternizing together, laughing, shaving, playing cards. Suddenly the door opens and a man from the front is carried in dead. His body is placed in a bunk and the sheet drawn over him. A young Russian soldier, fists doubled, rises from his card game and begins to curse those slant-eyed bastards who have killed his comrade. Quietly, an officer goes toward the body, draws back the sheet so that the Russian boy may see the still, brown face there, and says simply, "Our comrade's eyes are slant eyes, too."

#### DIXIE CHRISTMAS USSR

In the autumn, if you step off any train almost anywhere in the fertile parts of Central Asia, you step into a cotton field, or into a city or town whose streets are filled with evidence of cotton nearby. The natives call it "white gold." On all the dusty roads, camels, carts and trucks, loaded with the soft fiber, head toward the gins and warehouses. Outside the towns, oft-times as far as the eye can see, the white bolls lift their precious heads. The same thing is true of the southern part of the United States. In Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama, you ride for hundreds of miles through fields of cotton, bursting white in the sun. Except that on our roads there are no camels. Mules and wagons bear the burdens. And Negroes do most of the work. When I was in the South, I had wanted to visit a big cotton plantation.

"It's a little dangerous," my friends said. "White folks don't like strange Northern Negroes around. You can't do it."

But I finally managed to do it. During the December holidays in Alabama, I went with the head of a section of the Red Cross—a Negro section, of course—to distribute fruit to the poor—the poor meaning in this case the black workers on a rich plantation.

We set out in a rickety Ford and drove for miles through brown fields where the cotton had been picked. We came to a gate in a strong wire fence. This passed, some distance further on, we came to another fence. And then, far back from the dirt road, huddled together beneath the trees, we came upon the cabins of the Negro workers—a dozen cheerless one-room shacks. A group of ragged children came running out to meet us. The Negro with the Red Cross button descended from the car and spoke to them in a Sunday-school manner. He asked them if they had been good, and if they had gotten any presents for the holidays. Yes, the children said, they had been good, but they hadn't gotten any presents. They reached out eager little hands for the apples and oranges of official charity.

We went into several of the huts. While the Red Cross man talked about the Lord, I asked a few questions. I asked a very old man if the cotton had been sold. He answered listlessly, "I don't know. The boss took it. And

even if it is been sold, it don't make me no difference. I never see none of the money." He shrugged his shoulders and sucked at his pipe. A woman I spoke to said she hadn't been to town for four years. Yet the town was less than fifteen miles away.

"It's hard to get off," she said, "and I never has nothing to spend."

She gave her dreary testimony without emotion. The colored Red Cross man assured her that God would help her and that she shouldn't worry as long as she could work and had credit at the commissary store.

A broken-down bed, a stove, and a few chairs were all she had in her house. Her children were among those stretching out their arms to us for fruit. Yet the man who owned this big plantation lived in a great house with white pillars. His children went to private schools in the North, I was told, and his oldest girl traveled abroad. Black hands working in white cotton created the wealth that built his fine house and supported his children in their travels. A woman who couldn't travel fifteen miles to town was helping to send somebody else's child on a trip to Paris.

Economists call it the share-crop system. The plantation owner advances every month a little corn meal and salt meat, calico and candy from the commissary, gives seed and a cabin. These advances are charged to the black peasant's account. At the end of the year when the cotton is picked, the plantation owner takes the whole crop and often tells the worker his share is not large enough to cover the rent of the cabin, the cost of the seed, and the price of the corn meal and fat meat. "You owe me," says the planter. So the Negro is automatically in debt, and must work another year to pay the landlord.

In Soviet Central Asia I visited several cotton kolkhozes. I filled two notebooks with figures and data: the number of hectares under cultivation, the yield per hectare, the percentages fulfilled according to the plan—some not always good—and method of irrigation. I stayed for two days at the mechanization station for farm machinery near Tashkent. I saw the Cotton College. I visited the big building of the Cotton Trust at Tashkent. I studied charts. I looked at statistics. The figures I've forgotten. But I shall always remember what the natives themselves told me: "Before, there were no schools for Uzbek children—now there are. Before, we lived in debt and fear—now we are free. Before, women were bought and sold—now no more. Before, the land and the water belonged to the beys—today they are ours—and we share the cotton."

One of the Negroes at a Soviet collective forty miles from Tashkent where the seed-selection station and cotton experimental laboratories were located, came into Tashkent to invite Bernard Powers and me to spend Christmas with them in the country. The Christmas before I had spent in Alabama. Now I found myself halfway across the world in Uzbekistan—but again I would be passing the holidays with my own people. There were about a dozen American Negroes attached to this cotton experimental farm, most of them from the South. Some were agricultural chemists, graduates of Tuskegee or Hampton, others were from Northern colleges, and some were just plain cotton farmers from Dixie, whose job it was in Soviet Asia to help introduce American methods of cultivating cotton. Some worked in laboratories at the collective, testing the quality of seeds and the strength of cotton fibers, and some worked in the fields just as they had done at home. It was an oddly assorted group of educated and uneducated Negroes a long way from Dixie—and most of them not liking it very well. Conditions on the Soviet collective, while a great change for the better for the Uzbeks, were for Negroes from America more primitive than most of them had known at home, especially for the younger college people who, when they got dressed up for Christmas in the middle of Central Asia, still looked exactly like American undergraduates.

When I got out to the cotton collective, I could understand why, though well paid, they were not happy. In the first place, the trip there was physically worse than any Jim Crow train trip I ever made in the United States. And, due to the almost continual snows that autumn, I found the whole collective farm one vast swamp of Asiatic mud in which a man sank almost to his ankles. The houses were comfortable, but there were no fireplaces, no gas stoves, no radio programs, and no juke boxes or movies anywhere within driving distance. Only a few Negroes had learned to speak Uzbek or Russian, so they were largely dependent upon themselves for social life in that far-off oasis. But despite their problems they were not a gloomy group, and Christmas with them was a very jolly period for me—once I got there. But getting there was another story which, in comparison, made my trip with Koestler through the burning desert to Permytyab a pleasure jaunt.

Just as the trip to Permytab had been blistering hot, so the trip to the cotton collective was freezing cold. When I arrived, I felt like an icicle. It took me all night to thaw out. But perhaps it was my own fault. If I had arranged the trip through official channels like the Writers Union, I might have traveled differently. But Powers and I both thought that since it was only forty miles by train, we would just go down to the station, buy our tickets and go. I should have known better. Nothing is ever that simple in the USSR.

It was very cold in Tashkent when Powers and I left in a horse-drawn sleigh for the station. At the station in the late afternoon we found an enormous crowd of robe-padded Uzbeks, jamming the entrances and filling the snow-covered sidewalks outside. I had never seen such a mass of travelers. The lines at the ticket windows contained hundreds of persons in each queue. And, no doubt because we were so nearly the color of the Uzbeks themselves, nobody took us for strangers and urged us to the front lines as folks in Russia might have done. As our train was scheduled to leave shortly, Powers decided to use his foreign worker's card and go directly to the stationmaster's office for tickets rather than wait in line. This worked. The station-master purchased our tickets for us quickly, and we passed onto the train platform. This long platform, like the station, was crowded to capacity, and the trains standing on the tracks were jammed to the doors.

When we located our train, it was even more jammed than any of the others. Besides the coaches were antiques, with each coach having open platforms at both ends. Even these platforms were already filled with people. Powers and I went from coach to coach until we found a platform where we could at least mount the steps to stand in the cold outside the coach. Luckily we had gotten on when we did, for within a few minutes, even the steps of our car were packed with Uzbeks, clinging to the rails. The train was late starting. Just before the tiny little engine gave a few hoots and pulled out of the railroad yards, it began to snow in large soft flakes.

Facetiously, I said, "It's going to be a very white Christmas this year."

"We are going to be white in a minute," said Powers, standing between a dozen closely packed Uzbeks on the open platform of the train.

Already the soot-blackened railway yards were newly whitened by fresh snow, soft, wet clinging flakes that had covered the shoulders of my coat and the brim of my hat before the train started. When we got under way, the speed of the train caused the snow to hit us all on the platform with great force and to stick to us more persistently than ever. Within a few miles everybody was covered with snow—Powers, the Uzbeks, and I. But at first I was not cold, wedged in between many padded robes as I stood there in the open. Shortly, however, the open platforms between the coaches were whipped by snow and wind as the train gathered speed. The damp snow on my hat brim and on my shoulders crusted over and froze into crinkly sheets of thin ice. The snow that stuck to my face made it a white mask, as were all the other faces around me.

So close together were we that it was difficult to turn around to put my back to the wind. And when I did achieve a turn, the wind drove stinging bits of snow down my neck. The wind from the Pamirs seemed to delight in assailing our little train driving into the storm. And the snow that had looked so white and lovely when it first began to fall, turned into a stinging terror for us on the moving platform. The usually voluble Uzbeks were silent, huddling together like sheep. Powers had turned into a snowman now. Around our feet and between our legs, the chill wind rushed. The wind blew up between the cracks in the floor and whistled between the couplings. I became so cold I could hardly move when the train came to its first stop, ten or fifteen miles outside Tashkent. If it had been anything other than a stationless whistle stop, I would have gotten off and sought shelter until I could return to Tashkent. As it was, almost no one got off, so none of us on the platform could squeeze into the sardine-packed coach.

After one or two more rural stops, I managed to push, half-frozen, into the car, which was without heat but steamy with human breath and vile with the stench of camel drivers, peasants and bazaar merchants, with all the sacks, bundles and baskets of onions and melons they had piled beneath the seats in the aisles and on the shelves overhead. Another stop and a few more Uzbeks pushed and shoved to get out. A blast of ice cold air came in as the door opened. The storm had turned into a real blizzard now, and the remaining poor souls who fell into the coach from the platform where they had been riding, were like human sticks of ice. The melted snow on my clothing enveloped me in a chilly dampness. I was sure I would catch pneumonia, but Powers looked so

miserable wedged in between the Uzbeks and the door that I did not tell him my unhappy thoughts.

When, at dusk, the train finally slowed down at the place where we were to spend Christmas—it *did* not even stop. It just whistled so that those who intended to descend there might jump off into the blizzard. This collective had no village attached, I learned later, so trains did not really stop there. As a convenience, they did slow down. Powers and I jumped off into the snow and immediately we sunk into a mixture of slush and mud almost to our ankles.

I said to myself, "If I ever get back to Tashkent after this, I will go right straight—by plane, if possible—home to the U.S.A. Never another foot of travel in the USSR!"

Colonel Young's son from Wilberforce, Ohio, with Golden, and a young chemist named Roan met Powers and me at the railroad. It was only a short walk to their quarters. But as we slithered through the sticky snow and pulled our feet from the sucking mud at each step, I am afraid I failed to hide very well my lack of joy at seeing at last a large group of fellow American Negroes away out in Asia.

Christmas Eve in Uzbekistan—and I was most miserable! But inside Golden's neat white-painted cottage, it was jolly and warm. Three or four jovial colored wives, who had come from Dixie to this, greeted us, and poured drinks, and let us smell the delicious aroma of the supper cooking in the kitchen. But nothing cheered me up, or thawed me out for hours, and I am afraid I did not act civilly. Never being much of a card-player, except at poker when I was in the Merchant Marine, I refused to join in the whist game that was proposed before dinner. I just sat glumly by the fire, nursed my cognac, and wished I was home in the U.S.A. Powers, who had come through that chilling train ride with me, thawed out before supper and was grinning like a Cheshire cat, joking with the other men's wives. Laughing and joking, folks were getting in the mood for Christmas. Every so often someone poured me another drink, and left me in the corner with my thoughts. But after a supper of stewed rabbit, hot bread and buttered squash, I felt better. And when midnight came and it was Christmas, in spite of the fact that I never could carry a tune, I sang "Silent Night" with the others.

Christmas Day was wonderful. We even had pumpkin pie for dessert, and the tables were loaded down with all the American-style dishes that those clever Negro wives could concoct away over there in Uzbekistan. That morning I didn't feel homesick at all when I got up and found a stocking full of halva, cashew and pistachio nuts hanging on the head of my bed. They were delightfully amiable hosts, these cotton-collective Negroes from America in the middle of a mud-cake oasis frosted with snow.

I never left the house the whole holiday, but when I looked out the windows Christmas morning I saw padding around the stables in the snow some tall brown Uzbeks who looked like the pictures on my Sunday-school cards in Kansas when I was a child. In their robes these Uzbeks looked just like Bible characters, and I imagined in their stable a Manger and a Child.

#### FLOWERS TO THE FAIR

Nina Zaratelli molded a head of the Negro engineer, Bernard Powers, and made a bas-relief of me, while she was working on the big model of Nichan in our room. This was eventually to be cast in bronze many times larger than life, for the new athletic stadium in Tashkent. Nina Zaratelli was a very pretty woman, a Georgian, given to dressing in simple black, over which she slipped a white smock when she came to our hotel to work in clay. She had been commissioned by the Uzbek government and brought from Tiflis just to make the statue of Nichan, which was to be a symbol of the new Uzbek youth. Nichan was a worthy model, and a handsome one, too, very muscular, alive and laughing. All of Nichan's friends enjoyed watching Nina Zaratelli work with Nichan posing, trying to keep still long enough for her to capture a likeness. The clay in which the sculptress worked was, curiously, almost the exact color of Nichan himself. And the statue she was making, before I left for Moscow, had begun to look a great deal like the boy, and to have in it something of his outer grace and inner strength.

Nina Zaratelli was a cultured woman who spoke beautiful French, and it was in French that she generally conversed with me. I told her about Paris and New York, and she told me about Tiflis and Leningrad. And sometimes, as she worked, I played her my jazz records.

As a farewell prior to my departure for Moscow, Nina Zaratelli and a few of her friends gave a small dinner

party at a little restaurant in Tashkent where I had never been. It was the only restaurant in the city, I understood, where one could just walk in and order a meal without a food card of any kind, so naturally it was very expensive. Contrary to Soviet custom, one tipped the waiters there and the page boy, too. It was, so far as I ever knew, the only equivalent in all of Central Asia of the Metropol Café in Moscow. Powers had been there a few times with some of his engineer friends, so he had told me, "It's the kind of place where I can wear a tuxedo." Certainly, its very presence in poorly and monotonously fed Tashkent amazed me. And it confirmed something I had long suspected from observation, not only in the Soviet Union but around the world—even in places where there is almost nothing, the rich, the beautiful, the talented, or the very clever can always get something; in fact, the best of whatever there is. From Topeka to Tashkent, San Francisco to Samarkand, I had learned that some can always get cream while most drink milk, some have wine while others hardly have water. The system under which the successful live—left or right, capitalist or communist—did not seem to make much difference to that group of people, in every city around the globe, who managed by hook or crook to live well. Be it Asia, Europe, or America, these folks had theirs. Not always were they the rich folks, either—sometimes merely the beautiful, the talented, or the clever.

In this small, secluded restaurant in Tashkent, there were thick steaks the like of which I had not dreamed existed in all Soviet Asia. But they cost a week's wages of even a very highly skilled worker. Workers did not eat there very often, if at all, I gathered. After dinner one could have Benedictine in a small individual bottle, priced about the same as a steak. Naturally, workers did not drink there, either. None of the Uzbeks I met in Tashkent had ever mentioned the place to me. Of course, they could go—but other than top officials, dancing stars and factory managers, how many had the money to go? Even I, with still a large packet of literary rubles in my suitcase, could not have afforded to dine there often. I am rather glad it was not until near the end of my stay that I knew the café existed for, with the ever-growing appetite I had developed after my illness, I might have spent most of my rubles on steaks and had but little left for my return to Moscow.

In a quiet street lined with trees, in a charming little bandbox of an old Russian house, nestled this small restaurant. Its main room was like a large living room, containing perhaps a dozen tables with very white tablecloths, gleaming cut-glass carafes, and heavy crested silver. Tapestries hung on the walls, and on a platform against one of the tapestries a trio, consisting of a piano, violin and cello, played popular French and American melodies. Most of the tables were taken when we arrived, filled with people who must have had pockets full of rubles—speculators on the open market, or authors, foreign specialists or visiting commissars, and perhaps a few skilled technicians, who had saved a long time for a single big evening of good food and vintage wines. I noticed that those who had finished their dinners were being served coffee—real coffee in individual glass urns, black and bubbling, steaming over fat lighted candles in copper holders. The red-coated waiters moved leisurely and courteously, and the whole atmosphere was that of the better restaurants of Paris or San Francisco. It must have been an old restaurant that had kept its European staff from prerevolutionary days, I thought. But the mystery of its why and how I never solved.

Our little party that night was quietly gay, but most of us concentrated on the food rather than conversation. Some had shaslik on skewers, but I had a big steak with rice, a custard for dessert, and a Benedictine with the coffee. I was intrigued by the trio of odd musicians who after the Russian hit, "Dark Eyes," suddenly burst into "The Sheik of Araby." The violinist, who was the leader and gave the signal for beginning each piece, had on what he must have considered a very swanky jacket. It was electric blue, double-breasted and extremely tight, fitting him like a picture on a wall, with pockets slanted. He swayed a great deal as he played. A huge and quite fierce-looking woman tackled the cello. She was larger than the little Louis XV chair on which she sat. Her hair was a fuzzy helmet on her head, and she was no longer young. Nina Zaratelli, lovely in black velvet, whispered to me across the table, that this woman used to be a concert artist and had played in Tiflis and Moscow before the revolution. Now she sat sawing sternly through "The Sheik of Araby" in Tashkent, followed by what I could have sworn was "Tea for Two." "Probably," I thought to myself, "she's politically suspect, exiled to this far-off Asiatic city a long way from Moscow and Leningrad. Otherwise, why would she be here in this tiny restaurant? She plays beautifully."

When, after midnight, a lull came in the popular tunes, and the swaying violinist in the tight coat left the stand, bobbing and bowing as he went out, the big fierce woman at the cello and the wizened old man at the piano, the two of them alone, began to play Schubert's "Serenade." Then the woman's face sweetened just a little and the music became a rose of loveliness that warmed the whole room with its fragrance. Nina Zaratelli, who dreamed someday of going to Paris where there were many such cafés, listened to the music as though it were being played for her alone.

#### FAREWELL TO SAMARKAND

Samarkand! Green-curl'd Samarkand! City of Tamerlane, the Earth Shaker; before that city of Genghis Khan, leader of the Mongols; and before that the sporting ground of Alexander the Great, who murdered within its gates his old friend, Clitus, when both were drunk with wine three thousand years ago. Samarkand, flourishing center of Arabic culture in the twelfth century; seat of the ancient observatory of Ulug Beg; golden name to the Venetian merchants in those Middle Ages of silks from Cathay and spices from Samarkand; lovely song-city of the Oriental poets; city of the turquoise domes—Samarkand! Green-curl'd Samarkand.

Today the old Samarkand is there for all who wish to see it in its crumbling splendor. The new Samarkand is a silk factory and a Communist University, a hydro-electric station and a Medical School. According to the Soviet Guide Book, it is also a commercial distribution point for "huge provisions of dried fruit, grapes, rice, raw hides and wine." Its main street is now called Karl Marx Street.

Because of the great difficulties involved in the liberation of Uzbek women from the harem and the veil, when I was in Samarkand a special effort was being made to supply women with the means of economic independence. The silk industry was utilized for this purpose. Since time immemorial Uzbek women had raised silkworms. As a rule, in the past, their husbands always took the profits. Now, however, cocoons were being purchased directly from the women themselves. And since silk is their especial province, new mills were being built for the training and employment of women. At the Deliverance of Women Mills which I visited, there were twelve hundred female workers, and not one was veiled.

When the mill first opened, it was difficult to get women to work at all—shy and timid as they were, afraid of their male relatives, afraid of machines, smothered by veils and burdened down by traditions of the past. Now the mill operated three shifts a day, seven hours each. The women workers were not only learning the regularity and exactness of factory work—something entirely new to the timeless Orient—but there was a factory school where women were taught to read and write. On a hill across a stream from the factory, there was a kindergarten for the children of employed mothers, a diet kitchen and a room to which nursing mothers came every three hours to care for their babies. Nearby were the new dormitory homes, in which men and women of various nationalities—Uzbek, Tartar, Tajik, Jewish, and Russian—lived. Some of the residents ate Oriental fashion on the floor. Others dined from European chairs and tables.

Formerly, in colonial days when the factories in Samarkand were owned by Russians, most of the foremen and technicians were Russian, just as in America most skilled workers and executives are white. Under the new set up three technical schools for the training of Uzbek workers had been opened. There had been only five thousand industrial workers in Samarkand. Within less than ten years that number had been increased by twenty. Electrification had much to do with Samarkand's increased industrial activity. Once in darkness, under the Soviets the entire city had become electrically lighted and its factories supplied with power.

During my stay in Samarkand, at the office of the Chairman of the City Soviet, I received a great deal of statistical information about the city and its problems. One of its problems, as in most Mid-Asian cities, had been that of water. In a land where wells sometimes have to be 170 feet deep before water is struck, people became accustomed to drinking from rivers, irrigation ditches, and whatever other convenient source they can find, without regard to sanitation. Now the city of Samarkand had sunk five artesian wells. Spring water from the nearby hills was also piped in, with the result that there had been a considerable decrease in typhoid and the various intestinal diseases common to the East. Yet some citizens still drank from gutters. The City Soviet wanted to make this a crime, punishable by arrest.

As to crime, for a city of many dim and winding streets, I was told that there were few murders, although pickpockets and petty thieves were plentiful. These were said to be a holdover from old times when, as a big trading and caravan center, Samarkand was exceeding dangerous. Begging, however, that scourge of the Orient, had almost disappeared. With work for all, the building of homes for the aged and the infirm, and the creation in Samarkand of six communes for homeless children, the old familiar cry of the East, "Alms, alms, for the love of Allah," was seldom heard, except from a few holy beggars whose religion demanded that they live by charity.

The whirling dervishes—whose fanatic rites once greatly excited a portion of the populace, and who in wild frenzy would slash their flesh into strips in public—had been forbidden to dance. Some, however, were still said to hold secret rites. Calmer Mohammedan sects gathered at the few mosques still open, but among them not many young men were seen. The young men of Samarkand were almost all going to school rather than to mosques.

To the Soviet colleges at Samarkand all Soviet Asia sent students. The classrooms I visited were crowded with both men and women, but many more men than women since Moslem families were slow to allow girls to be educated. Textbooks to meet the various language problems were a problem. The advanced courses had to be given in Russian, for as yet no books were available in Uzbek, Tartar, or Tadjik, so Russian was a required language. English and German were also taught, but at that time, so it seemed to me, greater stress was being put on German. Being a writer, I was naturally interested to find if there were classes in literature, and I was assured that there were. I was told that three times a week there was a class in the European and American novel. Out of curiosity I made it a point to visit this class, where I found about a dozen young Asiatics engaged in a study of Gorki, whose works were put aside temporarily to listen to me read some poems of mine in English and to permit the students to ask me questions.

I was amazed at being asked by one student who looked as if, only the day before, he might have emerged from a yurt—a nomad's felt tent—if I knew Sink-Lair Loo-ees. During his literature course he had read *Elmer Gantry*, which was then very popular in Samarkand, translated into the alphabet of the Uzbek language.

Samarkand campuses seemed to me not unlike our own in many respects, except that the average age of students was higher—usually twenty-two to twenty-five years upon entering college. Another difference was that most Samarkand students were members of trade unions, many of them having been sent to college by their unions. Examinations and tests were given, much as in American colleges, and for graduation, a thesis was required. Students were graded: Fine, Good, Satisfactory, and Not Satisfactory. Students did social work in connection with their studies, spreading their knowledge in the evenings and on free days to the teahouses, factories, workers' clubs and collective farms, thus acting as shock troops in the government's liquidation-of-illiteracy campaign. If a man's Red Army duty came during his college period, he was released from service until his studies were finished. And in the Red Army, college graduates served a shorter term than those who had not had advanced study.

My last evening in Samarkand, I went on foot alone at sunset to Tamerlane's Tomb. The gates were locked, but I looked into the charming courtyard that I had often visited before. Birds were nesting in the trees and a little grey lizard scurried across the ground. The setting sun gleamed warmly on the lovely old tiles, and on the great patches of sun-dried brick where the tiles had fallen away. Near the walls, beneath the mulberry trees, a little stream of water gurgled. Across the stream a child ran after a bantam chicken to put it to roost. In the courtyards round about, people were lighting fires and cooking.

As I walked back toward the center of the town, darkness began to fall, but the street lights were not yet turned on. In the dusk, little pools of light marked an occasional teahouse, where men gathered in the cool of evening. In front of one of these teahouses, in a dark grove of trees, I heard music—the high string lutes of the East. I went into this grove of darkness, where the glow of charcoal fires made the only light. I mounted one of the outdoor platforms, sat cross-legged on a rug, and called, "*Chai*," the Russian word for tea. But before the attendant reached me, several bowls of tea were offered me in the half-darkness, and soon I was a part of a group of young Uzbeks sitting on the platform. As everywhere in the Soviet Union, so here in Samarkand, a stranger was immediately the target of a hundred questions.

I said several times that I was an *Amerikanetz*, and that I lived *delico, delico*, far, far away. Their limited knowledge of Russian was on a par with mine, so I was not embarrassed. Some of the young workers did not speak Russian at all, so everything I tried to say was echoed again in Uzbek for those who didn't understand.

"*Eee kok Amerika?*" they said, meaning, "How is it in your home?"

"Cri-ses," I said, putting the accent, Russian way, on the second syllable. "*Bolshoy cri-ses!*"

"*Eee kok technika?*" For all the world has heard of American machines and technical knowledge, and some collective farms near Samarkand used Chicago tractors.

"Fine," I said, "very good," not knowing how to explain to them that partially due to our *technika*—the advance of machine production without a corresponding advance in the distribution of goods—our crisis had come about with its resultant unemployment.

"Eee kok Moscu?"

"Big city," I said, "Moscow *horoshi* big city!"

"*Eee kok...*," somebody else began. But I motioned that I wished to hear—if they would let me—the music being played on a nearby platform. "Musika, musika," I kept saying until finally the barrage of questions stopped, and the thin wail of the strings held sway, delicate and strange to Western ears. Meanwhile, the tea bowls went from mouth to mouth in simple comradeship and complete lack of sanitation. When I rose from the rug to leave, it was quite dark and I was still a long way from my hotel.

"I'm going to my *gostinitza*," I said, meaning hotel.

Immediately the platform filled with voices again. Several men jumped to their feet and tied their robes about them with big square silken sashes. Some paid for the tea, refusing to allow me to share the bill.

"Goodbye," I said, but the men had no intention of permitting me to leave alone. Remembering what I had been told of thieves in Samarkand, I wondered if these new-found friends of mine were robbers, or perhaps even bandits from the desert. It was very dark now, and the spaces from street light to street light, I noticed, were tremendous. I started rapidly toward the hotel when my companions pulled me in the opposite direction, talking volubly the while in Uzbek and Russian.

"*Autobus*," they were saying, I finally gathered from a shower of words.

"*Niet*," I said, "thank you," knowing from past experience how infrequently the buses ran, and being already late for dinner at the hotel where I was to meet my translator. But the men insisted, "*Autobus!*"

Finally I went with them. They took me a few blocks away to a big garage that housed the municipal buses, and there they proudly pointed, "*Amerikanetz! See!*" They wanted to show me that their buses were from my country. They went inside and spoke to a driver, and in a very short time one of the big buses rolled out. I was helped in and, as the only passenger, driven to the very door of my hotel—as a gesture of hospitality toward a stranger.

An hour later during dinner, in came several young Uzbeks and made straight for my table. I recognized them as my friends of the teahouse, now freshly scrubbed and all dressed up. Their padded robes and little round embroidered caps seemed more than ever Oriental in the brightly lighted café of the European hotel.

"They come," my translator explained as the fellows stood around our table, "to see if you were brought back safely, and to ask you to visit them at their club tonight, and to come tomorrow to their homes and share their pilaf."

I said that unfortunately I was leaving that night to return to Tashkent.

"They want you," said the translator, "to accept the hospitality of the Uzbek workers. They want you to stay a long time in Samarkand, so that when you go back to America, you will remember their city with pleasure."

"Only with pleasure could I remember Samarkand," I said. But it was time to start for the station then to take the late train to Tashkent, and finally go on to Moscow, and in a few months home to America, for as Omar had written:

The bird of time  
Has but a little way to flutter—  
And the bird is on the wing....

Regretfully I held out my hand to the friendly Uzbeks who had come to offer me their hospitality. They shook it in my foreign fashion. Then they bowed, both hands folded over the heart in their own way of saying farewell.

## 5 SPRING BESIDE THE KREMLIN

ZERO WEATHER, ZERO HOUR

The train from Tashkent got to Moscow in the middle of the night, several hours late, on one of the coldest nights of the year, more than twenty below zero. There were only a few sleepy porters about and it took a long time to get all my belongings in a taxi, but at least I had no heavy records or victrola to lug. Fortunately the porter got me a taxi instead of an open *drosky* or a sleigh. I told the driver to take me to the Grand Hotel where I had asked the Writers Union in Tashkent to wire for a reservation. At the Grand the desk clerk, who recognized me, said that they had gotten no message concerning a reservation and anyway, unfortunately, were entirely filled. He suggested I try another hotel on Twerskaya. That hotel was filled, too. In desperation I decided to try the deluxe Metropol. It, too, was full.

Taxis were then very expensive in Moscow. It was getting later and later and colder and colder. The streets of the city were utterly deserted, and highways, buildings, earth and sky were white with snow. It looked as if it had been snowing all winter, and it was still snowing, delicate isinglass flakes. I decided to try the one other hotel I knew, a lush *valuta* (foreign money) hotel serving first-class tourists—although I did not intend to spend my remaining American dollars to stay there. I thought I might persuade them to permit me a night in exchange for rubles. No luck. The clerk was adamant. Twenty dollars a day, gold currency, or nothing. Meanwhile, my bags were still in the taxi outside. I said I had no foreign money. The cleric said simply, "*Nichevo!* Then try the New Moscow."

That was the big hotel across the Moscow River from the Kremlin where I knew many foreigners stayed at ruble rates—especially technicians waiting to go to their assignments in various parts of the country. But it was generally overcrowded. I asked if he would phone and see if there was a room available. He did so, and said they had rooms. I returned to my by-now-impatient taxi driver, and we went speeding off again over the hard-packed snow, through Red Square in the darkness, past Lenin's Tomb with its immobile sentinels, past the Kremlin gates with the old Mininskaya opposite, where I had lived in the summer, and over the river to the doors of the New Moscow Hotel. The clerk inside said yes, he could give me a room. So I went out and asked the taxi man to bring in my luggage.

While the desk clerk was examining my papers and permitting me to register, the driver made three or four trips to the car for my baggage. He had just gotten it all inside the lobby when the desk clerk uttered a loud cry. From among the mass of my papers, he had just gotten down to my travel permit.

"This," he cried, "has run out!"

"What?" I said, recalling that the permit had been good for six months. I had been away from Moscow just about that long, and I had neglected to have it renewed in Central Asia.

"It expired the day before yesterday," said the desk clerk. With that he pushed all my papers back to me and crossed my name off the register.

"I can't sleep in the streets tonight," I said.

"*Nichevo,*" shrugged the clerk, closing the guestbook with a bang.

"I'll have it renewed the first thing in the morning," I said.

"But you cannot stay here," said the clerk. "Without a valid permit, you cannot stay in any hotel." He called the taxi man to remove my baggage. The man reached for a valise.

I said, "Put my things down. I'm going to stay here."

The desk clerk said, "Take his things out. He will not stay here."

As the taxi man started toward the door with an armload of luggage, I cried in the strongest Russian I knew, "Stop! or I'll call the OGPU"

It worked. The man dropped my bags as if he had been shot. Then I began to argue with the desk clerk again, but to no avail. He would not let me have a room. Twenty below zero outside, and I had no place to lay my head. I made, as the French say, a *scandale*. I threatened, I begged, I shouted. I called it a disgrace that a foreign visitor should be so treated in the Soviet Union. But I got no room. Meanwhile the taxi driver began to talk in a Moscow

argot of which I understood nothing, but I gathered that he wanted to be paid and to leave, for which I could not blame him. I paid him his enormous price, and tipped him besides. As the desk clerk still demanded that he should take me and my luggage with him, the taxi man disappeared in a hurry and all we heard was his motor speeding across the bridge.

I looked at the irate clerk and did not say another word. Leaving my bags piled against the wall where they were, I curled up in one of the big lobby chairs, hat and coat on, and slept until dawn. In the morning I went into the restaurant and had breakfast. And after breakfast I went to the Writers Union to see about getting my travel permit renewed.

At the Writers Union I found Walt Cannon, the amiable American editor of the English-language edition of *International Literature*. Walt immediately started the wheels turning for me to get my permit renewed—but with all the red tape involved in the renewal and stamping of papers in Russia, he and I both knew that this might take three or four days or even a week. Meanwhile, where could I sleep? Walt solved that problem by inviting me to stay with him and his wife, Rose, in their single room in a new housing project far across Moscow. I had no alternative but to accept their kindness. Intending to remain with them only for a night or so, I stayed a month.

During that month most of my waking hours were taken up with papers—a new food card, a new residence permit, a new travel permit, a new press card. Six months in Asia, and all my permissions had expired, or were on the verge of expiring. Without the proper papers in the Soviet Union one could not leave, but one could not stay either. Then, to my consternation, I discovered that even my American passport was about to run out. As yet we had no diplomatic representation at Moscow, so I would have to go to Riga to have it renewed. Meanwhile, I sat in Moscow with nearly a half-suitcase full of rubles that had almost no value without the proper papers. It took a food card to get food, a residence permit to get a hotel room, and a travel permit to travel. And when I found out that my American passport was about to become invalid, that was my zero hour.

#### BREAD, RED TAPE AND POETS

By the time I had gotten my residence and travel permits renewed, there were no rooms available at the New Moscow Hotel where the Writers Union had put in for a reservation for me, so I simply stayed on with Walt and Rose Carmon, those two genial souls who had a single room with a family from Brooklyn in a new Soviet apartment house. It was a fourth-floor four-room apartment, large for Moscow—and the last word, in that it had a bathroom. It was occupied by an American Jewish family, the man some sort of technical adviser, the woman just a housewife. Their daughter and son-in-law, Jack Chen, lived with them. The Carmons were roomers—and I was like the man who came to dinner, a guest who simply stayed and stayed, and slept on a cot in one corner of their room. During my month there, there were seven of us in this apartment consisting of three bedrooms, a kitchen-dining room, and a bath. We were crowded, but warm. And we pooled our food rations.

Sometimes I would go with Rose Carmon by streetcar, the long way into the heart of the city where our foreign food store was located, and help her bring back supplies. This particular store always had ample food, but little variety. Fortunately, I liked red caviar which was, I believe, ration-free and inexpensive, and available by the tubful. Bread was strictly rationed down to the last tenth of an ounce, and carefully weighed, chopped off at any angle and given without a wrapper. To the store one carried one's own baskets and papers to wrap up things. The Russian clerks were great choppers, cutting meat or fish at any point to make it the proper weight which a person's ration coupons—or combined coupons—called for. I remember once, Rose and I saw the butcher stalls piled with ducks and decided to combine our ration coupons and have a duck for dinner. But her coupons, mine, and Walt's, were not quite enough for a whole duck. *Wham* went the cleaver whacking off about a third of the duck wherever the blade landed without regard for joints or anything else. We came home with a one-legged, half-backed fowl cut on the bias.

I remember once I passed the foreign food store alone and thought I would take home a loaf of French bread, which I spied available that day, sold by the loaf rather than the pound as was Russian bread. It was snowing outside and I had no basket with me into which to put the bread, not even a brief case. After going through the complicated process of pricing the bread, ascertaining if my coupons would cover it, then going to the cashier,

paying for it, getting a ticket entitling me to have it, and finally returning to the bakery counter for it, the clerk handed me the bread without any wrapping. I asked if, please, I could have a piece of paper.

She said, "*Niet*

I said, "*Puchimo?*" Why?

She said they did not give paper with bread. Paper came only with sugar, caviar and things of that nature that had to be wrapped.

"But it's snowing outside," I said, "and the bread will get wet."

"*Nichevo*," said the clerk and walked away.

Indignantly, I took my bread and went looking for the manager. Upstairs in an office I found that august bureaucrat and went through the same arguments, getting only a "No paper for bread" answer.

I said, "I will sit right here in your office until I get some sort of wrapping for this bread." So I sat down.

"*Pydion*," said the manager finally, after busying himself with papers for half an hour and seeing that I would not leave, "Come on." I followed him back downstairs and was given a few inches of brown paper, enough at least to cover the middle of the loaf.

But it was mere child's play getting a piece of paper to wrap bread as compared with getting the proper papers to be entitled to have bread, or a room, or to travel, or to collect money after one had earned it as a free-lance writer. I did a number of articles on my trip to Central Asia for *Izvestia*, *International Literature*, and other Moscow publications. The prices paid were good, equivalent in rubles to the better newspapers or magazines in the United States. But the order for one's money had to be signed by the editor first, then the business manager, and perhaps even the political editor. Then this order had to be taken to the controller or bursar where the cash was. But first just try to catch the editor! "He's off on a lecture tour of the Ukraine," or "He's busy getting the paper to press." When finally the editor is captured and he has signed the slip, the manager's secretary says, "Sorry, but today is the manager's free day." Although it might be Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or any other work day, there was never any telling whose free day was when—since Moscow then had no such things as Saturdays or Sundays off, as we have in America. Any day might be somebody's free day in any office or plant. This was most confusing to a foreigner. But one would come back the next day and perhaps manage to get the manager's signature. But that day might be the free day for the paymaster. Of these customs I complained loudly at the Writers Union, but they could be of no help. Literary agents were unknown in Moscow, and publications had no system of mailing checks or money directly to writers. Each writer had to attend to the collection of his own fees. One of Moscow's most successful short-story writers once told me that he had three secretaries—one to do his typing and two to collect his money. But I, who had no secretaries, had to do all this myself. It took a great deal of time and patience, but eventually I would emerge from a publishing office with a whole bundle of rubles, paid at last. I made more from writing in Moscow in terms of buying power than I have ever earned within the same period anywhere else. I made enough to travel all over the Soviet Union, to come home via Japan and China, and to live (except for the interlude with the Carmons) at what were equivalent to eight- or ten-dollar-a-day hotels in America. Writing in the USSR was one of the better-paid professions. But it often took more time to collect for an article than it did to write the article itself.

Karl Radek was my editor at *Izvestia*. He was a genial debonair little man, rather like Lincoln Steffens in California. Radek's office was a busy office, so he never had much time for conversation. I did not get to know him well. But I was sorry to learn after my return to America that he had been purged. Perhaps he was a little too witty for the rigid red tape of revolution. He once made me laugh about the difficulties writers had getting through this red tape to collect their fees. Radek said, "That's why we pay bad writers so well, Hughes, to make it worth their while to stop writing to collect."

Among the other famous literary personalities whom I met in Moscow, were the playwright, Sergei Tretyakov, whose *Roar China* was produced in New York by the Theatre Guild, and the popular lyric poet, Boris Pasternak. Everyone in Moscow seemed to think that Pasternak might fall into political disgrace at any time, but he was still going strong the last I heard. It seemed that Pasternak would not, or could not, write political poetry. He simply wrote beautifully about trees in autumn, birds and fields and flowers. One poem about a sweetheart

went:

From that day, from your head to your feet,  
I carried you with me and knew you by heart—  
As a provincial actor knows a play of Shakespeare's.  
I took you about with me in the city and repeated you.

Unfortunately, Pasternak did not produce a lyric line about the Five Year Plan, nor such Edgar Guest type of proletarian rhymes as did Demian Biedni, then the most widely printed of Communist versifiers. Yet Pasternak's poetry was very popular not only among Soviet intellectuals and students, but with ordinary people as well. I found him a gentle, likable man, cultured in appearance and shy with strangers.

Sergei Tretiakov and his wife, on the other hand, were dynamic, talkative people and outgoing hosts, with a spick-and-span apartment, modern and bright. Tretiakov himself was very political minded, interested and excited about the Scottsboro Case and the problems of American and African Negroes in general and, of course, the problems of colonial Asia where he had been. He made me a present of an enormous poster, showing a gigantic Chinese coolie breaking his chains, and he gave me a copy of *Roar China* inscribed in English. When I left for the Far East, he and his wife came to see me off at the station.

Another Russian writer, critic and lyric poet, Julian Annisimov, translated a number of my poems into Russian, and introduced me to a very bright young woman, Lydia Filatova, his protégée, who wrote brilliant critical articles. Filatova spoke English very well, and helped me to translate for American readers some of the poems about Negroes by the great Vladimir Mayakovsky who committed suicide in 1930, but whose work was still much talked of in Moscow. Mayakovsky was the mad surrealist poet of the revolution, writing strange but intriguing slogans for May Day Parades, fantastic poetic ads for Soviet shoe-shops, and rhymes in favor of hygiene, such as:

Let a little more culture,  
Workers, take place!  
Don't spit on the floor—  
Spit in a vase.

#### THEATER OF THE WHIRLING SEATS

When I did secure a room in the New Moscow Hotel, just across the bridge from the Kremlin, it was a very nice room, not large but quite comfortable. Downstairs there was a good dining hall with a Gypsy orchestra and a very pretty Gypsy girl singing. I soon got acquainted with the Gypsies, and, in the spring, was invited out to the girl's home one afternoon. She lived with relatives, some of whom were musicians and others ordinary workers. They offered me kasha and cabbage soup, a little more highly seasoned than the Russians made it, and they had a pitcher of *kvass* to drink—a sort of foamy malty drink popular in Russia, but which I never liked very much. The pretty Gypsy girl told me they had been living there for four years, since it was very hard for Gypsies to travel much anymore. I told her it seemed hard for anyone in the USSR. I asked her relatives how they liked the new Soviet life. They said, "*Nichevo*."

There was an attractive Gypsy Club in Moscow, and a Tsigane Theater, performing a wild and picturesque version of *Carmen*. But the Gypsies who played and sang in the New Moscow Hotel were neither wild nor particularly exotic. They sawed away at their fiddles in "smokings"—as the Europeans call tuxedos—and the girl wore a silver-spangled evening gown much as any cabaret singer might wear anywhere. Only occasionally, quite late at night, did their music sound lonely and wild and rebellious.

Muscovites are great playgoers, packing not only Russian-language theaters, but the various national playhouses as well—Ukrainian, Jewish, Gypsy—and offering the hospitality of their stages to visiting groups. When the Rustavoli Players from the Georgian State Theater in Tiflis came to town with their whirling sword dances and half-floating, half-gliding women, not a seat could be had for days in advance. And at the International Olympiad of Workers' Theaters, the Mongolian musicians and actors excited great interest. They

had traveled to the Soviet capital from Ulan Bator in Outer Mongolia, bringing their silken costumes and exotic instruments with them via the Trans-Siberian Railway. When the curtains of Moscow's vast Music Hall parted to the low monotone of Chinese pipes and fiddles, the slant-eyed actors were welcomed with a prolonged roar of applause.

Only Stanislavsky's great Moscow Art Theater, and its smaller affiliate, the Maly, housed productions untouched by Soviet ideology —famous old productions like *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, *The Lower Depths*, or *The Inspector General*. Other theaters might tamper with these plays, to slant them or bring them up to date in stunning new productions, but the Moscow Art Theater had a large and faithful public for its established classics unchanged, and its seats were booked months ahead. It was interesting to me to compare the various ways in which a single play, like Gogol's *The Inspector General*, might be performed. With Meyerhold's constructivist sets, it certainly came out differently than under Stanislavsky's carefully realistic treatment. But the theater that fascinated me most of all was Oklopkov's Krasni Presnia, the most advanced in production styles of any playhouse I have ever seen. Arena staging was the least novel of its innovations. For each production the entire seating and platform arrangements of the theater were changed, and the whole auditorium was always used as a playing area, front, back and aisles. Sometimes a conventional stage was utilized, too, with perhaps a runway from the stage up to the balcony. Sometimes there were runways along the side walls all the way to the lobby. And one amazing production was so designed that important things were happening all over the place, so the spectators sat in swivel chairs, whirling around at will to catch whatever interested them most.

From the young Oklopkov and the older Meyerhold, both of whom were kind enough to talk with me and to invite me to attend rehearsals, I acquired a number of interesting ways of staging plays, some of which I later utilized in directing my own Negro history play, *Don't You Want To Be Free?*, done in Harlem without a stage, curtains, or sets. I used two raised half-circles connected by a narrow runway against a side wall. The actors changed costumes behind an upright piano in the middle. This play of mine, before arena staging became popular in New York, intrigued Negro audiences for more than a year, chalking up a record run in Harlem of 135 performances.

The Meyerhold and Oklopkov theaters were a little special, even for Moscow. Much more popular with the general public and the run-of-the-mill intellectuals were the Vakhtangov and the Kamery Theaters, whose innovations were not as radical, but whose productions were expertly done and quite beautiful. The Vakhtangov's dynamic production of *Hamlet*, in which Shakespeare's hero became a man of action, entering on a dashing white horse, provoked much discussion in Moscow and was a great hit. Tairov's Kamery was then the *theatre du snobisme* in the Soviet capital, Moscow's smartest playhouse, given to the presentation of foreign dramas like those of Georg Kaiser and Eugene O'Neill. It was at the Kamery that I saw the scenery constricting, in and out, in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, like the throbbing brain of its poor Negro with his intermarriage problem.

Soviet ideology did not favor picturing colored people in subservient or clownish roles on the stage, for which I was grateful. One of the most popular of the plays at the Moscow Children's Theater concerned a handsome little Negro boy, presented most sympathetically, I was told. But I could never get in to see this play, so crowded was the theater, and adults were admitted only when accompanying children.

Most of the plays I attended were so vividly done that I could usually follow the action without the aid of an interpreter. Nor did one need a translator to enjoy the wonderful indoor circus. But at those few playhouses devoted to vaudeville and the music-hall skits, where the songs were topical and the comedy in Moscow argot and highly political, satirizing *kulaks* and profiteers and lazy workers, I could understand but little. The music-hall productions were shoddy, and not at all on a par with the serious dramatic or operatic theaters.

In contrast to motion-picture houses, all of the dramatic theaters in Moscow, even in subzero weather, were well heated. The motion-picture theaters, except for a few expensive first-run houses, were ice cold. To go to the movies, one put on more clothing than to go into the street. At the cinema, it was often difficult to see the screen for waves of white vapor rising from the mouths and noses of the spectators like a mist. Lacking heat, these houses also lacked ventilation. Every crack was kept tightly closed against the weather. Full of seldom-bathed comrades, the motion-picture theaters in Moscow smelled like very pungent kennels. I seldom went to the

movies that winter.

## MOSCOW ROMANCE

At one of the Meyerhold's rehearsals I met an actress, a sort of apprentice actress, playing bouncing country peasants, awkward maids, and other small bit parts verging toward comedy. She had a buxom body, a round smiling face, Slavic—not beautiful, not ugly—and was very healthy-looking. But she had a one-track mind. Without advance warning, Natasha simply came to my room in the New Moscow Hotel one night when I was out—and was in bed when I got back.

I had met her after my return from Central Asia. It was late when the rehearsal was over and not a *droski*, taxi, bus, or tramcar was in sight. The Moscow streets were silent and eerie white under the snow. I asked Natasha if she would like me to walk her home. She said, "Please." So I did. She lived near the Chinese Wall of the Old City, across the river not far from my hotel. She was very talkative, spoke French well, and kept up a running conversation as our feet went crunch, crunch, crunch through the dry snow. Natasha was amusing, and flirtatious.

She said, "Take off your glove." I did. She took off one of hers, and took my hand, and laughed. She said, "See your dark hand and my white one together—pretty, no? Comme c'est beau!"

"They're different," I said.

"Oh, I love the Negroes," she cried in French, "and I have not known one before, only seen them in theater, in cinema. But I love the Negroes."

At home in America, Negroes are immediately suspicious of persons who protest too much their love of colored people. But I knew she was not being condescending. Still I saw no need for her to stretch the point.

"Bien," I said, "that's nice of you. I love the Russians, too."

She squeezed my hand, and that was about the end of it that evening. I said good night at her door, went down along the river and across the bridge to my hotel. But the very next time I went to Meyerhold's theater one afternoon when a new set of spirals and bridges were being built on the stage, there she was. Lloyd Patterson, the Negro artist of our movie group, had asked me to meet him there and watch how a constructivist set was put together. His wife, whom he had married while I was away in Asia, was with him. I introduced them to Natasha. This time when I took Natasha home, she asked me to come in and meet her husband. He was a quiet pincenezed old gentleman about twice her age, half bald, scholarly and blanched, and somewhat absent-minded in manner.

"He works all the time," Natasha said, "studies formulas, charts, I don't know what." It seemed he was attached to a scientific institute, and took his position very seriously. He seldom went out. He had but little interest in the arts, but he was pleasant enough that afternoon as the three of us had tea. There was a real old-fashioned brass samovar in the living room, but there was no fuel to heat it. However, to show me how it worked, tea was brewed in the kitchen, then poured in the samovar. With the tea in tall glasses, bits of hard candy were served instead of sugar. You put a piece of candy between your teeth and drank the steaming tea over the candy. An American has to get used to hot tea in a hot glass plus candy between the teeth. My struggle tickled Natasha. She laughed and laughed. Her husband smiled and let his eyes stray to a treatise he seemed to have been reading before I came.

"Go ahead, read," said Natasha. "We'll forgive you." So the old man drank tea and read and jotted pencil notes on the edge of the pamphlet.

Natasha asked me to take her to a party later in the week, a small party of theatrical friends, mostly bit players. The party turned out to be far out on the edge of Moscow in a suburb of large old-fashioned wooden houses and log *dachas* among the pine trees and chalky white birches, ghostly in the snow. We rode to the end of a car line, then walked perhaps a quarter of a mile to a two-room apartment in one of the big old wooden houses. The party was lively, prankish, with folks reciting poetry, doing impersonations and showing off, rather like a bohemian party anywhere, except that tea and vodka were the main refreshments, rather than whiskey.

I do not know how the various tipsy guests got home, but I remember Natasha saying quite late, after all the

others had departed, "I'm sure the last streetcar has gone."

"Oh, yes," said our hosts, a young married couple, "but don't worry. You can spend the night with us."

It was miles back to the heart of the city. There was no telephone. And even if one could call a cab from the Metropol in Moscow, they were known not to arrive for hours, if at all. I pulled back a window curtain. Outside, not a soul stirred. It was zero cold, white and still in the moonlight, with the tall fir trees and the wooden houses like a picture post card of what I'd imagined Old Russia to be.

The married couple made up a cot in what appeared to be a combination kitchen-dining-room-library. They also spread a pallet on the floor. The cot was for Natasha and the pallet for me—both in the same room. In Russian trains, men and women, utter strangers to each other, slept in the same compartments. With the Russian housing shortage, I knew that even former husbands and wives who had gotten divorced, but could find no places to move apart, sometimes occupied the same room for months, until one found a vacancy elsewhere. That night Natasha insisted in both French and Russian that I, being a guest and a foreigner—*Negrochanski*—take the cot. But I would not, of course, be so ungallant. While she was still talking with her friends, I went ahead to bed on the pallet. But that room was quite cold, and the scanty covering was very thin. At the end of a carline again! I thought of my Tartar rendezvous in Tashkent and how cold it had been there, and I resolved never to go to the end of another streetcar line at night anywhere in the USSR.

Shortly Natasha came to bed on the cot across from my pallet. With my face to my wall, I pretended to be asleep, but she knew I wasn't.

"So little blankets," she murmured. "*Mon dieu!* I'm cold. *Cheri*, I shiver!"

"Me, too," I said.

With so little cover between us, in order to keep warm, our hosts must have known that we would have to sleep together.

#### IRRITATED AND SALIVATED

Even in the dead of winter the New Moscow Hotel was full of foreigners, mostly non-Communists and non-political foreigners, technicians waiting to go to the Ukrainian factories, or engineers expecting assignments to the Urals or wherever impending dams or other projects were about to be erected. Everybody quickly got acquainted in the lobby or in the dining room. It was a friendly place with quite a deal of visiting back and forth in the rooms and between floors. There was the usual hum of anti-Soviet talk, common to irritated foreigners as frustration with red tape and disillusionment with "the system," the delays, the hotel and the food set in. In the dining room there was plenty of food, such as it was, but little variety and the same unvarying menus of greasy rich sturgeon, cutlets—a kind of chopped meat shaped like a pork chop; *kasha*, a sort of cereal; cabbage, both red and green; and that horrible warm calves'-foot-jelly-like dessert, *kisel*. Red caviar saved my life. I could eat it morning, noon and night. Besides, once I have enough to eat, no matter what, food does not worry me much. Although Soviet hotel menus were a bore, I could put up with them.

But some folks complained continually about the food. Some complained even more about the crowded streetcars that would curve around the corner below the New Moscow with people swinging from the doors and windows, and on which a hotel guest could seldom get a foothold. Others lamented the scarcity of taxis, the high tariff of *droskies*, and the noncommittal attitudes of clerks and public servants, and how hard it was even to buy a stamp in the post office. Although I wasn't a Russian, in the face of such continual complaining, I often felt like saying, "Why don't you go back where you came from?" Some people did go back. Others—most others, in fact—stuck it out until they got where they had been contracted to go, although sometimes it appeared that they were just being paid to sit in the New Moscow Hotel—as our movie group had sat in the Grand—and do nothing but wait and wait. Russian delays were often long and intolerable. One Englishman had been in the hotel all winter, waiting to be sent to a plant that finally he heard the Russians as yet had not even begun to build. One day he took up with a girl from Pittsburgh who had just come to the Soviet Union to have a child.

Very pregnant, she arrived with the first group of American tourists that spring. They were booked for a ten-day tour of Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov and Leningrad. But when this young woman got to Moscow, she stayed. Not

having in advance a contract to work, and not being a diplomat on a mission, she could get into the country only as a tourist. So, she had bought a one-way ticket from New York to Paris, and there booked a ten-day tourist trip to Russia, keeping secret her intention to stay. She was a starry-eyed idealist, who had heard that in the Soviet Union there was no stigma attached to an illegitimate child. At home in Pittsburgh she had become pregnant by a man who was already married, so she had come to the Soviet Union to have her baby in a land where illegitimacy did not matter, where all children were equal, and women were free. She planted herself in the New Moscow Hotel on a three-day permit, intending to remain until she became a mother.

For three days she saw all the sights of Moscow and then, when her group moved on to Leningrad, the hotel naturally asked for her room. In fact, the management thought she had departed with the group. When it was discovered that she had not, a great furor ensued. Where were her papers permitting her to stay? The extension of her visa? Her residence permit? Her police permit? Her card for food? "What! Nothing?" She would have to go! The British engineer found her in the lobby, surrounded by bags, pregnant as could be, and dissolved in tears. The kind-hearted engineer took pity on her and, over the hotel's violent objections, invited her to share his room until things could be straightened out. It seemed that she really had neither papers nor any more money—but she was carrying a child she determined would be born free of stigma—in a land where all children are equal, she cried, and there is no illegitimacy.

The British engineer felt this to be an admirable sentiment. But the hotel's Soviet executives simply said, "Nichevo! So what? Why aren't things as she wishes in America? It's not our responsibility where her child is born. She has no permit to stay here. Her three-day tourist card is finished. Her room is already taken by someone else, and booked through the entire summer. She has no food card for this dining room. She cannot stay at the New Moscow Hotel."

Since I was the nearest American neighbor to the British engineer, just down the hall from his room, he knocked on my door to inform me that he had an hysterical American lady from Pittsburgh in his diggings. Would I kindly come and talk to her? I found a tall, simply dressed, nice, middle-class American girl sitting beside his lukewarm radiator weeping quietly, her unopened bags on the floor by the door. She said she thought everybody in Russia would understand her problem. But nobody did.

I said I understood, and the Englishman declared he did, too. But, when she had calmed down, we tried to explain to her how difficult it was to do anything in the USSR without the proper papers. Money really did not help much—even if one had money—without a half-dozen permits. True, at the Metropol anyone could eat in rubles or dollars, but at terrific prices. And, with foreign money, a person might be able to live fairly well by buying at the Torgsin shops which accepted only gold-backed currency of other lands, no rubles being tenable as exchange.

The girl said, "But I haven't got any money, only a few dollars left. And I have no ticket back—and even if I did, I wouldn't go home. I'm going to stay here, I have to stay here, where my child can be born with no mark upon it, no stigma. My baby! I have to stay here—the only country I know in the world where people don't care if a woman isn't married when she has a child. Don't the Russians understand?"

"We'll have to try to find one who understands," I said.

"I understand," said the Englishman, and he put the tired, distraught girl to bed. He slept on the floor.

The next day I told Walt and Rose Carmon about her, and they suggested that she go to see Anna Louise Strong and the folks at the Moscow *Daily News*, the English-language paper edited by the once famous Borodin. Nobody, left or right, in Moscow's American colony thought much of the Moscow *Daily News*. Always a day or two behind the Russian press with news, it was usually filled only with stock propaganda editorials, dull industrial reports, and slogan-like headlines. But any American with a problem was always dumped in the lap of the Moscow *Daily News*. It was a kind of Travelers' Aid Bureau, or so used by American residents in Moscow to get rid of fellow countrymen in trouble. I must say, the harassed staff of that harassed paper arose to each occasion as best it could. In this case, they actually found a room for the girl.

The poor Englishman had been threatened with eviction from the New Moscow Hotel for housing a foreigner without papers. But he withstood the management nobly and sheltered her for two or three nights until she got

located. The room found for the girl was on the far outskirts of Moscow, in a muddy, sidewalk-less suburb, miles from the only store where English was spoken and where this girl might trade if she ever got a food card. Somehow a temporary permit allowing her to remain in Moscow for a month had been secured— but nothing else. The Englishman pressed upon her a few pounds. I gave her a roll of rubles, and we saw her safely into a *drosky* and off to her abode, smiling happily.

Two days later she was back in the lobby of the New Moscow Hotel, bags and baggage. Cold and rainy that spring, and sometimes still snowing, the suburban streets were ankle-deep in mud. The American girl could hardly get out her door without sinking into a kind of swamp. The nearest car line or bus was a mile away from the house. The house itself was damp, penetratingly cold, dank with mildew and cobwebs, with a fire nowhere but in the kitchen stove—and then only at meal times. The Russian family with whom she lived were ordinary, kindly people who understood not a word of English, nor did the girl from Pittsburgh speak a single phrase of Russian, although she had studied the vocabulary in the little Russian *While You Travel* booklet, mispronouncing everything miserably. There was no bathroom in the house, and the toilet was far out in the yard through puddles of water in a morass of black sticky mud. But the last straw was that the walls of the house were full of bedbugs. When the poor girl finally managed to get back to the New Moscow Hotel, she had been bitten all over by vermin, chilled to the bone, and had caught a miserable cold.

The genteel Englishman took her into his room again. But by now the girl was really ill, and so upset that she could not eat. Her generous Russian landlady's cabbage soup, shared from a common bowl into which all dipped their spoons, had not agreed with her. The thought of cabbage nauseated her. That first night back in the hotel the girl ran a fever. The next morning the Englishman went for a doctor, and I stayed with the sick woman while he was out. Still talkative, even though ill, she told me in detail of her love for the man in Pittsburgh, who already had a home, a wife and three children, and whose home she respected—but whose child she nevertheless wanted to have.

When the doctor came, he felt her pulse, took her temperature and left a prescription. The Englishman went to have it filled. When he returned, he brought a small bottle of gray-black pills and an armful of large tins of fruit juices. Such orange and grapefruit juices were a luxury which could only be purchased in foreign money at the Torgsin stores. His guest was proving quite an expense to the poor British engineer, but he was most decent about it all and tended her like a nurse. He gave her the medicine and after she felt better, all day long he fed her on canned fruit juice.

That night the Englishman knocked rapidly on my door quite late. He was greatly agitated. "The American," he said, "I don't know what is the matter. Please come quickly!"

I found the usually voluble girl silent, unable to say a word. Sitting bolt upright in her bed, her tongue was swollen so that it almost filled her mouth. Slobbering, she could not speak. At that time, in the after-midnight hours, we knew of no way of getting a doctor, nor was the desk clerk of any help. But when I saw the empty tins of fruit juices in the wastebasket and saw the gray-black tablets beside the bed, and uncorked the bottle and smelled the tablets, I guessed what the matter was. I remembered such pills from my childhood in Kansas, popular there with the old people as a laxative—but always accompanied with the dire warning to anyone who took them, never to drink acids or citrus juices afterwards on pain of becoming salivated.

The tablets in the bottle which the Russian doctor had prescribed for the girl were calomel tablets. On top of the calomel, the Englishman had given her canned citrus juices all day. She was salivated. When you get salivated your tongue swells up, my grandmother always told me. This speechless American's tongue was swollen as thick as a sausage—salivated! I could diagnose that.

But the next day she could talk again. And when she could talk, *she did!* A week in Moscow was just about enough— in fact, dear God, too much! "I have never gone through such horror," she cried. Now she had begun to fear for the safety of her coming child. Better to be born with a stigma than not to be born at all! The cables got busy, money came from home, and the girl bought a ticket back to the U.S.A., where at least you don't need a permit to get a hotel room. She was hoping to get home before her baby came.

## ILLUSION AND DISILLUSION

Looking a long-held ideal in the face is about like looking a gift horse in the mouth. The poor old ideal, beaten and battered by reality, its gloss gone and its veneer cracked, often does not appear as pretty in actuality as it seemed in dreams. Glimpsing the ideal in naked reality may be much like seeing your favorite movie star in broad daylight without make-up. What the girl from Pittsburgh had dreamed the USSR might be, and what it was, were two entirely different things. But the case of the salivated girl, although the most extreme and to me the saddest, was by no means the only case I witnessed of dire disillusionment with the Soviets and all their works that year in the corridors of the New Moscow Hotel. There came to the Soviet capital many varied types of people from around the world. Among the ships that passed in the Moscow night (I know it's a cliché, but ships do pass in the night)—among the ships that passed in the Soviet night, while I was there, I shall probably remember longest the pregnant girl from Pittsburgh.

But I won't forget the poet, Norman Macleod, either. I had known Norman in New York, and so was glad to see him when he showed up in Moscow, accompanied by a little girl from Greenwich Village who had come to design bath towels for a Soviet trust. Norman had a sorry tale to tell. It seemed that he had gotten high on white wine in Paris and had been arrested by the French police for singing the *Internationale* in a loud voice on the Grand Boulevards. Then, hardly had he gotten to Moscow than he had gotten high on vodka, and was arrested there on the main street because he could find no men's room and did not know how to ask for one. Having to relieve himself of excess liquid on a public corner near the post office, he did so. Two militiamen politely requested that he come with them to jail. So within two weeks he had known two police stations in two different countries. But Macleod took it all in stride and was laughing when I saw him in the New Moscow Hotel.

Other passers-by during my months in Moscow included John Hope, the venerable Negro President of Atlanta University, who treated me to a wonderful *valuta* luncheon at the National Hotel where he was stopping. Earl Browder showed up one day and gave a talk at the Writers Union on the relations between literature and the class struggle. And from somewhere there arrived a Negro dancing boy named Banks, who occasionally hit a few steps in front of the very bad jazz band at the Metropol Café. Banks was not a very good dancer and the band was no inspiration to him.

In Moscow, too, that year my paths crossed the paths of such worldlings as the French poet and novelist, Louis Aragon, and his lovely writer-wife, Elsa Triolet; the Chinese poet, Emi Sao; the Japanese theater director, Seki Sano; the hard-drinking British poet, Charles Ashleigh; the brilliant but dogmatic Negro lawyer, William Patterson, making speeches on Scottsboro; and dozens of English and American tourists coming and going, most of them sympathetic liberals friendly to "the Soviet experiment"—but many of them unsympathetic when they departed, and others entirely shorn of any illusions they might have had as to man's ability to make himself over into a new unselfish image through communism.

I think most idealists expected too much of Russia in too short a time. The Soviet Union was then only fifteen years old. I kept thinking of what someone once said about the freed Negroes in America, "Don't try to measure the progress of the Negro by how far he has gone but rather by the distance from which he had to come." Maybe my having gone to Central Asia gave me a broader viewpoint on Soviet achievements. In Turkestan the new setup was only eight years old, dating from 1924—yet there they had already come from almost complete illiteracy to schools for all the children, from ancient feudal serfdom to wages and work for all, from veils and harems and marriage marts to women treated like human beings and not chattels, and from Jim Crow cars to a complete lack of segregation—all in less than a decade.

Maybe the fact that I was colored, too, made a difference. All the tourists I saw in the Soviet Union except John Hope were white. Most of the other travelers, such as the technicians and writers I saw there, were white, too. Some things irritated these people much more than they did me. Just as the dirt in Central Asia upset Koestler, so it upset me. Dirt without Jim Crow was bad—but dirt *with Jim Crow*, for me, would have been infinitely worse. In the old days, Koestler and I could not have stayed in the same hotels together in Turkestan, nor ridden in the same railway compartments. My segregated compartment would have been dirtier. As a white man before the revolution, Koestler could have ridden first-class—but not I. Koestler perhaps could not

understand why I did not complain as often as he did, nor why I was not quite so impatient with the maid who refused to set our bags over the doorsill in Bokhara. Koestler had never lived as a Negro anywhere. Even with dirt, there was freedom for a Turkoman now to sit in Ashkabad's dusty park and not see the old signs for Europeans only that formerly kept him out. Even with eternal grime and continued famines, racial freedom was sweeter than the lack of it. To Grasdani, such freedom in Asia meant only tin cans in the toilets and dark guests in the best hotels. But to Nichan it was education and football and *his* brown statue over a new stadium.

If, rather than a Negro, I had been a Russian of the old school like Grasdani, or a famous Berlin journalist like Koestler, or a comfortable white American tourist affording twenty dollars a day for a room, or a highly skilled foreign engineer impatient with lesser skilled men and bungling red tape, or a pregnant woman with romantic illusions, maybe I would have become quickly disillusioned, too, and found nothing good to say about a backward people who had come so far—to so little.

As to the purge trials, the liquidations, the arrests and censorship, deplorable as these things were, I felt about them in relation to their continual denunciation in the European and American press, much as Frederick Douglass felt before the Civil War when he read in the slave-holding papers that the abolitionists were anarchists, villains, devils and atheists. Douglass said he had the impression that "Abolition—whatever else it might be—was not unfriendly to the slave."

After all, I suppose, how anything is seen depends on whose eyes look at it.

#### D. H. LAWRENCE BETWEEN US

The first evening that I came back to my room in the hotel and found Natasha in bed, I said, "But, listen, Natasha, you've got a husband. *Q'est ce que tu fais, alois?*"

"My husband has long been sleeping," she said. "He will not wake up till six or seven in the morning."

"But staying out this way, don't you care anything about him?" "I like him, yes—but I like you, too," said Natasha. And that was that, *alors!*

She was fun and as wholesome in body as an apple. But she got in the habit of coming to the hotel more and more often, which eventually began to be annoying. On the other hand, she was most helpful sometimes in indicating to me ways of getting around, over, or through the unwinding of the vast amount of red tape involved in my getting out to Latvia to have my American passport renewed, then in getting all the dozens of papers and permissions needed to go eastward around the world, home via the Pacific. I had decided that, with all my surplus rubles, I might as well circle the globe. One could buy with rubles a rail ticket all the way from Moscow to Shanghai via Peking. To see the ancient city of Peking I had never even dreamed, but now I could, if the Russians would let me cross Siberia. Meschrabpom Films had arranged for all of us to go home via Europe. Siberia was not in the Meschrabpom plans, and the film company seemed quite unprepared to aid me in making my exit from Russia by way of the Far East. The Writers Union was not very helpful, either. In the end Constantine Oumansky and Natasha were the most helpful of all. But as to Natasha, I still didn't want an almost nightly guest, the reason being that I had begun writing again, and I always do my best writing at night—alone.

The circumstances of my beginning to write were curious. Shortly after I moved into the New Moscow Hotel, I met there Marie Seaton from London. She was doing a study of Russian motion pictures, and gathering data on Sergei Eisenstein and his work, which she later used in her biography of him. Marie Seaton had with her a paper-bound copy of D. H. Lawrence's short stories, *The Lovely Lady* which she lent me. I had never read anything of Lawrence's before, and was particularly taken with the title story, and with "The Rocking Horse Winner." Both tales made my hair stand on end. The possessive, terrifying elderly woman in "The Lovely Lady" seemed in some ways so much like my former Park Avenue patron that I could hardly bear to read the story, yet I could not put the book down, although it brought cold sweat and goose-pimples to my body. A night or two after I had read the Lawrence stories, I sat down to write an *Izvestia* article on Tashkent when, instead, I began to write a short story. I had been saying to myself all day, "If D. H. Lawrence can write such psychologically powerful accounts of folks in England, that send shivers up and down my spine, maybe I could write stories like his about folks in America. I wonder."

It had never occurred to me to try to write short stories before, other than the enforced compositions of college English. But in wondering, I began to think about some of the people in my own life, and some of the tales I had heard from others, that affected me in the same hair-raising manner as did the characters and situations in D. H. Lawrence's two stories concerning possessive people like the lovely lady and neglective people like the parents of the "Rocking Horse Winner." I began to turn over in my mind a story that a young lady in California, Loren Miller, had told me. He said that in one of the small towns in Kansas where he had lived during his childhood, there had been a very pretty colored girl who, as she grew up, attracted the amorous eye of the town's only Negro doctor, the town's only Negro undertaker, and the town's Negro minister. All three of these men enjoyed her favors. The girl became pregnant. But by whom? At any rate, the doctor performed an abortion on her and she died. The undertaker who had courted her took charge of her body. The minister preached her funeral. Since all the colored people of the town knew that each one of these men had been intimate with the girl, they wondered what would happen at her funeral. All three men present, but nothing happened. She was just buried.

When I sat down at my well-traveled typewriter and began to write my first short story, "Cora Unashamed," the material of the factual narrative I'd heard from Loren Miller changed into fiction. The Negro girl became a white girl of middle-class family, whose parents did not want her to fall in love with an immigrant Greek boy whose father ran an ice-cream stand. My story consisted of what happened when this girl's mother forced her to have an abortion, the girl died, and the Negro cook spoke her piece concerning love and morals at the funeral. None of the situations in my story were as in the real one, but its inspiration came from Loren Miller's tale.

It was Marie Seaton's loan of D. H. Lawrence that started me off writing short stories in Moscow. I had had no thought of doing so. But I am glad it happened that way because I sent my first three stories from Russia to an agent in New York, and by the time I got back to America he had sold all three, one to *The American Mercury*, one to Scribner's *Fiction Parade*, and one to *Esquire*. The money came in handy. And once started, I wrote almost nothing but short stories.

When in Moscow I started writing intensively, I really did not want to be bothered with an almost nightly female visitor. On the other hand, I hated to be rude to Natasha and say, "Go home." But another and more possessive "Lovely Lady" from D. H. Lawrence's stories had come between us.

#### MAKING RUSSIANS DO RIGHT

When I went to Latvia to get my passport renewed, this procedure at the American Consulate in Riga took only a few minutes, in contrast to the great length of time required to get almost any paper stamped in the Soviet Union. I stayed only overnight in Riga, not wishing to spend any more of my precious *valuta* than necessary. Possessing less than a hundred dollars in American money, I wanted to save that for China and Japan. Fortunately, one could buy in Moscow a round-trip ticket to Riga with rubles, and my only expense in Latvia was a hotel room and an enormous dinner. When I saw the great varieties of food on the hotel menu there, I could not restrain myself. I went from soup to nuts.

When I got back to Moscow I had a very busy spring, writing at night and chasing down permits for my trip to the Far East by day. I had definitely determined not to leave Moscow until I received permission to board the Trans-Siberian for Manchuria and China. Meanwhile the Japanese had bombed Chapai, the Chinese section of Shanghai, again, and had stepped up their military operations in Manchuria. In May, the American journalist, Agnes Smedley, arrived in Moscow from China with stories of grave trouble in the Far East. The Soviet Foreign Office continued to withhold permission for me to exit by way of Siberia. Nevertheless, I went ahead with my plans, badgering Constantine Oumansky at the Foreign Press Bureau, and worrying the Writers Union and Meschrabpom to help me. At last my exit visa came through.

My next problem was to get a compartment on the Trans-Siberian Express. That train, of all the trains in the Soviet Union, was the most difficult to get on. It was booked up for weeks, sometimes months, ahead. Diplomats and Red Army men were given priority, and an ordinary citizen might be bounced off even after he had gotten a place. As soon as I received my proper documents, I applied for a berth leaving Moscow as soon as possible. It

was three months before I finally got on the train.

Meanwhile, I struggled with Intourist, the agency through which foreigners bought tickets in Moscow. The courtesies of Muscovites to me as an American visitor, and especially as a Negro, I shall never forget. But those who composed the staff of Intourist were far from courteous. The bureaucratic males and females behind the counter there—whom I hope have all since been purged—were as rude and inefficient as any clerks I have ever encountered—ruder, in fact, since they knew that no foreigner could travel anywhere in the Soviet Union, or leave Moscow, except by and through their dispensation. Before I went to Riga I had traveled always under the wing of Meschrabpom or the Writers Union, who attended to tickets for me. But when I went to Intourist alone to purchase a ticket to Latvia, my troubles began. First you applied for the ticket, and left your various papers. Then when you went back to see if the ticket was ready, as likely as not the person who had taken the application would be having his free day and so was not on duty. No one else knew anything about a Riga ticket. You went back again later in the week and yes, the ticket would be validated, but the man investigating your papers has his free day today. Come back tomorrow. Finally, the papers and the ticket are validated and handed to you over the counter. But the ticket is to Warsaw instead of Riga!

I have seen foreign tourists go utterly to pieces in the Intourist office merely trying to get a *wagon-lit* to Leningrad or make a slight change in a sight-seeing itinerary.

The Intourist clerks would usually begin by saying, "No, it's not possible," to whatever request one might make. Then, when pressed, they would say, "We'll see." When you went back a few days later, they were still "seeing" in a lackadaisical manner. This would go on until a scene—as the French say, a *scandale*—erupted on your side of the counter. Scandals did not phase Intourist, Their clerks remained unruffled. The officials then would become even more non-committal, more disinterested, and ruder than ever. Old residents of the American colony in Moscow said they thought Intourist must be entirely composed of saboteurs placed there by counter-revolutionists especially to wreck whatever good will travelers might have acquired toward the Soviet Union. To make an enemy of me, at any rate, seemed to be the determined aim and objective of Intourist each time I had occasion to deal with it.

Other state employees could be difficult, too. One night, in my room in the New Moscow hotel, a water pipe beneath my washbowl sprung a leak and a steady stream of water started shooting out, wetting my bathroom floor and the rug in the bedroom thoroughly before I noticed it. I immediately phoned down to the desk and reported the leak. Then I took the biggest vase in the room and started catching the water and pouring it into the toilet bowl near the leaking pipe. This went on for fifteen or twenty minutes, and no one came to attend to the leak. I phoned again. The clerk said blandly that there was nobody on duty but himself and he could not leave the desk. I explained that the water would, if not stopped, flood the whole room and seep through to the floor below.

He said, "But what can I do about it?"

I said, "Call a plumber."

He said, "But there is no plumber until morning."

I said, "As a Soviet citizen, do you intend to let this hotel become flooded with water and the rugs and ceilings be ruined by an all night leak?"

I could not see him, but I am sure he simply shrugged as he answered, "I can do nothing."

I said on the phone, "But, comrade, I can't stand beside the leak with a vase and catch the water all night. At least, send a tin pan or a bucket up here, please."

Another half hour went by and no pan or bucket arrived, nothing. Finally, I employed my constant ace in the hole. I went to the phone and said in my most deliberate Russian, "Listen, I am a foreigner and a guest in your country. Yet I care more about Soviet property than you do. I cannot bear to see this floor flooded and the plaster below ruined because you will do nothing. If you do not have someone up here to stop this leak in the next few minutes *I am going to call the OGPU.*"

It worked. In no time at all the hotel engineer arrived with a helper and soldering tools, and in a few moments the leak was stopped.

When I told Emma about it the next day, that long-time colored resident of Moscow said, "That's the way

Stalin stopped them train wrecks in the station yard last fall. He just called the OGPU—and when they got through shootin' engine drivers, there was no more wrecks. You have to get hard with these Russians, to make 'em do right."

#### MAY DAY IN MOSCOW

"*On sedit*—he sits," was the expression used by Russians to describe incarceration by the Political Police, the OGPU. I did not know anyone in the USSR who "sat" during my year there, except a student poet in Moscow. He came to see me once or twice early in the spring to read me some of his poems in schoolboy English. When I did not see him for a month or two, I asked where he was, and was told, "On sedit."

"Why?" I said.

But the answer was not clear. Bourgeois family background seemed to have something to do with it. A few years after my departure from Central Asia, Faisulla Khodjaiev, President of the Council of Peoples Commissars in Uzbekistan, whom I met in Tashkent, was arrested and tried as a traitor accused of negotiating with the British across the Afghan border. My Moscow editor, Karl Radek, disappeared in a later purge. And Sergei Tretiakov of *Roar China* was shot in 1938, "liquidated" as they say in Russia. In the USSR politicians were often not simply removed from office, they were removed from this world.

I attended a few sessions of the public trial in Moscow that spring of six British engineers accused of spying and sabotage. The director and five English employees of the Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Company had been lodged in Lubyanka Prison. Twelve Russians in the company were also arrested by the OGPU. One of the English engineers confessed on the stand to the charges against him, as did each of the twelve Russians. Another of the Britons signed a confession of guilt before the trial, but repudiated it. With Vishinsky as the prosecutor, however, both he and the director were sentenced to prison—as were all of the Russians. American and British spectators were amazed at the complete and detailed testimony against themselves which the Russian prisoners gave without cajoling. It was interesting to witness in action that famous and perplexing pattern of self-confession that was to become a feature of many subsequent purge trials.

Spring was soft and beautiful in Moscow. There were hundreds of tulips in the Park of Rest and Culture, and a blue haze over the distant Lenin Hills; and on the trees around the Kremlin Wall new young leaves appeared, delicate and green; the great chunks of ice floating down the Moscow River became smaller and smaller until finally the river was just a ribbon of brown. Red Square, which I crossed every day to get to my hotel from the center of the city, was swept by teasingly warm-now-cold breezes. St. Basil's Cathedral with its Oriental pineapple domes looked like a gaily painted toy church in its triangle of streets below Lenin's Tomb. That terraced tomb was like a child's block of red and violet porphyry against the Kremlin Wall with its fir tree sentinels and its soldier sentinels, too—an immobile Red Army private with a Red Star on his cap at each side of the entrance. Several times in passing I went inside the tomb, down the narrow stairs, past Lenin's body, then up and out into the spring sunlight again. All day, winter and summer, there was a long line of men, women and children, waiting to file past the bier of the greatest of the Soviet revolutionists.

On May Day, I saw those who had inherited Lenin's authority take their places on the terrace of his tomb to review the mammoth parade that would pass. The Writers Union had gotten me a coveted place in the Red Square not a hundred yards from the tomb, in the special stands reserved for diplomats and distinguished foreign visitors. This I had not expected when I asked if I might see the parade from Red Square, which required a very special OGPU pass. If this permission were granted me at all, I thought I would be on the far side of the Square, not on the side with Stalin. But perhaps my being the only Negro writer in Moscow secured so favorable a location for me.

At any rate, when the parade began, there I was not a hundred yards from Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, Kalinin, Litvinov, and the other leaders of the Kremlin. Once in the Square, however, one could not leave until the parade ended, and it lasted almost six hours. For hours and hours, sometimes in three or four massed columns at once, through the Red Square, poured the special crack units of the Red Army, the Red Cavalry, and Red Fleet; and the colorful delegations from all the varied Workers Republics of the Soviet Union in their

regional costumes; the athletic delegations, the youth delegations, the shock workers groups, the school children. And when this part of the parade was over—after which guests could leave if they wished—but I didn’t—came the thousands and thousands of just plain workers marching past in a great solid fifty-or-more-to-a-row mass of men and women with their banners, workers of the world unite!... hail TO THE SOVIET UNION!... HAIL THE PROLETARIAT OF ALL LANDS!

Overhead planes zoomed, in the streets bands played, flags flew. Sometimes that great rumbling cheer of the Red Army men began in the front ranks of a unit of troops and gathered volume as succeeding ranks joined in for blocks, until the whole of Moscow seemed filled with a mighty masculine rolling baritone, a human rumble of mounting rhythm and power like nothing else I have ever heard.

Americans who had been in residence in Moscow for several years and had seen a number of November Seventh and May Day celebrations, told me that almost always something went wrong right in front of Stalin. The year before I was there, they said that the largest of the Soviet jumbo tanks, one of the showpieces of the parade, conked out in front of Lenin’s tomb. The roaring armored tank came speeding into the Red Square with a great rumbling clatter, gun turrets swirling—then sputtered, backfired, gasped and stalled, dead in front of Stalin! The rest of the parade had to circle around the moribund tank, stuck there until a number of little tanks pulled it away. Emma said she was sure the captain of this tank "*sed it*" the rest of his life.

The May Day on which I saw the parade, a similar thing happened to another piece of military equipment. All the papers had been heralding the new streamlined Soviet fieldpieces the Red Cavalry would display—long sleek guns that could shoot a great distance. When the Parade Marshall wished especially to accent something in the line of march, the rest of the parade would be temporarily halted at the entrance to the Square. This time, while the remaining units were held back, proudly into the Square, drawn by four beautiful white horses, with an arrow-straight driver mounted on the swivel gun carriage, came the longest, sleekest, steel-grey cannon I have ever seen, that looked as though it could shoot at lightning speed for miles. The driver sat up straighter than ever as his handsome piece of field artillery approached the dictators of the Soviet Union. Nearing Lenin’s tomb, even the horses seemed to sense that they were passing Stalin, Kalinin and Molotov, for they pulled steadily and proudly ahead to cross the Square. But without the gun! Just in. front of the great dignitaries, the gun became detached from the gun carriage on which the driver was riding, and the nose of the artillery piece on its two detached wheels swooped down to the cobblestones. The proud soldier drove on unawares, leaving his deserted fieldpiece behind him in the middle of the Square. The groans of consternation and the cries of the crowd, the soldier thought were cheers, as out of Red Square he disappeared, never looking back—with no gun at all following him.

"*On sed it*," Emma said when she heard about it. "He’s in jail for sure."

From within the Kremlin gates, horses came shortly to drag the sleek left-lonesome cannon away in disgrace as the rest of the parade swirled around it. The incident tickled most Muscovites. Whether Stalin was amused or not, I don’t know.

But I rather expect the masters of the Kremlin laughed at these contretemps, too, for most Russians seemed to have a great sense of humor. Certainly, they told an infinite number of jokes and humorous anecdotes on themselves and the Soviet state. Russian Jews then had a number of jokes about Trotsky which would sound, were a non-Jew to tell them, not only anti-Soviet but anti-Semitic as well. And concerning the masters of the Kremlin on the Red Square reviewing stand at May Day atop Lenin’s tomb, there was a macabre saying that went, "The men who look at parades from Lenin’s tomb, when they go to be buried themselves, will have a fine funeral with a motor hearse and miles of limousines; lesser bureaucrats will just have a horse-drawn hearse and their mourners will march on foot behind the coffin; but if you’re an ordinary worker—you walk to the cemetery and bury yourself."

Soviet citizens, like American Negroes, often had a rather grim sense of humor. I remember in a colored paper once, after the Detroit race riots, there was a cartoon showing a little white boy displaying to another little boy the hunting trophies on the wall of his father’s den. There hung the head of an elk, a bear, a lion, a buffalo and a deer. Among these handsome trophies was the head of a Negro. Said the little boy, "My father got that one

in Detroit.”

There was an anecdote going around Moscow the spring I was there about an official delegation sent by the Kremlin to a distant mountain village in the Caucasus where no part of the Five Year Plan had been fulfilled and where nothing worked. The delegation from Moscow was to try to win the villagers over to socialism by peaceful methods. When the commissars arrived, the villagers greeted them with open arms and said, “We want to show you that you are wrong if you say that we have nothing here that works. Come with us to the public square!” They led the commissars to the village green and when they were standing in front of an old war trophy of the Crimean War—a cannon in the middle of the square—the villagers said, “See, this works!” Bang! They blew the commissars off the face of the earth! When word got back to the Kremlin, Stalin said, “Those stupid jackasses should have been liquidated!” So the village was given the Order of the Red Banner.

Concerning the editorial blessings showered by *Pravda* and *Izvestia* on the shock brigade workers who overfulfilled their Five Year quotas, they said the Kremlin had a slogan, “Never shock a shock worker by shocking him into a promotion where he won’t need to work so shocking hard.” But the play on words in the original Russian, I gathered, was even more satirical. The double edge of wit is dulled in another language where overtones are not the same. But one of the slogans which Soviet citizens declared the Church had adopted in Russia, is just as ironic in English: “*Work for God with Bolshevik Tempo.*”

Then there was the one about the Muscovite who stepped on his own foot in a crowded street car and said, “Pardon me!”

Concerning the difficulty of getting seats for Chekov’s plays at the Moscow Art Theater, since priority was given to the men and women in heavy industries, there was a current saying among the intelligentsia to the effect that, “Only workers can get seats to see intellectuals suffer.”

One of my favorite laughs concerned a writer who went to a big department store that rainy spring to buy a pair of rubbers. He picked out the rubbers from the sample styles and sizes on the counter, went through all the complicated routine of going to the cashier, having his coupon torn out of his book and paying for the purchase, then taking his sales slip back to the counter where he was given an already wrapped package containing his rubbers. But when he got home with them, they were for two *left* feet.

Screamed the writer, “We’ve gone too far left now!”

#### NATASHA'S BIG SCENE

During May Day week the servants in the New Moscow Hotel had a party, and I was invited. It was given by the maids, porters and cleaning women. I did not see there any of the other guests in the hotel, so I think I was the only resident invited. This I took as an amiable compliment. I once had been a hotel worker, too. So I felt related to the servants of the New Moscow Hotel and, although I had not told them about my work in the past, they must have felt related to me, so they invited me to their party.

It was held in the workers’ quarters in the basement of the hotel, where crepe paper had been strung up for the occasion, and a table spread with cheese, black bread, vodka and kvass. There was a balalaika player, accordions, and dancing. Those on duty took time out to come to the party in their working clothes or uniforms, stamp out a few dance steps, then go back to work. As the evening wore on and the music got livelier and livelier, two or three buxom Russian girls from the country took to the floor, started clapping hands and singing old folks songs, and taking turns jogging out a rapid country jig all by themselves. Then maybe one would choose a man to jig until he became breathless facing her in a kind of rapid heel clicking song-

Farmer boy, better grab me, hey!  
Before I fly like a pigeon—  
Fly like a pigeon—  
Fly like a pigeon away...

seemed to be the refrain of one of the songs a girl panted out as she danced. But it was this girl who grabbed the most men to dance with her. When she grabbed me, I jiggled awhile, too, as everybody egged me on until I was out of breath.

The Russians have enormous energy for singing and dancing, and they must have kept this up until dawn in the basement of the New Moscow. But about two in the morning, I went upstairs to bed—and there was Natasha come to call. When I told Natasha I'd danced with the peasant servants from the country, she said, "*Beaux gens*, no? Such nice people, fine girls!" She was sincere. Although she herself had been born and educated in Moscow, in the theater she played peasant parts. She just liked peasants—and Negroes.

I never knew why the desk clerk or the floor-maid let Natasha into my room when I was away. They never let anyone else in, and what Natasha told them, I don't know. I suppose she was like me—if she decided to get somewhere, or go someplace, she went. I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go. You might have to squeeze through a knothole, humble yourself, or drink muddy tea from consumptive bowls or eat camel sausage, pass for Mexican, or take that *last* chance, but—well, if you really want to get there, that's the way it is. If you want to see the world, or eat steaks in fine restaurants with white tablecloths, write honest books, or get in to see your sweetheart, you do such things by taking a chance. Of course, a boom may fall and break your neck at any moment, your books may be barred from libraries, or the camel sausage may lead to a prescription of arsenic. It's a chance you take.

I'd told Natasha when I first met her that I was on my way home to America. She had told me that she had a husband. Nevertheless, as long as I remained in Moscow, she came to the hotel to see me. But the last time she visited the New Moscow, a few days before I departed, Natasha staged a big scene, created it and played it herself, and held the center of the stage for hours. She ran the gamut.

Hardly had she come into my room that night than she said, "I have told my husband all."

For lack of a better rejoinder, I said, "All of what?"

"About us," Natasha said.

"Why?" I demanded.

"Because I love my husband and want to be honest with him."

"Because you must want to hurt him," I said.

"No, *mais non*, because I love you most—and want you to stay here. I can get divorced."

"I don't think you're sensible," I said. "I'm going home."

"No! Please! No! You can write scenarios, work with Meyerhold, lecture at the university." Then she began to cry.

Six months anywhere is enough to create complications, I thought to myself, especially with women.

"If you have to go," she said, "then take me with you."

"Natasha, I can't take you with me to America."

There were enough troubles just trying to earn a living in the land of Jim Crow without having a white wife on my hands. My father had married a German woman in Mexico, but I had no idea of marrying a Russian in Moscow unless I were intending to stay in the Soviet Union. And to take one back to America with me!

"But I don't really want to go to America," Natasha wailed. "*I just want you to stay here.*"

There were, I knew, many girls in the Soviet Union who did their best to marry a foreigner, hoping in that way to be able to visit abroad or, in some cases, to escape a political system they did not relish. Russian women in Tashkent were always chasing Powers with that intent in mind. But Natasha seemed to possess a deep attachment for her own land and to have only admiration for the Soviet system. She was just in love, that's all, she said.

"I have to go home," I said. "This is not my country, and I have to go home."

"If you loved me you'd stay," wailed Natasha. "But you don't love me. *C'est moi qui t'aime. Je t'aime! Je t'aime!* But you don't love me. No, you don't! You don't! You don't...."

Her lamentations filled the room, filled the hotel, filled the night. Accustomed to robust, though small, parts in large theaters, she had a good strong voice. She shook the New Moscow Hotel in English, French and Russian. Finally when her breath and her emotions were exhausted, she departed without so much as a kiss.

## HECTIC FINAL!

My last weeks in Moscow were hectic ones—trying to get a ticket to the Far East, trying to collect the remaining monies due me in various editorial offices, and rounding up final visas and permissions to get off. Besides all this, I was getting letters from home that my stepfather had wandered off again and my mother and teen-age brother were in dire need. I cabled my publishers in New York to turn over to my mother whatever royalties I might have coming. This was the money I had intended to use in China and Japan. But I determined to go to the Orient anyway—with less than a hundred American dollars in my billfold. At least I could use rubles as far as Peking. But just before I was to leave, I read where the Japanese had cut the Chinese Eastern Railway line at the Siberian border. Said the Moscow *Daily News* of June second:

“The keys of the switches of the line connecting the railways were seized from the chief of Pogranichnaya Station. The line was blocked and a barrier erected at the head to obstruct the movement of trains.”

The next day I was informed at Intourist that I could no longer obtain a through ticket to any point in China. Intourist now had a directive permitting them to sell tickets only on the Russian Trans-Siberian itself, with no connections via the Chinese Eastern. I was told I might, of course, go to China by way of Japan, and that I could buy a ticket in rubles to Vladivostok, thence by boat to a Japanese port. Beyond that I would have to pay my transportation in dollars. My dream of seeing Peking vanished. Now a whole new series of ticket reservations had to be made. It had taken three months to achieve the point where I could leave Moscow for China—now the Japanese had cut the railroad! So I started the nerve-wracking ordeal of trying to get, instead of a ticket to Peking and Shanghai, one to Vladivostok, plus difficult Foreign Office permissions to pass through that highly guarded military port. I must say, in this effort, Oumansky was of great help. Both the permissions and the tickets were finally secured from Moscow to Japan.

Meanwhile, I got a severe toothache. Almost everywhere I have ever been in the world, I've had to go to a dentist. In Calabar, on the African coast, I once had a tooth pulled by a French dentist who said he was Gauguin's cousin, but who had no anesthesia in his office, so he simply called a little barefooted African boy to hold a glass of water, grabbed his pliers, and pulled. In Haiti, I had a tooth filled by a dentist who neglected to treat the nerve. In the middle of the night the filling started hitting the nerve like a trip hammer. I went to sit on his doorstep until daylight when he woke up and pulled the tooth out. Now in Moscow an old cavity began to hurt like fury. I went to the Writers Union and asked them to recommend a dentist. They gave me a slip and sent me to a neat office near the Pushkin Statue. The dentist filled my tooth immediately and requested that I come back the next day to polish the filling. I asked him how much would it be. He looked at me in astonishment and said, “Nothing. You brought your Writers Union slip.”

I was amazed. It was the first time anywhere a dentist had not charged me a small fortune. So, in the Soviet Union, a writer, or any worker, could have his dental work done for nothing! This I have never forgotten. Elsewhere I have sometimes had to go without a much-needed new suit to have my teeth fixed. Moscow dental customs, the unveiling of the harem women in Turkestan, and the disappearance of the color line throughout Soviet Asia, are the three achievements I remember best of the whole USSR. A free dental filling seemed to me a minor miracle.

But then many things were happening in the Soviet Union that I had never seen happen elsewhere. For example, there had just been held in Moscow the First Conference of Prostitutes-Become-Workers. This unusual gathering gave out statistics which state that just before the Tzar fell, there were forty thousand prostitutes in St. Petersburg and almost as many in Moscow. But now in Moscow there were only about four hundred. As far as I could tell these four hundred were invisible. The old organized vice rings of pimps, procurers and brothel keepers had entirely disappeared, along with the infamous Yellow Ticket, the card that prostitutes once carried. That ticket, so this conference of reformed women said, had now been turned into a Trade Union Card for most of the women of sin, since all who wished had jobs, and a special effort was being made by the government to rehabilitate those who needed medical or social aid.

In Moscow, I had met only one woman whom I thought might formerly have been a prostitute. I had night-lifed in many seaports as a sailor, and I recognized her as the type of higher-priced, delicately perfumed, well-dressed but demurely bold hustler to be found in the politer bars from Hamburg to Naples, Le Havre to Havana. This woman in Moscow had been the recent mistress of a tough American old-line labor organizer turned Communist. But now that he had gone back home, she was looking for another lover. Meanwhile, having a good clerical job, she no longer needed to sell her favors, but was free to give them away generously to any man who caught her fancy. Of course, she would accept gifts—soap, stockings, foreign lipstick—since such items of decent quality were almost impossible to purchase. But she herself was not now for sale as I believe she once had been. Every morning she went to work, and her little boy was a sturdy Young Pioneer, not neglected as he might have been in the old days when his mother had to haunt the bars all night in search of a livelihood.

One of my problems upon leaving Moscow was what to do with all the stuff I had accumulated—gifts from one end of the country to the other, books, and manuscripts of poems—since in continuing around the world, I wanted to travel light. All of my books by Negro writers I gave to the Foreign Library in Moscow. I gave to various friends my excess gifts. The remains of my soap and toilet paper I gave to particularly favored friends like the Carmons, Emma and Natasha before she staged her big scene. My camera I gave to the schoolboy son of the woman I thought had led a sinful life. It had given me good service and I had taken dozens of excellent pictures of Koestler, Nichan, Powers, Nina Zaratelli and the workers and peasants of Central Asia. I kept my typewriter, however, and a copy of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* to read across Siberia. But the Russians are a sweet gift-giving people, and I hadn't counted on the numerous farewell presents they were going to give me before I went away. It turned out in the end that I got on the train as loaded down as ever.

A few nights before I left Moscow, Fred and Ethel Ellis gave a farewell party for me. The Ellises were perhaps the most popular young American couple in Moscow then, liked by both left- and right-wingers among the American colony in the city. Living in the heart of the capital as they did, folks were always in and out of their big hotel room. Fred was, I believe, a cartoonist for the Moscow paper, *Trud*, an organ of the Central Trade Unions, and also, I think, sent drawings to the New York *Daily Worker*. Ethel, as I recall, did nothing except take care of her family. Fred was a sleepy-looking, amiable fellow, and Ethel a lively, sparkling little woman. Energetically she rounded up all my friends, the Carmons, and the Chens, Emma, the American journalists, the last three Negroes of the movie group—Rudd, Patterson, and Smith—and Natasha, and gave me a lively send-off indeed. It was marred only by some woman resident of the hotel knocking on the door at two a.m. and gasping in various languages, "Help! I've got a fishbone in my throat."

Everybody stopped talking and dancing to get the fishbone out of the strange woman's throat. Then the fun continued. Natasha was in a not very festive humor, so she left without saying goodbye before the party was over. Charlie Ashleigh—whom everybody called poor Charlie (he was going to the dogs)—became very intoxicated and passed out, occupying the Ellis boy's bed. This created a situation because, when about three a.m. Emma announced that she could no longer stay on her feet, either, the Ellises said, "Emma could stay here, but we can't get Charlie up. Somebody will have to take Emma home. There's no place for her to sleep."

Since Emma was colored and I was colored, and there were no other colored people left at the party, my race pride demanded that I take Emma home. (I did not want her to "disgrace the race.") She lived miles across Moscow over by the station! She was then about sixty years old, stout and heavy on her legs. Emma did manage, however, to get down the stairs with my support and navigate a block or two as we sought in vain a passing bus. But at the sudden sight of a *droski*, Emma cried, "I can't make! I can't, Langston," and started to sink downward. It cost me eighty rubles to take Emma home in a cab. But, as we jogged along, the cool spring air quickly revived her and she started telling me the latest Moscow gossip. She also asked me to give her regards to Harlem when I got home.

#### TRANS-SIBERIAN EXPRESS

On those days when the Trans-Siberian Express leaves Moscow for the Far East, the atmosphere at the station is almost like that of a New York pier when a big liner is sailing. Crowds come to see friends off, to jam the coaches,

to laugh and talk and weep. And when the train, finally emptied of visitors, pulls away, cheers, cries and screams follow it from the station. Hats and handkerchiefs are waved. Some people run all the way to the end of the platform trying to keep up with the moving windows in which their relatives or friends are framed as the coaches gather speed. Then the station is gone. Moscow is retreating. The gray houses, tall apartments, Kremlin towers and the bulbs of the Creek Orthodox Churches recede back, back, backwards to give way to wooden houses and mud streets, rustic suburbs, then patches of open country, log dachas, farms, forests of birch and pine, and open fields. Then the coaches are quiet, except for the clicking of rails, as the passengers sink into their compartments and catch their breath.

That is the way it was on the day I started home in the spring of 1933 by way of the Orient. Twenty or thirty people had come to see me off—Russians and Negroes, actors and writers and representatives of Meschrappom, Lydia Filatova and the two film translators, Doris Nemirova and Lydia Mirseva, who had gone through the movie days with me; Muscovites and Americans all waving as the long train pulled away from the Moscow station and I hung out the window waving back. When at last I sank down in the seat I found myself sharing with a lone Red Army man, I took a deep breath, happy at last to be headed home. I lay back comfortably in a corner to relax, for I was very tired. I was glad the Red Army man sharing the compartment with me was tired, too, and a little drunk from the vodka he and his friends had been drinking to their parting. He was more sleepy than talkative. Before the train got outside the city, this soldier had settled into his corner and gone to sleep. I sat looking out the window, thinking how wonderful it was to be going to Japan, China, then home, and how one phase of my existence had ended and a new one would be beginning. At least, I thought one phase had ended. But I was wrong. Just as the train began to speed through the springtime peace and quiet of the green fields in the late afternoon sunlight, the door of my compartment burst open—and there stood Natasha.

“Where did you come from?” was all I could say.

She burst out laughing, and laughed for a very long time. Then she came in, threw her arms around me and said, “I am going to Vladivostok with you.”

“Great day in the morning!” I must have looked very distressed.

She said, “Don’t you want me to go?”

I said, “It will cost you a fortune.”

She laughed, “I don’t care. I’ve taken all the money I’ve saved. Since I can’t go to America with you, I’m going right to the boat—right to the edge of my own land, to the Pacific—as far as I can go with you.” I was so astonished that I guess I didn’t say anything encouraging because Natasha began to look hurt. Then she repeated, “Don’t you want me to go?”

I said, “I don’t think you should. What about your husband?”

She repeated, “Don’t you want me to go?”

I said, “No, I don’t believe you should go.” Thinking all the while of ten days of Natasha, the whole way to Siberia! Great day, no! All the peace and happiness and freedom of the first half hour of that train ride gone!

“Then you don’t want me to go with you,” Natasha said, and she began to cry. Big tears rolled down her cheeks, then sobs came. Another scene! She put her head in my lap and wept aloud. But the Red Army man in his corner slept on. And the fresh green forests and the wide green fields kept gliding backwards outside the window. About that time the train porter knocked on the compartment door and said the dining car was open.

“Natasha, don’t cry. Sit up,” I pleaded. “Come on, let’s go in the diner and get some tea.”

Russians under almost any circumstances, I had learned, drink tea. Natasha stopped crying, wiped her eyes, stood up and began to powder her face in the mirror.

“We can’t talk in here, anyhow,” I said, “we’ll wake up the army officer.”

“I don’t want to talk anymore,” she choked. “You don’t want me to go with you.”

But when the tea came, she did talk. We sat there at the table for two or three hours as the train rolled ahead in the twilight. She ate a little dinner. And at some tiny village station where the engine stopped for water about nine o’clock, she got off in the darkness to return to Moscow.

I had missed Natasha in the crowd at the station, among all the other friends who came to see me leave. But I

did not miss her badly enough to wish that she were on the train with me. Yet, when she got off alone in the dark, I felt unkind, ungallant, embarrassed and unhappy. Natasha probably had to sit in that dreary little wayside depot all night waiting for a train back to the capital, I thought, and maybe when the train came, it would be crowded and she could not get on it. I felt very sad, very bad—yet very glad she didn't go any further.

#### TEN DAYS TO VLADIVOSTOK

Natasha left behind her on the train a little box of gifts, including a beautiful old Russian cashmere shawl for my mother. And at the bottom of her box was a little red-covered notebook, all of its pages blank except the last one. On this page she had written, "*Consolez-vous—s'il y a un peche, c'est mon peche.*" Then in the very corner, quite small: "*Aimez moi.*"

I didn't feel very happy as I put the little notebook back in the box, so I picked up *The Magic Mountain* and started to read. But before I had read a page, I went to sleep.

The next morning we were rolling through the Black Earth regions of rich farm lands. We crossed the Volga, then over the Ural Mountains into Asia. At stations on the vast steppes, peasant women in white head-cloths sold fermented mare's milk, sour pickles and hot cabbage rolls. Cities passed like Ekaterinburg and Tiumen on the Tura River, and Omsk where the Fifth Time Zone begins, Tartarskaya and Novosibirsk where the new Turksik Railroad from Tashkent meets the Trans-Siberian. Then came Krassnoyarsk founded in 1628, Irkutsk, a center for furs and gold near Lake Baikal whose cold blue waters shimmered in the Siberian sun. Here began the Soviet Far East sparsely populated by Russians, Ukrainians, Koreans and Chinese, but teeming with reindeer, elk, wolves, foxes, ermine, sable and otter. Then came Khabarovsk on the Amur River, and finally Vladivostok on the Bay of the Golden Horn, the terminus of the longest railroad in the world, the Trans-Siberian, fifty-five hundred miles in length.

On my train, but not traveling first class, I found the actors of the Buryat-Mongolian musical troupe that had so delighted Moscow theater audiences that spring. They knew almost no Russian, so we could not talk together, but I drank tea with them a few times on the way to the Mongolian border where they were to take buses, or maybe camels, to get home. All through Siberia I saw camels outside the stations, and also those long-maned, funny, stumpy little Siberian ponies—very strong and swift, I was told. I saw few automobiles. People rode ponies or camels. These ships of the desert, whom I'd thought of as being incapable of standing Siberian winters, would rise from their wobbly knees in the railroad yards loaded down with lumber or zinc pipes, and hump themselves over the horizon to distant constructions rising in the steppes. I wondered what the camel population of the Soviet Union was. Including Turkestan, it must run into the millions.

As far as I could learn, the most distinguished passenger on my train was a Hollander, Professor Dr. J. Rahder, a famous authority on obscure Oriental languages, their history, roots and derivations. Dr. Rahder was heading for Mongolia to do further work there on the verb-endings of some language of which I had never even heard. He had forgotten all his baggage except his brief case—completely forgotten it in changing trains in Warsaw—and so had nothing with him but paper and pencils, not even a change of clothing for the trip across the Soviet Union. But in Poland he had bought two enormous wicker baskets full of oranges and lemons and a case of bottled water, and on the trip drank nothing but this water and fruit juices, for fear that even Russian tea might be germ-laden. Dr. Rahder, a big fleshy man, was in a merry mood and did not seem to mind the loss of his bags. He was looking forward with excitement to once more delving into a comparatively unknown and scarcely annotated language.

It seems that from the university at Leyden, Rahder went every summer to the Far East for purposes of study. He had crossed on the Trans-Siberian a dozen or more times, so the trip was no novelty to him. On the train he occupied himself correcting a draft of his annotated translation of the *Gukansho* written about 1220 by the Buddhist abbot, Fujiwara Jien. This, he said, was one of the earliest attempts in the East to interpret and comment upon, not merely to record, the past. It was a sort of philosophy of history as derived from the then-known records of India, China and Japan. A few years later Rahder's translation of Jien was published in English in several sections in *Acta Orientalia* and reprints were sent to me, as he had promised they would be. Professor

Dr. J. Rahder might forget his clothes but no small detail of his work; not even a casual promise to send the *Gukansho* to a stranger he met on the Trans-Siberian, was forgotten.

Many of the people on the train got off before it came to Irkutsk. There Rahder and the Buryat-Mongolian actors of Ulan-Bator left us, as did a young Russian who had gone to Moscow to get married and was taking his bride back to a forest reserve for sables in the Barguzinian Taiga far across Lake Baikal. Several of the coaches of the train had been dropped and, by the time we got Khabarovsk on the Amur River where Japanese speedboats lurked, my coach was almost empty. There were very few passengers left on the train when we got to Vladivostok, the end of the line.

A gray fortress of a town edging the water at the foot of a series of scraggly hills, Vladivostok, dismal, damp, depressing and dirty, looked like the last outpost of a shabby frontier. The hotel was unattractive and the tariff very high. Dinner consisted of plain boiled potatoes, red cabbage, tea and the toughest steak I've ever tried to chew—but at least I could stick a fork in the gravy. There seemed to be in town almost nothing to see worth the trouble. Since much of the area was marked off limits to the casual stroller, I contented myself walking mostly up and down Lenin Street, where I saw newspapers in Japanese and Chinese on the kiosks, and Chinese lychee nuts on street-corner stands. In the cobbled roadway of a main street near the curb a man who looked as if he might be Chinese lay quite stiff and dead. No one seemed to pay him any mind. People simply walked around his body as they passed.

I was glad the next day to get on the boat sailing for Korea and Japan. In Vladivostok I had been unable to find anything amusing to do with the bulging pocket full of rubles I had left. Since rubles would be of no value in any other country in the world, I finally gave them all to the maid at the hotel.

\* \* \*

## 8 WORLD WITHOUT END

### BOMBS IN BARCELONA

Nicolás Guillén went with me to Spain as a correspondent for a Cuban paper. Since everybody said food in that war-torn country was scarce, we took along with us an enormous basket of edibles. But we ate it all on the train. Guillén was a jovial companion with whom to travel and on the way to Barcelona he entertained me with Cubanisms and folk songs:

Oyelo bien, encargada!  
Esta es la voz que retumba—  
Esta es la ultima rumba  
Que bailamos en tu morada.

At the border between France and Spain there is a tunnel, a long stretch of darkness through which the night express from Paris passes in the early morning. When the train comes out into the sunlight, on the Spanish side of the mountain, with a shining blue bay where children swim in the Mediterranean, you see the village of Port Bou. The town seemed bright and quiet that morning. But as I left the train, I noticed that almost all of the windows of the station were shattered. There were machine-gun marks on the walls of the customhouse and several nearby houses were in ruins, gutted by bombs. In the winding streets of Port Bou there were signs, refugio, pointing to holes in the mountains to be used in case of air raids. And on old walls there were new Loyalist posters. One read: "It's better to be the tail of a lion than the head of a rat." This was my first view of wartime Spain, this little town by the blue sea where travelers changed trains.

In the country they were harvesting the wheat, and as we chugged southward, men and women were swinging primitive scythes in the fields. The Barcelona train was very crowded that day and all around me folks kept up a rapid fire of conversation in various accents. Guillén and I were the only Negroes on the train, so I thought, until at one of the stations when we got out to buy fruit, we noticed a dark face leaning from a window of the coach ahead of us. When the train started again, we went forward to investigate. He was a brown-skin boy from the Canary Islands in a red shirt and a blue beret. He had escaped from the Canaries by the simple expedient of getting into his fishing boat with the rest of her crew and sailing toward French Morocco. From there he had gotten to France. The Canary Islands were a part of Spain, he said, but the fishermen did not like the men who had usurped power, so many of them sailed their boats away and came to fight with the Loyalists. This young man spoke a strange Spanish dialect that was hard for Guillén to understand, but he told us that many folks in the Canaries are colored, mixed with African and Spanish blood.

What should have been a short trip from the French border to Barcelona, took all day and well into the night. When our blacked-out train pulled into the blacked-out city near midnight, Nicolas Guillén was so tired that he had stopped talking or singing, and wanted nothing so much as a good bed. There were no lights whatsoever on the platform of the Barcelona station, so we followed the crowd moving slowly like shadows into the station where one lone lantern glimmered behind a ticket wicket. I was loaded down as usual with bags, books, records and a typewriter. Guillén had sense enough to travel light with mostly just his songs and himself. He helped me carry things, and clung to what little remained of our hamper of food. We took a bus through pitch-black streets to a hotel on the Ramblas—there was no gas for taxis and only one bus met each train. I was so tired that night that I slept right through an air-raid alert. Hotel instructions were that all guests were to assemble in the lobby when an alert sounded. Since the hotel had no basement, the ground floor was considered safest. But the so-called ground floor of this hotel was really several feet above street level. The lobby had enormous French doors and windows opening on a balcony. It did not look very safe to me. But I learned later that in a bombing no place was really safe, and that the Spaniards had two rather fatalistic theories about protection. One was during an air raid to go to the roof of a building and fall down with it if a bomb struck. The other was go to the ground floor and, in case of a hit, be buried at once under debris.

One could tell that Barcelona was jittery from the terrific bombing it had undergone the day before I arrived. But nothing happened during the first twenty-four hours I was there, so Guillén and I walked about, looking at the destruction and at the anti-aircraft guns on most of the busy comers, the flower sellers on the tree-lined Ramblas, and the passing crowds everywhere, with folks clinging to the overcrowded streetcars all day long. Sitting in the café, whenever the public radios started to blare out the latest war news, everybody would jump. Nerves were certainly on edge. But there were no planes overhead all day.

As Guillén and I sat at a sidewalk table on the Ramblas that afternoon, a dark young man passed, turned, looked back at me and spoke. He recognized me, he said, because he had heard me read my poems at the library

in New York. He was a Puerto Rican named Roldan, who had come from Harlem to serve as an interpreter in Spain. At that moment he was on his way to a dance at a little club where the Cubans and other Spanish-speaking peoples from the Caribbean gathered. He invited us to come with him. The club had a beautiful courtyard and a little bar where rum drinks were mixed. The party that afternoon was in honor of the International Brigaders on leave, among them several Spanish-speaking Negroes and a colored Portuguese. Catalonian soldiers and their girls mingled gaily with the Negro guests. And Guillén, lionized as Cuba's most famous poet, was in his element, surrounded by girls.

That night back at our hotel we knew it was wartime because, in the luxurious dining room with its tuxedoed waiters, there was only one fixed menu with no choice of food. The dinner was good, but not elaborate. Later we went to an outdoor café for coffee. Until midnight we sat watching the crowds strolling up and down the tiled sidewalks of the Ramblas. The fact that Barcelona was lightless did not keep people home on a warm evening. There was a wan bulb behind the bar inside to help the barman find his bottles, but other than that no visible light save for the stars shining brightly. The buildings were great grey shadows towering in the night, with windows shuttered everywhere and curtains drawn. There must be no visible lights in any windows to guide enemy aviators.

At midnight, the public radios on many corners began to blare the war news and people gathered in large groups to hear it. Then the café closed, and we went to the hotel. I had just barely gotten to my room and begun to undress when the low extended wail of a siren began, letting us know that Fascist planes were coming. They came, we had been told, from Mallorca across the sea at a terrific speed, dropped their bombs, then circled away into the night again. Quickly, I put on my shirt, passed Guillén's room, and together we started downstairs. Suddenly all the lights went out in the hotel. We heard people rushing down the stairs in the dark. A few had flashlights with them. Some were visibly frightened. In the lobby a single candle was burning, casting giant-like shadows on the walls. In an ever-increasing wail the siren sounded louder and louder, droning its deathly warning. Suddenly it stopped. By then the lobby was full of people, men, women and children, speaking in Spanish, English, French.

In the distance we heard a series of quick explosions.

"Bombs?" I asked.

"No, antiaircraft guns," a man explained.

Everyone became very quiet. Then we heard the guns go off again.

"Come here," a man called, leading the way. Several of us went out on the balcony where, in the dark, we could see the searchlights playing across the sky. Little round puffs of smoke from the antiaircraft shells floated against the stars. In the street a few women hurried along to public bomb-proof cellars.

Then for a long while nothing happened. No bombs fell. After about an hour, the lights suddenly came on in the hotel as a signal that the danger had ended. Evidently, the enemy planes had been driven away without having completed their mission. Everyone went back upstairs to bed. The night was quiet again. I put out my light, opened the window and, never being troubled with sleeplessness, I was soon sound asleep. The next thing I knew was that, with part of my clothes in my arms, I was running in the dark toward the stairs. A terrific explosion somewhere nearby had literally lifted me out of bed. Apparently I had slept through an alert, for almost all the other guests in the hotel had already assembled in the lobby, huddled in various stages of dress and undress. At the foot of the stairs I put my trousers on over my pajamas and sat down shaking like a leaf, evidently having been frightened to this dire extent while still asleep, because I had hardly realized I was afraid until I felt myself shaking. When I put one hand on the other, both hands were trembling. There were the sounds of what seemed like a major battle going on in the streets outside—but this was only the antiaircraft guns firing at the sky, so someone near me explained. Suddenly I developed the worst stomachache I've ever had in my life. I managed to find my way to a men's room about the time a distant explosion sounded, far away, yet near enough to cause the hotel to shake. When I came back, by the light of the single candle at the desk, I managed to find Guillén, sitting calmly like Buddha on a settee under a potted palm. He said, "Ay, *chico, eso es!*" Well, this is it! Which was of little comfort.

Gradually I began to be fully awake and less frightened, so I sat down, too, smoked a cigarette, and got acquainted with some of the other folks in the lobby. After perhaps a half hour, when the crackling of the antiaircraft batteries had died down, an all clear sounded, and the desk clerk said we might return to our beds. He blew out his candle before opening some of the French doors leading onto the balcony overlooking the Ramblas. Some of us went out on the balcony to see what was happening in the streets. An occasional military motor passed without lights, and a few people moved up and down—police and rescue workers, I supposed. As I stood there with the others a sudden crackle of shots rang out in our direction from across the corner square.

Glass came down all over us from windows on the upper floors. A machine gun was firing directly at the hotel! We almost fell over each other getting back inside the lobby. Door and shutters were slammed again. Shortly some soldiers entered from the street and said that someone on an upper floor had turned on a light. (Their orders were to fire at any exposed light in any building.) Sternly they mounted the stairs in search of the offender. Later I learned that some foreigner (not knowing the rules) had turned on a bedside bulb after he had opened his window for air. So the guards simply blasted away at the lighted room. The frightened guest was severely reprimanded. And I had cause to quake all over again. It was quite a while before I went back to sleep that night.

Eventually, however, I got used to air raids in Spain—the Junkers, Heinkels, Savoias and Capronis going over—and the sound and the feel of bombs bursting. But I never got used to the alerts—those baleful, high, eerie, wailing sirens of warning.

#### SWEET WINE OF VALENCIA

Somewhere along the line, the railroad to Valencia had been bombed, and no one knew just when the train service would be resumed. So Guillén and I, with others in the hotel who wished to go south, managed to hire a car to drive down the coast. Bright and early one morning through the Catalonian countryside we went speeding, through villages as old as the Roman Empire, and along the dancing Mediterranean, blue beneath the morning sky. We passed fields of wheat, groves of olives and oranges, and cities that recently had been bombed from the air or shelled from the sea. Sometimes elderly peasants in the fields lifted a clenched fist in the government salute. On walls half ruined by explosives, slogans were freshly painted hailing the People's Army. And in village squares young men were drilling to go to the front. The beautiful landscape of Spain rolled by as our car went down the road south, the Spain that had for more than a year occupied the front pages of the world, the Spain of the huge Madison Square Garden meetings in New York, the Spain that I had seen placarded in the main streets of cities like Buffalo and Denver and Salt Lake when I had lectured there: aid besieged Madrid!... milk FOR THE BABIES OF SPANISH DEMOCRACY!... MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO the loyalists!... The Spain to which had come from all over the world young men—including many Negroes—to fight in the International Brigades. The Spain that had brought up thousands of young Moors from Morocco as shock troops for Franco. Divided Spain, with men of color fighting on both sides. To write about them I had come to Spain.

Among the things I wanted to find out was what effect, if any, the bringing by Franco of dark troops to Spain from North Africa had had on the people in regard to their racial attitudes. Had color prejudice been created in a land that had not known it before? What had been the treatment of Moorish prisoners by the Loyalists? Were wounded Moors segregated in the prison hospitals? Were there any Moors at all on the government side? How were American Negroes received in the cities of Spain when they came on furlough from the Brigades?

As I wondered about these things, our car began to slow down in the late afternoon for traffic was growing heavier on the road. Now burros, trucks and oxcarts mingled in increasingly long lines. Fords and oxen, peasants on mule-back and soldiers in American trucks, the old and the new vied for dusty passage. On either side of us were orange groves as far as one could see. I thought of *Cuentos Valencianos* and the novel, *Entre Naranjos*, by Blasco-Ibañez that I had read in Mexico. About sunset I saw in the distance medieval towers, mingling with tall modern structures. We were approaching a city, a big city.

"Valencia," the chauffeur said.

Ancient Mediterranean seaport, now the seat of the Spanish government. From my days as a merchant seaman, I had happy memories of Valencia. That night as I looked out the windows in the Hotel Londres with the crowded Plaza Castelos below, I was glad to find myself again in that pleasant coastal town. Valencia was a rest center for Loyalist troops and numbers of foreign sailors were in and out, too, including some Americans on boats bringing supplies to Spain. The cafés were full morning to night—even long after dark, for Valencia did not take care to black out as completely as Barcelona, although the city was shelled from the sea and bombed from the air with frequency. But the Valencians just didn't seem to care much. They had good wine and good food—fresh fish, melons and the sweetest of oranges and grapes—much more food than any other city I visited in Spain. And there were parks and bathing beaches, music and dancing, antiaircraft guns making fireworks in the sky every night, and tracer bullets arching like Roman candles in the air as Franco's bombs lighted up the port. The docks were miles from the heart of Valencia, so whenever an alert sounded, the citizens would say, "Oh, they're just going to bomb the port, not us." And they kept right on doing whatever they were doing. Nobody bothered much to seek shelter. People were always being nicked by bits of antiaircraft shrapnel showering down on them as they stood in the street or on rooftops trying to see the enemy planes when they should have been indoors.

I spent a week or so in Valencia before moving on to Madrid and the battle fronts. Word of our coming had already been sent ahead from Paris to the House of Culture in Valencia, so the poet, Miguel Hernandez and

several other writers made Guillén and me welcome, and soon found for us a guesthouse where we might stay much cheaper than at a hotel. But the day we arrived the House of Culture was draped in mourning and the body of Gerda Taro, young Hungarian photographer, was lying in state there. Taking pictures at the front during an attack, she had been smashed between a tank and a truck the day before. She was Robert Capa's friend in Spain, and like him took wonderful photographs, everyone said. Valencia honored her as the first foreign newspaperwoman to die in battle during the war.

From Valencia I wrote a long letter to the girl I was in love with then, Elsie Roxborough, in Detroit. Elsie had staged a play of mine, *Emperor of Haiti*, and was ambitious to become a director in the professional theater, radio, or motion pictures. She was a lovely-looking girl, ivory-white of skin with dark eyes and raven hair like a Levantine. Each time that we met in Detroit or Cleveland or Chicago, Elsie would tell me about her dreams, and wonder whether or not it would be better for her to pass for white to achieve them. From what I knew of the American entertainment field and how Negroes were then almost entirely excluded from the directorial or technical aspects of it, I agreed with her that it was difficult for any colored person to gain entrance except as a performer—as a director or technician, almost impossible—and for a colored woman I would think it harder even than for a man. Elsie was often mistaken for white in public places, so it would be no trouble at all for her to pass as white. While I was in Spain she wrote me that she had made up her mind to do so. She intended to cease being colored. The intervals between her letters to me gradually became greater, until finally no letter came at all. When I got back to the United States, Elsie had disappeared into the white world. None of her friends saw her any more, nor did I. But every Christmas for several years she sent me a carefully chosen little present—with no return address on the packet.

That summer in Spain the beach at Valencia was as lively as Coney Island on the Fourth of July. The sand and surf were crowded with soldiers on leave and their girls. In the surf I saw one afternoon an ebony-dark young man, bathing with a party of Spaniards. Thinking he was perhaps an American or a Jamaican from one of the International Brigades, when he came out of the water I spoke to him in English, but he replied in Spanish. He was an African from Guinea on the West Coast, who had come to study in Spain before the war. He had enlisted in the People's Army, he told me, but having been a university student, he was assigned to the officers' school in Valencia to study for a commission.

I asked this young African what he thought about the war. He said, "I hope the government wins because the new Republic stands for a liberal colonial policy with a chance for my people in Africa to become educated. On Franco's side are all the old dukes and counts and traders who have exploited the colonies so long, never giving us schools or anything else. Now they are making the Africans fight against the Spanish people—using the Moors and my own people, too, to try to crush the Republic. And the same Italians who dropped bombs on Ethiopia now come over here to help Franco bomb Spaniards. You can pick up shrapnel in Valencia with Italian markings on it."

When he learned I was from New York, he wanted to know all about Harlem, and if I had ever met Joe Louis. He said he would like to come to America some day.

"To stay?" I asked him.

"No," he said, "just to visit. I like Spain. My wife is Spanish."

"I like Spain, too," I said, "only I miss the bullfights."

"I never saw one," he said, "and now all the famous matadors have run away to Franco where the money is. They are not as brave at fighting fascists as they are at facing bulls."

A common saying in Valencia was, "All the best bullfighters and all the best whores have gone over to the enemy—but we'll get along without them." That summer I did not see any bullfighters, but the few remaining prostitutes were making a fortune. Valencia, like all Mediterranean seaports, had had a great many houses of pleasure when I was there on a freighter in the early 'twenties. Now there were not nearly so many, although the city was full of soldiers on leave and sailors with bonus pay to spend, looking for agreeable girls. What houses of ill-fame there were now operated only from four in the afternoon until seven in the evening. But during these three hours of operation, the houses were as crowded as a New York subway train at rush hour, and the women did a rushing business. Unlike American soldiers visiting such houses, the Spaniards did not queue up and take their proper turns. Instead, they pushed, shoved and crowded by the hundreds into the parlors of the houses, charging boisterously but amiably like young bulls after each girl who came into view. As soon as a woman was free, she was mobbed by as many men as could reach her at once. Finally the girl would manage to untangle one eager customer from the mob and disappear, to return in a few minutes for another. When the doors were closed at seven, the girls of the houses remained at work until all those within the gates were accommodated.

Such after-hours courtesies, however, did not exist in Madrid, I learned later in the summer. There the

houses of prostitution like every other business, had to close promptly on time; unserved patrons, no matter how long they had been waiting, had to leave. Madrid was a fighting city, not a center of furlough pleasures; so the black-out and curfew were strictly enforced. But in Madrid after dark the ladies of the evening took to the streets. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Ernest Hemingway has a vivid description of nocturnal love-making along the avenues of the besieged capital. But I do not recall that he described one of its most picturesque areas. After dark just off the Puerta del Sol in the heart of Madrid, in the block behind the Telefonica—the city's only skyscraper and a favorite target for Franco's artillery—numerous prostitutes and hundreds of soldiers off duty congregated. On moonlight nights these human shadow shapes, milling about, could see others only dimly in the moonlight. On nights of no moon, in the inky blackness between the tall buildings, no one could see anything. But the darkness up and down the street would be pinpointed by the tiny flames of dozens and dozens of matches being lighted by the soldiers to peer into the faces of the prostitutes walking in the dark. The blacked-out canyon of the street danced with little flames of hope, burning briefly, then flung to the ground as some young soldier, lighting a match at the sound of a seductive voice, found himself peering into a broken-down witch's face.

"*Caramba!* You're older than my grandmother!" was a not infrequent exclamation as the match dropped to the pavement and the soldier in disgust moved on to the next feminine voice calling in the dark. But sometimes an artillery shell gave a sudden burst of light, enough for a soldier to see a woman clearly, and perhaps pick out a partner for his needs.

Concerning the nice girls of the town, there was a very sad story going the rounds of Madrid that year. In pre-revolutionary Spain, good maidens did not go out with young men until they were engaged, and only then accompanied by a chaperon. Such girls remained virgin until married. If it were rumored otherwise, and chastity were doubted, a girl might never get a good husband. But when the Franco troops besieged Madrid in overwhelming numbers early in the days of the Civil War, and when it seemed that the city could hold out no longer, word spread that if Madrid fell to Franco his Moorish legions would rape all the women in the city. This pleasure, without hindrance, Franco had promised them. Rather than be raped, many of the good girls of Madrid decided to give themselves to their sweethearts—the gallant young men who expected to die anyway, within a few days, in defense of the city. So, under the thunder of Franco guns and the bombs of foreign planes, one thunderous night shaken by gunfire, a sort of mass submission of the decent maidens of Madrid to their beloveds took place. But due to the miracle of "*No pasaran!*"—*They Shall Not Pass!*—the city did not fall—not that week, nor that month, nor that year. Madrid held out. Then, even in the eyes of their own lovers, thousands of the nice girls of Madrid, since they were no longer virgins, were held in contempt.

In Madrid, when I went to visit the famous bull ring, it was empty save for anti-aircraft guns mounted in the arena. Madrid's famous *majas* with their mantillas were gone, too, and the ladies of the evening were mostly homely hags. The great actors and actresses and musicians—except for a very few courageous artists—had all fled to San Sebastian, Salamanca, or Seville along with the rich industrialists and the Franco generals. But one great artist remained, the flamenco singer, La Niña de los Peines. She refused to leave the city she loved. When I learned in Valencia that La Niña was still singing in Madrid under fire, I decided it was time I got my permit validated for the front. Madrid was the front.

#### BREAKFAST IN MADRID

My first Sunday in Madrid, having heard that La Niña de los Peines was singing, I found the theater. The performance was at eleven o'clock in the morning—why that odd hour I never knew—but the place was already crowded when I arrived to discover on a bare stage a group of Gypsy guitarists and dancers clapping hands and tapping heels as I entered. In their midst on a wooden kitchen chair sat a middle-aged woman. The performers were not dressed in traditional Gypsy clothing—as in a professional theater presentation—but wore the ordinary working clothes of poor Madrileños. There was nothing visually colorful or picturesque about them. They might have been people out of the audience sitting on the barren stage with no special lighting and no curtains, and without a spotlight, fooling around with a few guitars. Never having seen La Niña before, I asked if she were there. My seat neighbor said, "Yes. The old one in the middle on the chair, that's her."

La Niña de los Peines, Pastora Pavón. She was clapping her hands with the others, but someone else was singing when I sat down. Shortly, without any introduction or fanfare, she herself sat up very straight in her chair and, after a series of quavering little cries, began to half-speak, half-sing a solea—to moan, intone and cry in a Gypsy Spanish I did not understand, a kind of raw heartbreak rising to a crescendo that made half the audience cry aloud with her after the rise and fall of each phrase. The guitars played behind her, but you forgot the guitars and heard only her voice rising hard and harsh, wild, lonely and bitter-sweet from the bare stage of the theater with the unshaded house lights on full. This plain old woman could make the hair rise on your head, could do to

your insides what the moan of an air-raid siren did, could rip your soul-case with her voice. I went to hear La Niña many times. I found the strange, high, wild crying of her flamenco in some ways much like the primitive Negro blues of the deep South. The words and music were filled with heartbreak, yet vibrant with resistance to defeat, and hard with the will to savor life in spite of its vicissitudes. The poor of Madrid adored La Niña de los Peines—this old Girl with the Combs—who refused to leave her besieged city, and whose voice became part of the strength of Madrid's stubborn resistance under the long-range guns, a few miles away.

The Franco batteries shelled the city almost daily. I wondered, when I first arrived in Madrid, why I was offered my choice of the large and beautifully furnished front rooms on the top floor of the Alianza de Intelectuales, instead of the much smaller former servant's room at the back of the house. With living quarters very scarce in Madrid, and the clubhouse crowded, I wondered why someone was not already occupying these spacious front rooms with a lovely view of the city. Gratefully I accepted one. Guillén, much wiser, took a servant's room below stairs. I soon learned that my room, being a high corner room, was the room most exposed to shellings in the whole house. In fact, its windows on one side, directly faced tire Fascist guns. At night I could see the flash of enemy fire when shells poured into the city. But once I'd moved in, I stayed. Another American and I were the only tenants on the top floor. The Spanish writers, thinking that all Americans were like Ernest Hemingway, anyhow, believed we loved to live facing guns.

My fellow American was away at the front when I arrived. But when he came back, I found him a well-bred Princetonian named Harry Dunham, a young cameraman for Pathé News, who had been in the thick of several battles and had taken some daring sequences. We became quite good friends and he gave me a picture of himself riding atop an armored car with his camera. Some years later Harry was killed in the American Army in the South Pacific. But neither of us were struck by shells that summer in our exposed bedrooms of the Alianza.

The poet, Rafael Alberti and his wife, Maria Teresa Leon, were in charge of the Alianza de Intelectuales at Marques del Duero 7. They lived reasonably safe from shells in a little apartment on the sub-street level of the mansion, an apartment that probably had been occupied by a governess or a tutor. The actual servants' rooms were in a two-story wing of their own, and were very small. When I asked Guillén if he did not wish to share my large light airy chamber on the top floor, Guillén said, no, he would keep his servant's room with its one window. Mine, he said, had too much glass to shatter in case a shell struck the house. Guillén said he would hate to be blown up and cut up by glass also. With Dunham away most of the time making newsreels, on that third floor all by myself, it was lonely, especially during shellings.

This Alianza was the writers' and artists' club. Few foreigners lived there—Dunham, Guillén and I being the only ones then. It was a richly furnished house of some fifty rooms, the former home of a rebel marquis whose family fortune was derived from the slave trade in the days of the Spanish Main. The walls of the living room were hung with priceless Goyas, El Grecos, and other famous paintings. There were rare medieval tapestries, enormous porcelain vases, and much antique furniture, including real Louis XV chairs. The marquis had been a great bullfight fan and possessed chests full of spangled toreador suits. Other trunks were filled with ruffled skirts and beautiful lace mantillas, which smart Spanish women sometimes wore to corridas and the Feria at Sevilla. There was an entire room full of old armor and suits of mail, too, such as Don Quixote wore. Sometimes on chilly nights when we had nothing better to do, the men would all dress up in matador jackets and the women in dresses from Seville of old and have, to my jazz records, an impromptu costume ball. But we were careful to put everything back properly in the basement, for some of the things were priceless, and we knew they would probably go to a museum when the war was over.

The military bus that brought Guillén and me to Madrid over a shell-scarred road had arrived at night after a thirteen-hour trip from Valencia. Dinner at the Alianza was over, and we were told that there were no restaurants open after dark in the whole city. Anyway, with a curfew no one was allowed abroad late at night without a military pass. I went to bed very hungry. But I slept right through the breakfast hour the next morning. At the Alianza there were only two meals a day, breakfast at nine in the morning and dinner at eight at night. "There was not a scrap of food to be found in the house between meals. There were no railroads running into Madrid, and only one highway for the transportation of food—the military road over which our bus had come. A city of a million people was fed entirely by this one road. No wonder there was almost nothing to eat for sale anywhere, nothing on the shelves of the food shops, and restaurants— what few there were—were strictly rationed, with a food card required of each diner.

But on that morning of intense hunger, I refused to believe it would be my fate to starve my first day in Madrid. Guillén had already gotten up and gone out, as had Alberti. So I ventured into the streets alone and found my way through the morning sunlight to the Grand Via. Fortunately, speaking Spanish fairly well, I was able to ask of almost every passer-by where a restaurant might be. Most people looked at me in complete

amazement and said they knew of none in operation at that hour anywhere in town. With supplies so short, Madrid restaurants opened only at dinner time. A few food stores were pointed out to me, but they had nothing edible to sell, even if I had had a ration card—which I'd not yet secured.

Soon I reached the Puerta del Sol, the Times Square of Madrid, all of whose shops were sandbagged, with just a hole between sandbags for an entrance. There were many broken windows, some boarded up and some not. But I was too hungry to pay much attention to the ravages of war. I felt certain there must be somewhere in that city something to eat. I determined to find it. At last I did. A man in the Puerta del Sol told me that each day in a bar near the Telefonica, they opened a keg of beer at noon—and with the beer there were usually appetizers.

I headed post haste for the bar. It was crowded to the doors, but I managed to wedge my way inside. The keg of beer had not yet been opened. Finally noon came, and the crowd of soldiers and civilians surged toward it. I was in the forefront and managed to get, if not at the bar, at least near it, as the mugs of beer were put on the counter. I got one. That was my breakfast juice. But where were the tidbits, the morsels, the appetizers? Everyone else seemed to be waiting hungrily, for most eyes were turned expectantly toward a door that led to the kitchen. At last that door opened and two waiters emerged, each bearing a big, round tray piled high with I knew not what, since the contents of their trays were obscured by clouds of steam that rose from them. The waiters put the trays down, one at either end of the bar. I lost no time getting to the nearest one. Everyone reached out and took a handful of whatever was on the trays. I stretched over a man's shoulder and plunged my hand into the tray, too. My hand came up full of warm hard grey little objects which turned out to be tiny swirling little shells. I discovered I had a handful of snails!

I knew that people in the Latin lands ate snails, but I had never intended to eat one myself. However, at this point I was so hungry that I did not hesitate, nor even stop to think. I simply pulled a snail out of its shell and ate it. In fact, as fast as I could, I pulled snails from their shells and ate them—then I reached just in time for another handful before the tray was emptied. Steamed snails were my first meal in Madrid.

#### HARLEM SWING AND SPANISH SHELLS

One of Franco's ways of getting back at besieged Madrid for holding out so tenaciously was to broadcast daily, from his powerful radio towers at Burgos or Seville, the luncheon and dinner menus of the big hotels there, the fine food that the Falangists were eating, and the excellent wines they drank. (Rioja and the best of wine areas were in Fascist hands.) One could almost hear rebel diners smacking their lips on the radio.

Since food was scarce in Madrid, I did not torture myself listening to Franco's succulent broadcasts. But I found myself thinking a great deal about hamburgers, hot dogs, sugared doughnuts and ice cream—things one can get on almost any American corner—not to speak of more substantial items like steak. In Madrid, when I got there, even with the proper ration cards, there was next to nothing to buy. The city was almost surrounded by Franco's troops, who were trying to starve the people out. I, after missing my first breakfast in the city, never missed another one.

Breakfast at the Alianza consisted of a single roll and "Malta coffee"—burnt grain, pulverized and brewed into a muddy liquid. Sometimes there was milk, but no sugar. Guillén and I had brought from Paris several bottles of saccharin tablets which we shared with the others as a sweetener. After breakfast one had the whole day uninterrupted by meals. I spent much of my time trying to discover bars that served tidbits with drinks. There were several that tried to do so each day, circumstances permitting, so by making the rounds between bombardments, I could manage sometimes to eat a small lunch of knick-knacks before night. One very sedate old wine house on Alcala Zamora was still serving ancient expensive sherry—for very rare old sherry was all it had left in its cellars. Here they would attempt every day at five to serve something to go with the sherry—often only chestnuts or green almonds. But sometimes from the slaughter house, the venerable proprietor would secure the hearts, liver and lights of various animals and boil them, then slice them into little hunks to be speared with a toothpick. Each person might have a small saucer of these innards with his sherry. Almost all the writers at the Alianza were to be found in this dusky wood-paneled old bar in the late afternoon talking about literature and trying not to seem unduly disturbed if the proprietor was unable to furnish anything that day but rare old sherry.

Dinner at the Alianza was beautifully served every evening and delicious, for the club had an excellent cook, who did her best to make what little she could purchase appetizing. She could create a wonderful soup out of almost nothing but a pot of water, a few herbs and some rancid olive oil. It became a very special soup if someone left a few crumbs or crusts of bread on the breakfast table. She would toast and fry these in olive oil at night and put them into the soup. Beans she could flavor superbly. Once in a blue moon we might have meat, a little cube, or a very thin slice for each person. Sometimes, but rarely, there was fresh fish from Valencia. I shall never forget one night when we had fish; we had also a very special guest. He was a venerable Spanish scholar, soft-spoken

and grey-haired, who had arrived in Madrid from Valencia, probably on the same truck that brought the city's ration of fish that day. Our distinguished guest had not been in Madrid before during the Civil War, so he had never experienced such slim food rations, since in Valencia people still ate fairly well. And there, of course, came plenty of fish directly from the sea.

When our ration of fish arrived on the table at the Alianza—a dozen beautifully fried but quite small smelts—and the platter was passed to our distinguished guest first, he simply raked all the fish into his own plate, thinking them a single service. As polite as Spaniards generally are, at this moment two or three persons at the table could not resist a groan of anguish. Someone even blurted out before thinking, "Ay, Señor, you've taken all the fish."

Our hostess, Maria Teresa Leon, who presided over the table, quickly and graciously said, "Oh, but they're yours, sir, prepared just for you." However, the bewildered guest could not help but notice the sad faces at the table, so he said, "But won't you all share mine?"

By now everyone had gotten their company manners back, and politely refused. "Oh, thank you, no, those are for you, dear friend, sweet visitor. *Bon appetit!* Eat well!"

A dozen little fish normally would have been a rather small serving for even one person in Spain—just a starter preceding the meat course. In Valencia one person might even in war time have that many fish for a meal. But in Madrid, where everything had to come into the city by trucks using precious gasoline, and over a shell-raked road, it was another matter. Our embarrassed guest entreated in vain that we share his fish. No, we would not! We stuck to the fiction that they were prepared just for him. Fortunately, a bowl of garbanzos, big old Spanish cowpeas, arrived on the table, so we each had a helping of those for dinner, plus an onion. I never ate so many raw onions in my life as I did that summer. Onions and grapes were the only things to eat that were at all plentiful in Madrid. Sometimes the grapes were very sour and green, but we ate them voraciously.

Beans and onions and grapes at the Alianza were all elegantly brought to table in priceless old china belonging to the marquis who was with Franco in Burgos. I suppose he has gotten all his beautiful dishes back now after the war, as well as his lovely tapestries and priceless El Grecos on the walls. As head of the Alianza, Rafael Alberti was most careful of its belongings. And everybody's heart bled when a cup or something was broken, which didn't happen often, but when it did the fault usually lay with the club's collective son, Luis, a war orphan the Alianza had adopted. Luis was a gentle boy of sixteen who tried to be as careful as he could, but it seemed his fate to almost always be tripping over a rung near a Venetian mirror, dropping something, or tearing the page of an old book just by looking at it. The writers and artists in the house nicknamed the boy, El Destroyer. But because he had seen his whole family wiped out in a bombing raid on his village, nobody scolded him. Usually Maria Teresa just asked him to please be very careful.

At first I thought perhaps the youngster was just careless, until I saw a series of little mishaps, one after another, overtake him through no fault of his own; the lad was accident prone. One night I witnessed what must have been for an adolescent, the most embarrassing moment of his life. This was the evening when the main salon of the mansion, seldom used, had been opened in honor of the visit to Madrid of two American Congressmen, Henry O'Connell of Montana and James T. Bernard from Minnesota. For these American dignitaries the intellectuals of wartime Madrid held a reception at the Alianza. Everybody put on their best clothes for the occasion. After we had all shaken hands with the visiting Americans, there was to be an hour of music. The large drawing room was crowded with visitors, including General Miaja, the defender of Madrid. All went well until the very moment when the music was to begin. As the Congressmen took their seats, the rest of the assemblage found places, too, including El Destroyer. He sat down unobtrusively on one of the little antique golden Louis XV chairs in an out-of-the-way corner near the tail of the grand piano. This chair, generations old, must have held many people in its time. But of all nights, tonight was the night the chair decided to cease performing its function. Just as the first note was about to be struck on the piano and the dignified soprano faced her quiet listeners, with an unduly loud splintering of its tiny legs, the Louis XV chair suddenly gave way beneath the young Spaniard. It sank to the floor with a loud crash, carrying with it an astonished adolescent.

El Destroyer loved American jazz. But fortunately my records were locked away safe from breakage, with the marquis's symphonies in the recreation house across the courtyard from the mansion itself. This room had a splendid record player with modern amplification and was seldom used except during a very heavy shelling of the city. The shells generally came from the west where Franco's artillery was situated. This recreation house was on the western side of the court, protected by a much taller building adjoining it. Shells would have to penetrate this larger building before striking the recreation rooms. So this house was considered by the residents of the Alianza as the safest place to be during a bombardeo. When heavy shells began to whistle too near our mansion, or explode within wall-trembling distance, Maria Teresa would get the key to the game room and we would all

gather there and listen to music until the bombardment ceased. Before I came, Harry Dunham told me, they had listened mostly to Beethoven, Brahms, or Wagnerian overtures. But when I appeared with a box full of swing music, folks would call for Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Lunceford or Charlie Barnet. Certainly in intensity and volume my records were much better than the marquis's symphonies for drowning out the sound of Franco's shells exploding in the streets outside.

The first heavy night shelling of Madrid after my arrival occurred at about two o'clock in the morning. Busy on an article for the *Afro-American*, I had not yet gone to bed, and was rather fascinated to watch from my window artillery flashes in the distance, then a split second later to hear a shell whistling overhead. Artillery bombardments never frightened me nearly so much as air raids. There were no baleful warning sirens, screeching eerily, to make the flesh crawl as there were before air raids. The big guns simply started to go off—and that was that. But this night shells soon began to fall near the Alianza. Suddenly a projectile landed at our very corner with a terrific explosion, like a thousand tons of dynamite. I jumped up from my typewriter and started downstairs.

Usually at the Alianza no one bothered to get out of bed during a late bombardment. But this bombardment was so intense that almost everyone gathered for company across the court in the recreation hall. As usual, someone began to play records to drown out the sound of the explosions. The amplifier was turned up very loud—so loud in fact, that unless a shell had fallen in the courtyard, we could hardly have heard it. The automatic record player would repeat a disc innumerable times if one wished. So that night of the big bombardment, the Jimmie Lunceford record we kept going continuously until almost dawn was “Organ Grinder's Swing.”

#### DEATH AND LAUGHTER

The rebel gunners seemed to love to fire on Madrid in the middle of the night, but sometimes there were bombardments in the daytime, too. There were no air raids directly on the city while I was there, but enemy planes were used on nearby troop concentrations and on the bridges and highways in the surrounding countryside. The one road leading into Madrid was frequently bombed in an attempt to disrupt its traffic. But just for fun, it seemed, artillery batteries showered Madrid almost every day, sometimes taking the Telefonica for a target and dropping shells all around that skyscraper into the heart of the town. At other times, instead of concentrating on the business section, the big guns would be trained fanwise, spraying destruction over a wide area of the city. Sometimes, it seemed to me that enemy gunners just shot up in the air and let their projectiles fall at random for no military reason except to terrorize people. But the people of Madrid, having lived under fire for a year, had gotten over terror by the time I arrived. Most bombardments they treated like showers of rain, simply crossing to the opposite side of the street from that toward which the guns were firing—as one does when the rain is slanting the wrong way and shelter is drier on the other sidewalk.

My first visit to the famous Hotel Florida was to pay a call on Sherwood Eddy, the sixty-five-year-old Y. M. C. A. executive whom I had known in New York. I had run into him the day before, bustling about Madrid in an old overseas cap from World War I, which he said he had put on to make him feel at home under fire. Together that day, Sherwood Eddy and I toured various floors of the Hotel Florida where Ernest Hemingway lived, and where up to that time some twenty artillery shells had penetrated the walls. The street entrance to the Florida was well protected with sandbags. But since it was impossible to sandbag nine stories, some of the front upper floors now had no complete walls at all. Not many guests accepted front rooms anyway any more, and suites with a view were not in demand—since the view from the rise on which the Florida sat was a full panorama of enemy territory just beyond the Casa de Campo. From shattered window panes one did not need binoculars to see the enemy trenches.

The Hotel Alfonso, another important hostelry a few blocks from the Florida, had several large shell holes through its four walls, too. Sometimes a shell came in one side and went right on through the other. One of the corridors on an upper floor of the Alfonso led straight into space—its French doors, balcony and all having been shot away. In an unused bedroom I looked slantingly down three floors into the street through an opening made by a projectile that had struck the roof and plowed its way downward to the sidewalk. On the hotel's marble staircase two persons had been killed by shrapnel a few days before.

The safest hotel seemed to be the Victoria, not so near the firing lines. There, Herbert Matthews of *The New York Times* and many other foreign journalists lived. The Victoria had not been struck by shell fire up to the time I left Madrid. But any of its inhabitants who had been in the city long could tell you of narrow escapes in other parts of town. Some journalists I knew, covering a special dinner for a distinguished foreign delegation, had to flee to the cellar of the restaurant with the guests when the big guns started to fire. Shortly a bus boy came down into the basement with a table leg in his hands. A member of the foreign delegation asked, “What's that?”

“That's the table where you were eating,” replied the bus boy.

The citizens of Madrid themselves had thousands of humorous tales with a macabre twist. One concerned a man who went into a barbershop to get his hair cut entirely bald, since there was no soap for shampoos and he wished to avoid lice. As he sat in the chair, a shell fell in the street just outside, a sharp piece of shrapnel flew through the window, and he got his head cut off instead of his hair. The barber was unharmed—except that he didn't get paid for the haircut.

Another story concerned a Franco projectile that landed with a hiss and a boom one busy afternoon on a sidewalk of the Puerta del Sol. Fortunately, no one was killed. But when the smoke cleared away, people saw a man lying on the sidewalk stunned and speechless, with one leg of his trousers ripped from belt to ankle. Sympathetic strangers crowded around him. "An ambulance right away! Get the poor fellow to a hospital."

But the man, having regained his senses, jumped to his feet, angrily looked at his torn trousers, and cried, "Hospital, hell! I want a tailor."

There were certain sections of Madrid more dangerous than the actual front-line trenches, so people said, since they were more frequently exposed to direct artillery fire. But in spite of the bombardments in the city traffic usually kept on moving and, while I was there, the streetcar service was seldom disrupted. But during a shelling, motormen seemed to have a tendency to increase their speed. So when shells fell, I would often see trams whizzing faster than ever through the streets. A few cars had been hit and passengers killed, so if any passenger wished to get off and take shelter, the motorman would stop the car for him. But the general feeling was that a person was as safe on a streetcar as in a shelter. The car might be struck, but so might the shelter. The streetcar men of Madrid had sent a whole company of their own to the front. Sometimes those at work relieved the men at the front so that they might come back to town and take a turn on leave at running the cars again.

During that second year of the war, there were said to be almost a hundred thousand children in Madrid. Certainly one saw many youngsters playing in the streets, picking up shrapnel for fun, and playing hide-and-seek in shell holes. But mothers in the more exposed sections of the city usually called their children into the house at the first boom of the cannon. The children, often more expert than the grownups in recognizing the sounds of artillery and from just which direction the shells were coming, were sometimes loath to obey. I heard a small boy yell from the street to his mother in an upper window one day, as he kept on playing, "Aw, those are our guns, ma, shooting the other way. Can't you tell by the sound?"

In the early days of the war Madrid was frequently bombed from the air. But after the first few months, the rebels no longer wasted their aviation on nonmilitary targets. However, by that time whole areas of Madrid had already been destroyed. Now the artillery continued the destruction. By 1937, the beautiful Arguelles section of new villas and modern apartment houses was a shambles. One enormous apartment house, covering a whole block, was known as the House of Flowers, because, in its planning, each window had been designed with a window box for plants, and each balcony had its rows of potted flowers or vines. But when I saw this huge dwelling house, it was empty and desolate, with great shell holes in the walls, its window boxes broken and its balconies smashed. But a few flowers were still blooming in some of the windows, and from a number of balconies little green vines still hung. Although the taller buildings, being excellent targets for artillery, were empty, a number of cottages were still occupied. One day in Arguelles, I was told, a shell fell in the study of a bearded old professor of Greek. His wife and daughter came running to see if anything had happened to him. They found the old gentleman standing in the center of the floor, holding a portion of the shell in his hand and shaking his head quizzically.

"This little thing," he said, "this inanimate object, can't do any more than kill us. It's the philosophy that lies behind this little fragment, wife, that is so dangerous."

The Cuban poet, Alejo Carpentier, who had been living in Arguelles, told me that one morning after an especially heavy shelling, he had passed a house, a considerable portion of whose front wall was lying in the yard. A shell had passed through the roof the night before and carried with it not only a portion of the living room wall but the top corner of the family piano as well. Then the shell buried itself in the garden. Nevertheless, early that morning Carpentier saw the little daughter of the house seated at the damaged piano, very clean and starched, her hair brushed and braided, her face shining. Diligently, she was practicing scales from a music book in front of her. The fact that the top corner of the piano had been shot away in the night and that the living room had no wall did not seem to affect the child's concentration. In answer to the Cuban's good morning and his question as to what had happened, the little girl said, "Oh, a shell came through our house last night. I'm going to help clean up after a while, but I have to practice first. Today's the day my music teacher comes."

Madrid, you wondrous city!

were words the Brigade boys had to put to an old Spanish folk song, "Mamita Mia." The Madrileños had

previously put wartime Spanish words to it, too, about the way their city was holding out under siege:

*Madrid, que bien resistes!*  
*Madrid, que bien resistes,*  
*Mamita, mia, los bombardeos!*

The will to live and laugh in this city of over a million people under fire, each person in constant danger, was to me a source of amazement. One could forget the possibility of imminent death, but it was impossible not to be cold as winter came, or always half hungry. At the Alianza sometimes, when transportation had been disrupted and our food shop had no rations for our dinner, there would be nothing at meal time but bread soup with bread. The writers around the table would repeat an old Spanish proverb, “Bread with bread— food for fools.” Then we would all laugh and tighten our belts as we got up to keep our stomachs from feeling so empty.

I was an American who could go home anytime I wanted to. But the others were Spaniards who lived in Madrid. How much longer could they resist like this, I wondered. Yet it seemed certain that they would never be starved out—perhaps not even shelled out or bombed out, unless overwhelming military forces were unleashed against them. Hemingway and Matthews, Leland Stowe and all the other American journalists in the city agreed that there were no signs of surrender. Yet there were no heroics, no mass meetings, no bands, no great speeches about it. City without heroics, *Madrid, que bien resistes!*

One night that summer, in the center of the city, in one of the larger motion-picture theaters the audience avidly followed the progress of an American-made film. Suddenly a shell fell in the street outside with a tremendous detonation—but nobody moved from his seat. The film continued. Shortly another shell fell, nearer and louder than before, shaking the whole building. The manager of the theater went into the lobby and looked up and down the Grand Via. He saw a billowing tower of smoke at the corner. Overhead the whine of one shell after another caused him to decide to stop the show so that people might seek refuge. He had the film halted and mounted the stage to announce his decision to the audience, and say that in view of the intensity of the shelling, he thought it best to call off the rest of the picture. Before he had gotten the words out of his mouth, he was greeted with such hissing and booing and stamping of feet and calls for the show to go on—plus cries of “Coward!” hurled in his direction—that he shrugged his shoulders, signaled the operator to continue, and left the stage. The magic of Hollywood resumed its spell. While enemy shells whistled dangerously over the theater to crash in nearby streets, the film went its make-believe way to a thrilling climax—a climax in which gunfire played a prominent part. Artillery fire outside and machine-gun fire on the screen mingled, one hardly distinguishable from the other. The picture was *Terror in Chicago*.

#### BODY HERE, LEG THERE

Just after the big battle of Brunete near the city, I reached Madrid. This was the battle in which the Loyalist troops experienced the heaviest concentration of aerial bombs yet used up to that time anywhere in the world. For more than twenty-four hours, Spanish, Italian and German aviation bombed the government trenches. The whole earth shook, and its trembling was felt all day and all night in Madrid itself. Brunete was an outpost of the defense of Madrid. To go with one of the first groups of American newspapermen to visit that front after the battle was my good fortune—journalistically speaking. I had never been on any war front before, so I was lucky to be going with experienced men, for the reporters with whom I traveled were Leland Stowe and Richard Mowrer. We went in Mowrer’s car, driving over shell-pocked roads until we came within sight of Quijorna on the Brunete front. At the top of a rise a sentry stopped us.

He said, “You’d better leave the car here. Down there in the hollow the road is within range of fascist guns. They might machine-gun a car. If you walk, they’ll only snipe.”

“Maybe they won’t even bother to do that,” said Stowe. “Anyway, we’ll walk.”

So we left the car and started down the road in the brilliant sunlight. The leaves on the trees along the road had all been shot away, and the branches were splintered and broken. This was the first time I’d ever seen battle-scarred trees. While I was looking up at the trees, it seemed that ever so often I heard a bird cheep. But I could not see any birds. Finally I asked my companions, “Where are the birds I keep hearing?”

“Birds?” Stowe said, “There’s no birds. Those are sniper bullets whistling by.”

“Firing at us?” I exclaimed.

“Certainly,” said Stowe. “There’s nobody else on this road to fire at.”

“I never knew bullets sounded like birds cheeping before.”

“Well, now you know,” Mowrer grinned. “And there’s no use to duck. Anyhow, they’re probably just shooting at us for fun.”

Perhaps for my comfort, Stowe said, "I can tell by the sound, the bullets are over our heads."

Chee-eep!... Chee-eep! ... Chee-eep! I didn't know just where the cheep came from, so soft and swift, but Stowe's words were of little comfort. I could see spurts of dust fly up every so often in the road where an occasional bullet landed too near for a feeling of safety.

I was glad when we had crossed that declivity and went up the next rise and down into the outskirts of the ruined village toward which we were headed. Had there been a hotel, or any shelter standing whole, I probably would not have gone back to Madrid until the snipers cleared out. I had never been a personal target before, and I did not relish the thought of being a target again that day.

The little town was a scene of complete desolation. Nobody remained there, but there were still portions of the dead in the streets. Whole bodies had been cleared away, but hands, arms, fingers and legs were still lying around, protruding from piles of rubble, smelling not good in the sun. There were no soldiers about, nobody at all, so one could walk into any of the shell-battered houses and bombed-out buildings and take whatever one wished. In some houses books and furniture had not been harmed. In others, everything was smashed, scorched, or otherwise damaged. The records at the little city hall were scattered all over the place in the rubble of its shattered walls. Maybe it had been a very old building, two or three hundred years old, but now it was in ruins. I picked up an old ledger with a leather back, its faint pages indicating records of marriages more than eighty years ago.

There wasn't much to see in the village except ruination, and the stench of death was not pleasant. After I'd ventured into one quite pretty little villa, only partly destroyed, to find a dead man sprawled just inside the door, his left leg a yard or two away from his body, I was none too eager to explore any more of the deserted town. Stowe and Mowrer wanted to check up on the full extent of aerial destruction, so I let them go ahead. It didn't take more than a quick look on my part to verify that it had been devastating, a kind of preview of what happened later to other larger and more famous European cities in World War II—to which some of the newsmen in Madrid predicted Spain was but a prelude.

Some of the men in the International Brigades had told me they came to Spain to help keep war and fascism from spreading. "War and fascism"—a great many people at home in America seemed to think those words were just a left-wing slogan. War and fascism! He was not just a slogan, that dead man sprawled on the floor of his house; not just a slogan the chee-eep, chee-eep, chee-eep of what I thought were birds singing; certainly not a slogan the streets I had to traverse through that smashed village with a leg here, a hand there, to get back to the road exposed to snipers' fire to reach our car to return to Madrid.

"Death does not smell good at all," I thought, a little sick at the stomach as I walked away from that Spanish town where nobody lived any more on account of war and fascism.

#### GENERAL FRANCO'S MOORS

"Imagine," said the Madrileños, "that rebel Franco bringing Mohammedans to Spain to fight Christians! The Crusaders would turn over in their graves. The Moors are back in Spain."

With Dick Mowrer and Leland Stowe, I visited a prison hospital in Madrid and saw my first Moor. We had gone to interview some captured German aviators and Italian ground troops. The Germans were in one ward and the Italians in another. The Italians were the most talkative. They said they had come to Spain because Mussolini had sent them. They had no choice in the matter, and they seemed to have no idea what the war was about—or if they did have, they were careful not to express themselves. They were amiable young fellows, stocky and rough-looking, probably peasants at home or unskilled workers. The Germans, on the other hand, were much less communicative. They had been sent to fight communism, they said, and yes, they bombed cities full of women and children. An airman had to take orders, *nein*? But one of them said that now he knew what a bombardment felt like, as he lay there in this prison hospital that had been struck by fourteen shells.

It was a hot day and smelly in the hospital wards. Since I didn't understand German or Italian well, and the other reporters were dragging out their interviews a very long time, I decided to walk down the corridor and see if I could find some water. If I missed anything, Stowe or Mowrer would tell me later. The hospital hall was empty. But as I got almost to the end where the hall turned, around the corner came one of the darkest, tallest men I have ever seen in my life. His blackness was accentuated by a white hospital gown flopping about his bare legs, and a white bandage around his head. Not having seen a Negro since I'd been in Madrid, the sudden sight of this very dark face almost startled me out of my wits. There at the corner of the corridor the man and I would have collided, had I not stopped in my tracks as he passed me without a word, silently like a black ghost.

I was a bit ashamed of myself for having been startled at the unexpected sight of a dark face in a hospital I had thought filled only with white prisoners. I thought of how once, when I had been walking with some other

fellows along a bayou in Louisiana, a white woman had looked out of her hut and cried, "You colored boys get away from here. I'm scared of you." Now, here I was—a Negro myself—suddenly frightened by another dark face!

When I got back to the German ward and asked the nurse about the man I had seen, she said there were a number of Moors in another part of the hospital. While Mowrer and Stowe continued to talk to the Germans, I went with the nurse to find them. In a big room with three rows of cots, a number of Moors sat on their beds in white wrappings and bandages, while others lay suffering quietly, too badly wounded to be up. It was almost impossible for me to carry on any sort of conversation with them. They spoke little or no Spanish and I had no interpreter with me. But finally I came across a small boy who had been wounded at the Battle of Brunete. He looked to be a lad of ten or eleven, a bright smiling child, who spoke Spanish.

"Where did you come from?" I asked.

He named a town I'd never heard of in Morocco.

"How old are you?"

"Thirteen," he said.

"And how did you happen to be fighting in Spain?"

"I came with my mother," he said.

"Your mother?" I exclaimed, for that was the first time I had heard of Moorish women being brought to Spain. The rebels, I learned later, imported women as well as men—women to accompany the troops, to wash and cook for them behind the lines.

"What happened to your mother?"

The little boy closed his eyes. "She was killed at Brunete," he said.

The Moorish troops were colonial conscripts, or men from the Moroccan villages enticed into the army by offers of what seemed to them very good pay. Franco's personal bodyguard consisted of Moorish soldiers, tall picturesque fellows in flowing robes and winding turbans. Before I left home American papers had carried photographs of turbaned Mohammedan troops marching in the streets of Burgos, Seville and Malaga. And a United Press dispatch from Gibraltar that summer said:

"Arabs have been crossing the Straits of Gibraltar from Spanish Morocco to Algeciras and Malaga at the rate of 300 to 400 a day, according to reliable information reaching here. General Franco intends to mass 50,000 new Arab troops in Spain so that he can maintain the strength of the Nationalist army should the Italian volunteers be withdrawn."

According to Madrid papers these shiploads of Moorish mercenaries from Larache provided a strange union of the Cross and the Crescent against Spanish democracy. The Falangist papers reaching Madrid were most religious, even running in their advertisements slogans such as VIVA CRISTO REY! VIVA FRANCO! as if Christ and the General were of equal importance. On the cover of the book, *España en la Cruz*, published in rebel territory, the map of Spain was pictured crucified on an enormous cross by the nails of Marxism, Judaism and Masonry, which the book claimed formed the core of the Loyalist government. Yet the Franco insurrectionists, in spite of their Christian cast, had encamped thousands of pagan Moors at Casa del Campo. And General Queipo de Llano was said to have promised one girl in Madrid to each twenty Moors. But I could not find that the enemy's use of these colored troops had brought about any increased feeling of color consciousness on the part of the people of Spain. I was well received everywhere I went, and the Negroes in the International Brigades reported a similar reception.

Negroes were not strange to Spain, nor did they attract an undue amount of attention. In the cities no one turned around to look twice. Most Spaniards had seen colored faces, and many are quite dark themselves. Distinct traces of Moorish blood from the days of the Mohammedan conquest remain in the Iberian Peninsula. Copper-colored Gypsies like La Niña de los Peines are common. There were, too, quite a number of colored Portuguese living in Spain. And in both Valencia and Madrid I saw pure-blooded Negroes from the colonies in Africa, as well as many Cubans who had migrated to Spain.

All the Negroes, of whatever nationality, to whom I talked, agreed that there was not the slightest trace of color prejudice in Spain. In that respect they said it was even better than France because in Paris, charming city that it is, some of the big hotels catering to tourists will not register dark-skinned guests. Negro jazz musicians told me that they enjoyed performing in Spain where audiences are most cordial. I found, shortly after my arrival, that one of the most popular variety stars in Madrid was El Negro Aquilino, a Cuban, who played both jazz and flamenco on the saxophone. Aquilino was then in his third month at the Teatro Calderon, and appeared on the same bill with the famous Pastora Imperio, the great dancer who remained on the Loyalist side. Aquilino traveled all over government Spain, and was a great favorite with the soldiers for whom he played at the front. When I went backstage to interview him for my paper, I asked him about color in Spain. He said, "*Color? No le hace nada*

*en España*— it doesn't matter."

Sometimes, amusingly enough, American Negroes in Brigade uniforms were asked if they were Moors fighting on the Loyalist side. One young Negro, Walter Cobb, had a big scare behind the lines on the Aragon front where he was the only American with a French brigade. Cobb spoke both French and Spanish.

"I have to keep in practice with my languages in this man's country," he said. "If I hadn't known Spanish in the last action, I'd have been taken for a Moor and made a prisoner. Man, I was driving a captured Franco truck that we took at Belchite one night, bringing it back behind our own lines to be repaired, and I hadn't had a chance to paint out the Falangist markings on it. I hadn't gone but a few kilometers in the dark before some Loyalist soldiers on patrol duty, Spanish boys, stopped me at a crossroads and threw their flashlights on the truck. When they saw me, dark as I am, and saw that truck with those Fascist insignias on it, they thought sure I was a Moor that had got lost and come across the lines by accident. They yelled at me to jump down quick with my hands up, and they held their guns cocked at my head until I got off that truck. Man, I started talking Spanish right away, explained I was an International. So they let me show them my papers and tell them how we captured that truck from the Fascists, and that it belonged to us now. Then, man, they almost hugged me! But suppose I didn't keep in practice with my Spanish? As much like a Moor as I look, I might have been dead, driving a Franco truck! It pays to *habla español*."

In Arguelles, I saw two posters in a classroom for the Spanish soldiers of the 14th Battalion training to fight the Moors. One poster said: LIKE THE SPANISH PEASANTS, THE INDUSTRIOUS AND DECENT MOOR DOES NOT TAKE UP A GUN, HE TILLS THE SOIL. And the other poster declared: THE MOORS ON THE side OF THE FALANGISTS DO NOT KNOW THEY ARE FIGHTING AGAINST THE REAL SPANISH REVOLUTION. WORKERS, HELP US! RESPECT THE MOORISH PRISONERS.

The International Brigaders were, of course, aware of the irony of the colonial Moors—victims themselves of oppression in North Africa—fighting against a Republic that had been seeking to work out a liberal policy toward Morocco. To try to express the feelings of some of the Negro fighting men in this regard, I wrote these verses in the form of a letter from an American Negro in the Brigades to a relative in Dixie:

International Brigades, Lincoln Battalion, Somewhere in Spain, 1937

Dear Brother at home:  
We captured a wounded Moor today.  
He was just as dark us me.  
I said, Boy, what you doin' here,  
Fightin' against the free?  
He answered something in a language  
I couldn't understand.  
But somebody told me he was sayin'  
They grabbed him in his land  
And made him join the Fascist army  
And come across to Spain.  
And he said he had a feelin'  
He'd never get back home again.  
He said he had a feelin'  
This whole thing wasn't right.  
He said he didn't know  
These folks he had to fight.  
And as he lay there dyin'  
In a village we had taken,  
I looked across to Africa  
And I seen foundations shakin',—  
For if a free Spain wins this war,  
The colonies, too, are free—  
Then something wonderful can happen  
To them Moors as dark as me.  
I said, Fellow, listen,  
I guess that's why old England  
And I reckon Italy, too,  
Is afraid to let Republic Spain

Be good to me and you—  
Because they got slaves in Africa  
And they don't want 'em free.  
Listen, Moorish prisoner—  
Here, shake hands with me!  
I knelt down there beside him  
And I took his hand,  
But the wounded Moor was dyin'  
So he didn't understand.

#### CITATION FOR BRAVERY

Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1936 caused a number of young Negroes, so some of them in the Brigades told me, to come to Loyalist Spain. By fighting against Franco they felt they were opposing Mussolini. Others said they had come to Spain to fight against the kind of people who oppress Negroes in the American South. Others said they had come to oppose fascism, and help prevent its spread in the world. Certainly they had not come because they had been forced to come, or because they were well paid, or because there was a great deal of prestige or glory attached to coming. Indeed, many would find it dangerous to go back home after having fought in Spain. Why then were these men in the Brigades? With so many unsolved problems in America, I wondered why would a Negro come way over to Spain to help solve Spain's problems—perhaps with his very life. I don't know. I wondered then. I wonder still. But in my heart I salute them. And I tried to find the answers.

I met in Spain two colored kids hardly sixteen, Al Chisolm and George Waters, from the U. S. A. I met a very elderly Negro cooking beans for the Loyalist troops. I met several young married men with children who had left their families to fight at Brunete, Lerida, Teruel, and places they had never heard the names of before they came to Spain. I met some Negroes who, I was told, had been at the Lenin School in Moscow. And I met others who had only the vaguest idea what communism was, or socialism either. I met all kinds of Negroes in Spain, just as I'd met all kinds in Harlem. I couldn't type the men in Spain any more than I've been able to type Negroes anywhere else. Some were smart and some were dumb. Some had been to college, others hardly to grammar school. Some were pleasant, some rude. And some—in Spain of all places—were even "a disgrace to the race"—at least, to hear others tell it.

Just before I got to Madrid, perhaps the greatest "disgrace to the race" of all had occurred at Brunete. A colored officer in charge of a mixed unit of several nationalities in the Brigades, so I was told, had taken shelter with his men in a hillside cave during a terrible day-long Fascist bombardment. As the foreign planes dropped high-test explosives from the skies hour after hour after hour, and the Franco artillery pounded away at the Loyalist positions, the whole countryside shook. Deathly thunder! Smoke and fire everywhere! Nevertheless, the order came into the shelters and caves for the Brigaders to charge. The various units went out under fire to attack—that is, all but the unit commanded by the Negro officer in the cave. To his men he gave no orders to charge. Finally, some of his subordinates asked if he did not intend to obey the command. They were, they said, ready to charge.

"Charge on, then," the Negro officer is reported to have said. "Charge on! But if anybody thinks I am going to charge—out there under those bombs—they're crazy."

A junior officer took command of the unit, and the men charged—most of them to their deaths. The Negro officer in the cave survived to walk up Lenox Avenue in Harlem again—of course, disgraced—but alive. In Spain he was stripped of his rank, and sent back to the U. S. A. The Brigaders took it hard, particularly the Negroes among them. When I suggested that perhaps the man was shell shocked, they said, "Shell shocked nothing! If it just hadn't been a mixed unit—white boys and all-waiting to obey his orders! Imagine! And him sitting back there in that cave saying damn if he's going to charge! A disgrace to the race, that's what he is!"

But such behavior was not true of Oliver Law, the Brigade Commander killed at Brunete, and proclaimed a National Hero by the Loyalist Government. It was not true of Milton Herndon who died in action at Fuentes de Ebro; or of Lt. Walter Garland or Sgt. Bunny Rucker who lived to come home; or Alonzo Watson or Douglass Roach or Otto Reeves, who didn't come back; or Ralph Thornton, who took four prisoners at Belchite and was cited for bravery beyond the call of duty; or of Abraham Lewis, who cooked hundreds of meals on the battle front under fire; or of Thaddeus Battle, the Howard University student, fighting on the Madrid sector. And somehow I don't think the man in the cave was too much of a disgrace to the race. At least, *he was there* at the front. At least, he went to Spain.

I was introduced to Ralph Thornton in the improvised office of the mimeographed bulletin of the

Washington-Lincoln Battalion in the ruined city of Quinto. Artillery and air bombs had left few buildings standing whole. The Brigade library, post office and bulletin had taken possession of one of the least demolished houses. Ralph Thornton was the acting clerk there when I met him. We sat in the sunlight near the door and I tried to get him to tell me why he had just been cited for bravery.

Thornton, a light brown-skin fellow from Pittsburgh, a former newsboy, was loath to talk about himself. "It wasn't much," he insisted. "We just took four prisoners, that's all. Me and two other boys captured them."

Luckily, other members of Thornton's outfit were sitting with us and they weren't bashful in talking about Thornton. The story was that after the taking of Belchite, during which Thornton led a successful charge on a rebel-held building, he and two white comrades, Ben Findley and Carl Geiser, were given several blocks of houses to inspect in the captured city. Many of the houses were in ruins, but some stood intact. From upper windows, snipers still operated. Behind barred doors and closed blinds, rebels who had been unable to escape crouched in hiding. Inspecting these ominously quiet houses was no gentle task. You could easily get a hand grenade in the face.

The Americans went up the narrow stone stairs of an ancient house with walls three feet thick, and dark cold silence everywhere; But on the top floor, when Thornton opened the door to a front room, the silence was suddenly perfumed with the scent of powder and acrid smoke stung him in the eyes and burned his throat. A man moved in the dark, then jumped to his feet crying, "Salud!" At the same time he threw his rifle down. The gun was still hot when Thornton picked it up. The man was a Fascist who had been lying there sniping at government soldiers. The captured sniper turned out to be the vice-president of the local Falangists, and one of the most active enemies of republicanism in that section of Aragon. "A Spanish klansman," Thornton said, "I should've shot him." Further inspection of the house revealed several cupboards filled with gold and hidden jewels.

Nearby, in another house whose inhabitants had been unable to flee, the three Americans found an old woman sitting at a window. They asked her if there was anyone hiding in the house. She said, "No." But a search of the premises revealed a concealed opening leading to a tunnel where an Italian soldier was hiding. The Italian probably thought he was in Ethiopia by mistake when he saw Thornton's dark face inviting him to surrender.

Before the three Americans went back to staff headquarters that morning, Thornton and his comrades had taken two other prisoners, and had made sure that there were no more snipers in the blocks of houses they had been sent to inspect. Because of Thornton's valor at Belchite in the storming of a rebel-held building, followed by the importance of the prisoners he took, the whole Brigade united in the presentation to him of a watch on the day his citation arrived.

#### MY ONE AND ONLY WOUND

Several times in Spain I thought I might not live long. One of those times when I felt my end had come was at University City. My nearness to death came about because of a "wartime tourist," as the Brigade boys termed the endless stream of do-gooders coming to Madrid that year, who immediately wanted a conducted tour of the front. These do-gooders from almost all over the world were well-meaning people, some of whom had done effective propaganda work for Loyalist Spain in their homelands, or raised large sums of money for Spanish causes, sent milk for children and supplies for hospitals. But when they came to Madrid, they sometimes innocently got in the way of more urgent activities, and took up the time of the city's fighting citizens and soldiers with repetitious and silly requests for autographs. On the other hand, some visitors came quietly, like Dorothy Parker, and went away quietly. Others made a lot of noise to let everybody know they were there—willing to give their *all*. But the trouble was that, whereas their *all* perhaps meant a lot in terms of what they could do for Spain at home, in Madrid under siege, their zeal was of little immediate value. But Spain that summer was very popular. A trip to besieged Madrid became almost as important to visitors as seeing Seville at Easter had been to peacetime tourists. I made the mistake of going to University City one day with such a group of eager wartime sight seers.

The group included a woman from the American Midwest who wore a large white hat. The women of Madrid did not wear hats—perhaps because there were no hats there to buy during the war. Milliners had gone out of business. At any rate, American women with hats seemed to attract a lot of attention in the streets, so usually, after the first day or two in town, they would become aware of this and leave their hats at the hotel. But that day when we went to University City, the sun was shining very brightly, so the American woman wore her large-brimmed, lacy, rather floppy white hat as a sunshade.

I was typing in my room at the Alianza when the Spanish writer, Vicente Salas Viu, culled to ask me if I would like to take a ride out to the University. They had, he said, two cars to carry the ladies of some foreign

committee out there to see the Clinic. This famous *Clinica*—a modern structure of several stories belonging to the Medical College—had been written about a great deal in the European and American press as unique in the annals of warfare since, for some time, the Fascists held the wings at one end of the building, and the Loyalists held the wings at the other end. And right through the campus the front-line trenches ran. One part of the grounds belonged to the government, the other to the rebels. Sometimes they took potshots at each other. But generally in the daytime, University City was a quiet front, with little firing. Most of the activity was at night. Then it consisted mainly of tunneling under each other's trenches to plant explosives and blow sky-high a machine-gun emplacement or an outlook post. Sometimes, in my room at the Alianza after midnight I could hear a tremendous explosion in the University City sector. The *dinameteros* were at work.

People could take the subway to this unique front at the edge of the city, so I had been there before. Like most visitors to Madrid, since it had become so famous, the first thing I wanted to see was University City. But since I had seen it several times by now, I really had no good reason to leave my typewriter that day to ride out there again.

"But some of the ladies are Americans," Salas Viu said. "My English is very bad. Come along and entertain them." So I went—to my sorrow. It was such a beautiful summer day, the sky very clear and blue, that it was good to get out of doors. Besides, I thought, those ladies might have some chocolate bars from the outside world in their pocketbooks. They did not have any chocolate bars, but they were good women, seriously interested in raising funds for Spanish war relief in their various countries. And the American women were acquainted with people I knew in Pittsburgh and Chicago. The ride out to the campus was a pleasant one.

At the University we went into the Clinic to look through sandbagged holes in walls toward the rebels behind their sandbags in opposite wings. By keeping quiet, you could sometimes hear the enemy laughing and talking. Then we paid a visit to the ground fortifications where we saw a trench school for the many Spanish soldiers who could hardly read and write. These trench schools were a part of the government's campaign against illiteracy. I told the women how I had visited such a trench school a few weeks before on the very day when a soldier had just learned to sign his name in full for the first time. The man was so proud of this achievement that he stuck the paper up on the platoon bulletin board and he and his fellow soldiers made quite a happy occasion of it—his whole name written in his own hand by himself for the first time in his life!

The women were not happy just being in a school in a quiet dugout only a few yards inside a trench. Where were the guns? The Spanish corporal assigned to guide us took us a few hundred yards further. We passed a few lookout men on guard with rifles. But when we came to the communications trench, the young corporal stopped and indicated that we should turn back. I could see that the women were disappointed with their uneventful tour. It was so quiet, not a shot being fired in the trenches. Nothing was happening. University City, for all its fame, did not seem as exciting to them as the Alfonso Hotel where they were stopping in Madrid.

"Couldn't we just go a little further?" one of the women asked.

The corporal shook his head, and a higher officer standing there agreed, "No."

"Why, from here we can't even see the Fascist lines," said the woman in the big white hat. "Couldn't we go right on up to the front?"

I had found the Spaniards almost always obliging, and I knew if these women kept on asking, they might even land in rebel territory. Personally, I was none too anxious to follow them when, finally, the officer shrugged and the young corporal agreed to lead us through the communications corridor to the next line of trenches.

"But," suggested the Spanish officer, "would madame please take off her hat?"

"Why?" asked the lady, for the sun was beating down on the open trench where she stood.

"It might attract attention," said the officer.

"Oh, who can see us down here in this hole?" laughed the woman. "Come on, let's go. I'll keep my head down." The Spaniard said no more.

The trenches were rather shallow and, from the tall buildings about, perhaps the enemy could see us moving. But we reached the forward trenches without incident. There, the corporal said, if we cared to climb on the high platform where a machine gun rested, we could look through the sandbagged opening directly across to the Fascist trenches a few hundred yards away. Three or four people could stand around the machine gun at one time, so I climbed up to look out along with the lady in the white hat and a couple of others. I had just pulled my head back from the opening and was about to step down into the trench again when all of a sudden the crackle of rifle fire aimed our way rang out from the rebel trenches. A bullet whizzed through the opening. Another struck the side of a sandbag, sending a stinging spray of sand all over us. Suddenly I felt a sting in the crook of my arm, and the muscle there began to tremble.

The women screamed. One of them almost fell backward into the trench as the rest scrambled down. I had

on only a sport shirt that day, and when I looked down at my bare arm I saw a little stream of blood trickling toward my wrist. Salas Viu had flecks of blood all over his face.

"Come! Hurry!" said the little corporal, leading us rapidly back through the communications trench. "Heads down! Señora, please, take off your hat."

But the woman had already taken off her hat, bent very low running as fast as she could toward the exit. I held a handkerchief to my arm to stop the blood. And Salas Viu kept wiping his bloody face with his coat sleeve. Fortunately none of the women were harmed, only badly frightened. But presently they were more frightened still, for the rebels threw a well-aimed trench mortar. It narrowly missed the trench, but landed near enough to send a mighty spray of earth and sand high into the air. Pebbles and dirt scattered all over us, and the noise was deafening.

"What are they doing?" one of the women screamed.

"*Jugando*,"—playing, said the little corporal.

"They play like that sometimes," Salas Viu said, "just for fun, Madame."

This was true. University City was a dull front, so sometimes the men shot at each other for lack of anything else to do.

We stopped at a first-aid station beyond the trenches where a dressing was put on my arm. "A piece of dum-dum bullet nicked you," said the nurse. "But it didn't penetrate the flesh much. The bleeding will soon stop."

Salas Viu was treated for the cuts on his face, full of tiny little abrasions from the stinging sand where an explosive bullet had hit the sandbag. He was advised to go to a hospital when he got back to Madrid just in case there were bits of metal embedded in his skin.

As for the woman in the white hat—well, none of the other tourists spoke to her on the way back to the city. Some of the other women had already repeated in her presence several times, "They asked her to take off that target on her head and she wouldn't listen—until we got shot at! That nice young Spaniard asked her to take off her hat!" But by the time the early shock of the first fright had passed, the women in the cars riding back to Madrid became quite silent, probably realizing how close someone had come to being killed. Perhaps the rebels were just playing that afternoon—but their bullets were real.

#### A HEMINGWAY STORY

Not given to frequenting the Algonquin in New York, I never met many famous writers. During the months that I was in Spain I became acquainted with more white American writers than at any other period in my life. Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn were in Madrid when I got there, as were Herbert Matthews and Leland Stowe. Dorothy Parker came that summer, and Malcolm Cowley, and Lillian Hellman, as well as Elliot Paul, Meyer Levin, Louis Fischer, Joseph North, Seymour Waldman, Richard Watts, Jr., Thyra Edwards and Vincent Sheean. The Negro short-story writer, Lucius McDaniel, and the poet, Edwin Rolfe, were members of the International Brigades, and Alvah Bessie joined them later. Of the English writers, the novelist Ralph Bates, and the poet, Tom Wintringham, were Brigade members. There as correspondents were Tom Driberg from London, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Nancy Cunard, who came in and out from Paris several times. Stephen Spender visited Spain, too.

Among the non-English-speaking writers I encountered were André Malraux, Juan de la Cabada and Andres Iduarte whom I had known in Mexico; Pablo Neruda, Alfred Kantorowicz, Ludwig Renn, Ernst Toller, Gustav Regler, Ilya Ehrenburg, Michael Koltsov, Jef Last, and a number of others from Middle Europe and Scandinavia whose names I can't remember now. But some of them, we were told at the Alianza, were very famous in their own countries, just as Nicolas Guillén was famous in Cuba.

The night that Lillian Hellman made her broadcast to America from the Madrid radio, a shell tore half the cornice off the front of the building from which she was talking. At the Alianza a few blocks away, we heard it strike like a million giant firecrackers exploding simultaneously in one spot—a quick, dry, loud bang! of terrific power. But Miss Hellman kept right on talking. Her broadcast was already twenty-four hours late because the night before Madrid had experienced an even bigger shelling. Then more than a hundred projectiles crashed into the city, so Miss Hellman could not leave her hotel to go to the radio station. The following evening in her talk she said of the bombardment of the night before, "You are quiet when a shelling comes because the bravery of these people who have seen so much, and will see so much more, reaches you and makes you quiet. And maybe you get quiet because you, too, are angry; you can't believe in a world which allows foreign dictators to wreck a city by carefully picking the poorest and most crowded part of that city, where the houses are the flimsiest and the children play most, then shell it and shell it with monotonous regularity. You would think the human heart would turn and make them stop."

Lillian Hellman closed her radio talk with a little anecdote about a truck full of evacuees one day on the Madrid-Valencia road. She said, "When in most other places of the world it would have been time for lunch, an old man took out his one loaf of bread. He looked around at the others and said, 'If nobody has bread, then I have bread for all.'"

I had found the people of Spain most generous with what little food they had—and with their belongings or services. Once in Madrid I took my shoes to be repaired. When I went back to get them the shoemaker refused payment. He said, "You, a foreigner, would not be here in besieged Madrid if you had not come to help us. I will not take money from you for my work." And he would not take it.

Certainly the most celebrated American in Spain was Ernest Hemingway. I found him a big likable fellow whom the men in the Brigades adored. He spent a great deal of time with them in their encampments. Hemingway himself had been under fire more than once, and he lived in one of the most vulnerable buildings of Madrid, the Hotel Florida. I ran into him and the golden-haired Martha Gellhorn from time to time, and spent a whole day with Hemingway in the late summer at the Brigade Auto Park on the edge of the city where my friends, Rucker and Battle, were stationed. I don't remember now what we talked about, nothing very profound, I'm sure, and there was a lot of kidding as we shared the men's food.

I did not frequent the same bar as did Hemingway—the bar which he made famous in his stories about Spain. It was too expensive for me, being the only bar in town that had any Scotch whisky left, and not much else. Most of the foreign correspondents frequented it, as well as some of the better-heeled Spaniards and military men. And the pretty Moorish girl that all the men liked was always there at cocktail time. This bar—the Aquarium—aside from being expensive, was probably the most dangerous café in Madrid, for it was in the very middle of the Grand Via between the Puerta del Sol and Cibeles, and shells were sometimes falling all around it. To make matters worse, its walls were glass like a fish bowl. But while I was there a shell never hit it, so far as I know, nor even shattered its glass panels. Its fourth-estate patrons, men used to covering wars and catastrophes all over the globe, led a charmed life. After endless cocktail hours in this glass-walled café in the heart of bombed Madrid, most of the correspondents I knew who frequented the place are still living.

But one evening there was a mighty ducking and dodging in this bar, so I was told, for at its most crowded hour a man pulled out his pistol and fired several times at another, killing him. Hemingway turned the incident into a short story, later published in *Esquire*. I was not involved. But immediately afterwards, two of the people present in the bar, who became characters in Hemingway's story, told me about the shooting.

They were a young English couple in charge of the English-language broadcasts for the Madrid radio. The man was a slightly built fellow with whom Hemingway had had a disagreement, so I was told, that became a fist fight which Hemingway won. Since that time, the author and the English couple had not been on speaking terms, although they saw each other often in the Aquarium Café. The English girl was stocky with short black hair. Hemingway in his short story did not name the couple, but he described them so pointedly that no one who was in Madrid at the time could mistake whom he meant. In the story, he exaggerated the man's slightness and the woman's stockiness, and in the fiction version of the incident, he had the man hiding under a table as the shots rang out, leaving his wife unprotected. The Englishman in reality claimed he pushed his wife into the kitchen and himself got behind a door only after he had seen that she was protected. I was not there, so I do not know. I was waiting at the Hotel Victoria for some other newspapermen to come and have dinner. But the police had locked the doors of the bar and would let nobody out until after their investigation, so almost everyone was late dining that evening.

What led up to the shooting that afternoon was that a ragged little Spaniard of middle age had wandered drunkenly into the de luxe bar filled with foreigners, top-echelon army men and government officials. In his hands he had, of all things, a flit gun. With alcoholic good humor, the little man began to spray people with flit. Some Spaniard at the bar objected to this. When the man kept on, an argument developed. The little drunk called the other man a few bad names. Spanish cursing is vile indeed. We have nothing like it in English. The Spaniard at the bar drew a pistol and shot the little drunk dead. From this real-life episode Hemingway fashioned a fictional story, adding to the episode a wedding feast earlier that afternoon when the little drunk's son had gotten married, and where his father with the flit gun had imbibed too much.

In many of my stories I have used real situations, and actual people as a starting point, but have tried to change and disguise them so that in fiction they would not be recognizable. I was interested in observing what Hemingway did to real people in his story, some of whom he described almost photographically.

HAIL AND FAREWELL

Tarazona, an English-speaking training base for the International Brigades, was hung with flags on the autumn

morning that I arrived. They were celebrating the end of the first year of the formation of the Brigades. Big doings were coming off: a military parade, a sports festival, boxing matches, a banquet and, in the afternoon, a visit from the American Congressmen, Bernard and O'Connell. At night there was to be a mass meeting in the town hall, followed by a party at staff headquarters for Lieutenant Walter Garland, the Negro in charge of this training base, who was returning soon to America.

Garland, only twenty-four years old, was one of the youngest commissioned officers in the Brigades, tall, brown-skinned, efficient-looking in his officer's uniform. He stood at the entrance to headquarters that autumn afternoon with the members of his staff, all white besides himself, to receive the American Congressmen as they drove into camp followed by a car full of newspapermen. Later at the reviewing stand in the ancient village square, the mayor of Tarazona and the members of the City Council received the visitors. Then the signal for the beginning of the military review was given. Lieutenant Garland and his officers took their places in front of the stand and, for the last time, the men whose training he had supervised, passed in review before him. Marching in squads in long ranks, steel-helmeted, in brown uniforms, they came out of the narrow village streets, passed the stand, turned, and lined up in the square before their officers in the brilliant sunshine.

These Internationals from all of the Americas and England stood in formation before their young Negro officer, who presented the men to the American Congressmen and, in turn, the Congressmen to the troops.

In the speeches that followed, the American visitors paid their respects to the International Brigades. Of the volunteers, Congressman Bernard said, "I have the greatest admiration for every one of you.... You represent the cause of world democracy, and the success of that cause will be a blow to Mussolini and Hitler." Congressman O'Connell of Montana declared, "We have only the highest praise for your bravery and for the cause for which you carry on." At the close of the speeches the American ranks broke into the "Star Spangled Banner" and the square full of soldiers stood at salute. Following the ceremonies, Lieutenant Walter Garland formally turned his command over to the new officer in charge, Major Johnson, a white American.

Garland entered the International Brigades as a private. He became a sergeant, was wounded at Jarama, and spent two months in the hospital with a bullet wound in the stomach. Then he entered Officers' Training School. During the Brunete offensive, as First Lieutenant, Garland led his men into action under the heaviest bombardment from the air that a modern army had ever known up to that time. Here he was wounded again and forced to retire from the lines. Upon his second recovery, he was sent to a post at the Tarazona Training Base, and rose to the position of commander. During the time of his directorship, various innovations were made. One, of great importance, was the setting up of the technical facilities for the reproduction of military maps in a more accurate fashion than had yet been known in Spain. The writing of the first manual in English for the use of the International Brigades was begun. And the mechanism for the training of radio and telephone operators and observers were developed.

I asked Garland how he accounted for his sudden ability for things military, since at home he had been a musician. Did music, I wondered, have any connection with warfare? Garland laughed and said he didn't think so.

That night at staff headquarters, his fellow officers and friends gave a farewell party for him—a party full of warmth and friendship. There was wine and food, the old songs of various countries, and the new songs the soldiers had made up in Spain. Then somebody asked Joe Taylor, a Negro scout just out of the trenches, to sing a spiritual. He sang "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" Then Joe Kelly, veteran of the Irish revolution, sang an Irish song as hauntingly beautiful in its way as the Negro lament that had gone before. Then those who had been Garland's closest co-workers and friends, his staff officers who had served under him, English and American, Irish and Spanish, made short speeches of farewell to their fellow soldier whose work at that particular post was done. And I, who did not know that soldiers cried, saw some of them cry. The next day Garland left for the United States to try to tell the folks at home what the Spanish struggle meant.

#### HAND GRENADES AND RATIONS

When the 1st Regiment de Train of the 15th Brigade was at rest not far from Madrid in the fall, their camp was near a road. The tents were so cleverly camouflaged, painted a zigzag green and brown, and so carefully hidden under trees that, from the highway, it was difficult to know there was a camp there. One day the enemy bombers had come over and dropped a few bombs, but they landed in the woods and did no damage. The Madrid front, a few kilometers away, was near enough for the wind to bring with it the sound of heavy artillery beyond the Casa del Campo and exploding mines at University City. The first day I visited the Brigades Auto Camp there was a steady rumble in the air.

Thaddeus Battle, one of the two Negro members of the Regiment, was a student at Howard University, a

major in Political Science, before he came to Spain. He was a mild-mannered, quiet young man, wearing glasses, who busied himself studying Spanish and French during his spare time.

"Student movements in America are beginning to carry some weight in national life," he told me as he sat smoking in his tent that chilly autumn afternoon. "Negro students must be a part of these movements."

Outside we heard what seemed to be the hum of planes. We stuck our heads out of the tent and looked up, but nothing was in sight, so we went on with our conversation.

"Negro college students must realize the connection between the international situation and our problems at home," Battle continued. "Right here in Madrid, I've seen how Fascists destroy schools and libraries. University City, a million-dollar educational center in ruins! Why gain culture only to see it destroyed? Franco tears down what it has taken people years to build. He burns books and closes schools and stifles education. In America our students, Negro and white, must stand up against all the forces that point toward a Fascist social order. And our Negro campuses should play a much more vital role in influencing government policy than they have done in the past."

We talked until the big gong for supper sounded and we got in line before the cook tent. Three Spanish women were ladling out a savory rabbit stew. The line of soldiers forming there was a typical section of the English-speaking units of the International Brigades: Irish and Cockney lads, a Southern father and son from Oklahoma, two cousins from a wealthy old family in California, an Australian school teacher, and two colored troupers—one Thaddeus Battle, standing behind me, and Bernard Rucker, from Ohio.

It was Rucker, whom the fellows called Bunny, who drove me back to Madrid that night in one of the Brigade trucks. On the way we talked. He told me that he had played basketball on the Beatty Park team back home in Columbus, and that when he got out of school in the middle of the depression, he had gotten a government relief job on W. P. A. and was a member of the Workers' Council of the Urban League, active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and acted in the Y. M. C. A. Theatre Guild plays. Bunny said that he had come to Spain to show good will toward the Loyalist cause, since he felt that Negroes should become more international in their viewpoint and activities, then they would understand their own problems better, and see their relationship to similar problems elsewhere in the world.

Bunny said that for several months he had been a driver in this Brigade shock unit, taking troops and supplies to the front, often working under fire and sometimes strafed by enemy planes. Peasant women and children he had seen machine-gunned in the fields, and once Bunny and the men in his transport unit helped put out a fire in a wheat field to save the grain from going up in flames. During the Brunete offensive his convoy was caught in a heavy bombardment, and he saw a bombing plane crash into a tower of flames only a few hundred yards from his truck.

As we reached the outskirts of Madrid, several times Bunny had to show his papers to sentries who flagged down his speeding truck. When we got to the Alianza, it was almost dark. He would have to drive back to the Auto Park without lights. Military drivers seemed to have little regard for speed limits and, in the blacked-out streets of Madrid at night, there were frequent crashes. So I warned Bunny to be careful as I said goodbye. He grinned, then disappeared in the twilight like a bat out of hell, taking the corner as fast as his truck would go.

Inside the Alianza some of the residents said, smiling, that they had missed my company at dinner.

"But I'll bet you ate my food," I answered, which was a sort of customary reply at such mock solicitousness—for at mealtime at the Alianza de Intelectuales nobody ever really missed anyone else. An absent boarder meant a little more to eat for all around the table. If at breakfast, someone announced he would not be back for dinner that evening, you could almost hear the silent cheers. Everybody was glad I had eaten with the Transport Brigade.

Certainly I was happy to know the boys in the Transport unit because they were helpful to me in getting about. The high-powered foreign correspondents, representing big papers or important wire services, all had cars in Madrid, or were able to rent them, and to acquire gas—which was more difficult to get than a car. With no trains running in or out of the city, and with no car, I had to depend on the kindness of others to travel, or wait until I heard of a military convoy going someplace that I wanted to go. One of the places I wanted to go was the American Hospital at Villa Paz. I also wanted to visit Campesino's headquarters at Acala de Henares where Cervantes was born. Attached to Campesino's headquarters were a number of Cubans of color.

Nicolas Guillén and I finally got to Campesino's camp. While we were talking to him outside headquarters, an officer threw a hand grenade up into the air just for fun and it came down near us with a loud explosion. Campesino laughed fit to kill at seeing us jump, he liked such pranks, and was famous throughout Spain as the daredevil general of the war. Campesino wanted us to meet his favorite Cuban officer, Captain Cuería.

"*Ven aca, Cuería,*" he called. I do not recall any salutes being exchanged as the captain approached the general under the trees where we were standing near headquarters. Basilio Cuería was a big fine-looking brown-

skin Cuban in his thirties, a former baseball player who had been in the United States, and who spoke English well. He was the captain of a machine-gun company made up entirely of Spanish gunners. When General Miaja inspected the Campesino troops, Cuería and his company gave a lightning demonstration on the field of how quickly a machine gun might be assembled from the parts each man carried, and they were singled out for a special citation by the general staff. Cuería's men were also the best baseball players in Spain, Campesino said. Cuería had taught them the game.

In Campesino's mess hall I had one of the best meals I had eaten in Spain. "How do you get such good food?" I wondered.

"*Como crees, chico?*" he asked, using the intimate *tu* form as if he had known me all my life. "How do you think, kid?" Grinning, his hand pulled a grenade from his belt. "I always get my proper rations. When they see me coming in a commissary, they begin to load up my trucks right away before I start playing ball with this."

#### HOW A MAN DIED

In order to get permission to visit the Ebro front in the northeast where it was rumored the next major battle was to take place, and where a number of Negro Internationals were stationed, it was necessary for me to go to the Brigade headquarters at Albacete.

The trip to Valencia was without incident. But the troop train to Albacete was packed to the door with soldiers returning from leave, many of them drunk and exhausted. When I got to the station that night, the train was already crowded. The coaches were third class with wooden benches. I was lucky to get a seat on the rail of a bench, for soon the aisles were packed with standees. The trip took all night. Most of the way the coaches were blacked out, the lights being turned on only at stations. During long waits in the pitch-black countryside, men would stick their heads out the windows to see if enemy planes were overhead. To move about in that train, one had to walk over sleeping men prone in the aisles or under benches. Some fell asleep standing up. Finally I got so sleepy myself that I lay down with my body partially under a bench. For the rest of the night, fellows were walking all over my feet, but usually I slept on.

Albacete was a madhouse, filled with troops, recruits drilling, bustling military offices, and officials so busy it took hours to see any of them. I stayed there only one night—that was enough! The hotels were all packed and jammed, but I was given permission to sleep in a Spanish barracks on the outskirts of town, a big grey-stone building filled with double-decker wooden bunks where hundreds of men were sleeping when I got there around midnight. The responsible told me to take any bunk I saw. If there was none empty, just wait until somebody got up for guard duty or something, he said. Men were coming and going and moving about in the barracks all night. I found an empty bunk, the top tier of a double-decker, and lay down with all my clothes on—for it was a chilly night. When I went to sleep, I was so tired that I thought nothing could wake me up. But I did wake up to find my whole body crawling with bedbugs. The insect I loathe most in the world is a bedbug—their cold brown bodies and horrible smell when they are mashed, and the bloody little stains they leave on bedding and clothing! I sat up and looked at the bugs crawling in and out of my coat sleeves. I pulled up my trouser legs to scratch and dozens of bugs were on my legs. The whole bunk was covered with bedbugs. When I looked at the man sleeping below me, he was covered with them, too. To try to kill them would have been futile, there were too many. Besides I hated their smashed odor. But I swore, if I ever got back to a nice clean bed in the U. S. A., I would never leave again. Finally I went to sleep.

From Albacete a Brigade truck carrying machine-gun parts to the Canadian Mackenzie Papineau Battalion, took me along, too, to the front, where a Loyalist attack was in progress. In this attack, so I learned in Albacete, Milton Herndon, one of the Negroes I had hoped to see, had just been killed. North of Valencia, a few miles out of Vinaros the truck in which I was riding broke down and refused to budge. We were due at the front in time for supper, but we never made it. While the fellows worked on the truck, I was stuck there on the road until long after midnight. It was dawn before we reached Pueblo de Hajar, and from there set out to find the tents of the Brigade battalion's new field headquarters where I was to sleep. But we learned from a sentry on the road that enemy artillery had located it during the night and blasted it out. A young officer and two other men had been killed and seven seriously wounded, including a doctor. It was a good thing for me that our truck had broken down on the road and I had not slept at headquarters the night before. I might have been blown out of this world.

That morning in the drizzling rain, we located the new position of the battalion staff several miles further away now behind a ridge. Dave Doran, political commissar of the 15th Brigade greeted me, gave me something to eat and a blanket and showed me a tent in which I might spread it to get a little daytime sleep, since I had been up most of the night. I slept until noon. The Negroes in the area were all off in dugouts and trenches three or four

miles away, and so widely scattered that Doran felt it would not be wise in bad weather and under battle conditions for me to try to seek them out. Besides, he had no one he could assign to the task of conducting me into the lines on that fluid front where at any moment new battles might break out. I was disappointed, but asked if there were any way I might see some of the men from the machine-gun unit with which the slain Milton Herndon had served. Doran said he would try to find out where these men were located, and perhaps take me there.

Milton Herndon's younger brother, Angelo Herndon, whom I had met in New York, had given me a copy of his autobiography, *Let Me Live*, which told the story of his part in a relief demonstration in Atlanta. He had been arrested and sentenced by an all-white jury to twenty years on the chain gang under an old Georgia law designed to prevent slave insurrections. That ancient statute of ante-bellum days had been dug up and applied to the street demonstration against the relief commissioners which was termed "rebellion." When I first met Angelo, he was free on fifteen thousand dollars bail, and had come to New York to make a speech about his harsh sentence which had created almost as much newspaper comment around the world as the famous Scottsboro Case of a few years before. "When Negroes ask for bread in Georgia, the only answer is the chain gang and death," Angelo said in his speech. He told me that his brother, Milton, was in Spain, and he said if I should see him, to be sure to say hello for him. But I missed Milton by a few days. So the least I could do when I got back home, I thought, would be to tell Angelo how his brother died.

The rain kept up all day, dreary and cold, and toward evening it began to come down in a steady torrent. It was quiet on the Ebro front. No action, just silence in the pitch-black dark of a rainy night in a valley where perhaps twenty thousand men lay in trenches and dugouts, behind barricades in ruined villages, squatting beside machine guns, or gathered around field pieces. Rain and silence. Then after dark, sporadic rifle fire. Occasionally, for a few seconds, a machine gun spitting a row of bullets into space. Then long blanks of silence again. A far, the boom of cannon, steady for maybe a half hour. Perhaps the Loyalist guns trained on Zaragossa, as the rebel guns were trained on Madrid. Then silence again. And the rain coming down in a soft steady drizzle.

Where the headquarters tent sags, water drips down and spatters on the table. Two candles burn. Men come in and out with messages for members of the General Staff, papers to sign, calls to the field telephone in a dugout on the side of a hill. The pop of a motorcycle. A courier arriving or departing for the lines. When the tent flap is lifted, you see the sentry outside with his gun on his shoulder, scarcely visible in the darkness, his cape-like coat touching the ground. He stands there silent, on guard in the rain. Dave Doran comes in. "Sorry," he says, "but we can't go to the Mac-Pap's tonight. Too much rain. Too difficult for you to see the men on a night like this. Besides, that Battalion's the furthest away, a couple of miles or more through the trenches once you get to the trenches. They're the last in our lines. Instead of you going, I've telephoned for two of the members of Herndon's section to come in and talk to you."

The rain seemed to come down harder than ever. Rain and the dull boom of artillery. It was cold so I went into the next tent to look for my overcoat. One of my tent-mates was spreading down a ground cloth with a flashlight, preparatory to making our pallets on the damp earth.

"We've just dug a little trench around our tent so the water'll run off," he said. "You know, this is the first night the Estado Mayor's been located here."

"Yes," I said, "I know about the shelling. I'd been in it myself, if we hadn't been delayed on the road."

"Lucky you!" said the soldier.

This was my first visit to an International unit in action under battle conditions. They were on the Aragon sector, specifically, Fuentes de Ebro—which means the village of Fuentes located on the River Ebro. The Loyalist troops, including the English-speaking battalions, had taken Belchite and Quinto only a short time before, important victories for the government. Now the Brigade lines lay just outside the town of Fuentes de Ebro. In the attack on Fuentes, Milton Herndon was killed. Now, two of his comrades were coming to field headquarters behind the lines to tell me about it.

I put on my heavy coat and went back to the busy staff tent to wait. Two or three hours passed, and they did not come. Meanwhile, there was a meeting of the Political Commissars from the various International companies, English, Canadian, Irish and Spanish-speaking. I was invited to sit in and listen to the problems and interests of the men whom the Commissars were commissioned to look after.

Nine o'clock came, ten, eleven. Still the men hadn't arrived from the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion where Sergeant Herndon had served. The meeting of Commissars broke up. It was raining very hard, so Doran decided to telephone for a truck to carry the men back to the nearest trenches where, even then, some would have an hours' or two hours' walk to reach their companies.

"Something must have happened that they couldn't leave," Doran said to me regarding the men from the

Mac-Pap's. "But I'll phone again and see."

I followed him out into the rain. On our way to the communications dugout, we ran into two dark shapes moving in the dark on the side of the hill.

"Johnson! Sankari!" they called out, identifying themselves.

"What happened to you," Doran asked. "We'd given you up."

"Snipers must have heard us coming out," one of them answered, "so they kept picking at us all around until we had to stop."

"So many bullets kept whizzing by for a while that we had to lay down in a ditch and stay there more'n an hour."

"Then in the rain, we couldn't find the path up here since you've moved. We weren't sure where you were."

But they had finally arrived. Two men from the 4th Company of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion who had served under Sergeant Herndon in his machine-gun section. They were big fellows, standing there in the dark. Dave Doran introduced me: Aaron Johnson of Los Angeles, Hjalmar Sankari of New York. When we got inside the candle-light tent, I saw that one was a colored boy, Johnson. And the other was a Scandinavian-American, Sankari.

"You'd better go back in the truck we're sending for now," Dave Doran advised them as he started out to phone, "so there won't be much time for you to talk."

The two men wiped the rain from their faces and we sat down on the square rim of a bank of earth that had been dug out to make a hollow seat around the table. The others left us alone in the tent. I began to ask questions about Herndon and his life in Spain. But, at first, it was a rather halting interview. I knew that no fighter likes to talk much about a comrade who's just been killed. But these men were his friends, and they had come to tell me about him.

"Milt Herndon! He died like this," they said. Sometimes one talked, sometimes the other. One answered a question, another added a phrase. Two voices in the night, a Negro voice and a white voice. Two American voices telling how Milton Herndon of Atlanta died.

"He died like this," they said. "He was taking the second machine gun over the top. He was the Sergeant, the section leader. He had three guns under him. He was taking the second gun over the top with his men. We went about three hundred metres up a little rise—when the Fascists opened up. We had to stop. A regular rain of bullets. They hit one of our comrades, Irving Schatz, his name was. He fell just ahead of us on top of the ridge in full view of the Fascist fire. Irving was wounded in the leg and couldn't move. The man nearest to him, Smitty, raised up to drag him back, and a bullet got Smitty in the heart. Got him right in the heart. Then Herndon crawled up the slope to rescue the wounded boy. They got Herndon, too—through the head, through the mouth—two bullets, just like that! And Herndon and Smitty both died. The other boy lived. Irving's in the hospital now. But Herndon and Smitty were killed right there. It was October thirteenth, our first day in the lines. At one o'clock we went over the top."

The rain came down in torrents on the little tent where we were sitting. A motor truck drew up outside. We heard the fellows piling in for their return to the trenches. Someone came to say that the others would wait for us to finish our conversation. But I did not like to keep a whole truck full of men standing in the rain.

"Tell me a little of what he was like," I said, "before you go. I know Angelo, but I never knew Milton."

"He used to talk a lot about Angelo," Sankari said. "He was proud of his brother for what he did in Atlanta. Milton was smart, too—he knew what lies behind this war. He knew what's up Hitler's sleeve. He worked hard in the company and in his section. Good machine gunner. Fine soldier. The men liked him. He had both Americans and English guys under him, and we all liked him."

"Two of us are colored in the company besides Herndon," Johnson said, rising. "Myself and Charlie Lewis from New York. We all liked Herndon. He worked hard. Milt was good-natured. He was a good card-player, too. A good fellow."

"He wanted to be a dynamiter," the Scandinavian added as he lifted the tent flap. "Herndon, he was a big tall guy, used to be a coal miner, and he would have been in one of the Spanish companies as a dynamiter if he could've spoken Spanish. He was a good singer. Everybody liked him."

"He and Smitty were both fine fellows," Johnson said. "They were good friends, too. Smitty was white. They're buried together." "Out in No-Man's-Land, over by Fuentes, we buried them that night," Sankari said.

"You know, our machine gun company was named after Frederick Douglass," Johnson added as they left the tent. "Herndon suggested the name, and when we named it the Frederick Douglass Machine-Gun Company, Milt made a speech on the connection between Negro rights at home and the fight here in Spain. He said, 'Yesterday, Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia—today, Spain—tomorrow, maybe America. Fascism won't stop anywhere—until we

stop it.' That's what he said."

Their truck rumbled slowly away in the blackness of the downpour, its headlights out. With it went these two Americans, one white, one Negro. Together they had come through the rain, hiding in roadside ditches from the bullets, in order to tell me how two other Americans, one white and one black, had died to stop fascism. At the moment of their death, they saved a wounded comrade.

On my pallet that night on the soggy ground under a dripping tent at the Ebro front, I remembered long ago it was written, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." I thought how Milton Herndon had died there at the Ebro not only to save a friend—and a land not his own, Spain—but all of us.

## NEGROES IN SPAIN

At Pueblo de Hajar in an abandoned mill the night before I left the front, I gave a program of my poems for a group of the Brigaders, and I read some of the *Letters from Spain* in verse that I had written. Afterwards there was a discussion, punctuated by the occasional roar of artillery. Some of the Internationals sitting around on the cold stone floor of the mill objected to the lack of correct grammar and the slightly broken English that I had used in these *Letters*. They said that many of their Negro comrades in arms were well educated; furthermore, I might mistakenly be aiding in perpetuating a stereotype. I answered that, of course, most of the Negroes in the Brigades spoke grammatically, but that others—and plenty of whites, as well—had had but little formal education and did not speak as if they were college men. Like the colonial Moors on Franco's side who had had meager, if any, opportunities for education, Negroes from states like Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi had attended very poor schools at best, and in some communities they had none. Anyway, one of the things I was trying to show in my poems was that even the least privileged of Americans, the Southern Negroes, were represented in the International Brigades, fighting on the side of the Spanish peasants and workers to help them preserve a government that would give the peasants and workers—as were most Negroes, too—a chance at schools and the learning of grammar.

With a French reporter, Mathieu Gorman, I went to captured Quinto. We found the Mexican painter, Antonio Pujol, sitting in a battalion kitchen that had been set up in a storage house with piles of licorice root stacked in the corners. Pujol was trying to keep warm. A Cuban boxer, Raul Rojas, came in and showed us the knife with which he had killed the Fascist hero of Toledo, Santa Pau, in hand-to-hand fighting at Belchite a few days before. The dead man's dried blood was still on the knife handle. This didn't help to make a damp chilly afternoon any more cheerful. But at the receiving hospital two American nurses brewed a big pot of tea, and gave us some tinned biscuits, which made me feel better. As usual, I was hungry.

A truck headed south before dawn took me as far as a bridge in the middle of Spain where the road across a river divided into two forks, one of which led into the Madrid-Valencia highway. I hadn't the least idea that morning where I was when they dropped me off at the near end of the bridge from which, the driver said, I would have the best chance of hitchhiking a ride into Madrid. The sentry guarding the bridge, who stopped all cars to examine papers, said he would help me get a ride. He was a teen-age Spaniard who told me that almost every day a Fascist plane or two came over and tried to bomb the bridge. He pointed out some big holes along the almost dry river bed where he said bombs had fallen. Sure enough, it wasn't any time before we heard a plane, and I looked up to see it high in the distance. I looked around, wondering which way to seek shelter. There were woods on either side of the road.

"Shall we go into the wood?" I asked, thinking it wise, in any case, to get away from the bridge which was a bombing target.

"Never into the woods," said the little Spaniard. "Come with me—we go under the bridge."

"Under the bridge?" I cried, feeling myself being blown sky high

"Sure," he said, "they always aim at the bridge, but never hit it. Most times their bombs fall in the woods." But before we had time to get under the bridge, the plane had come over, and no bombs fell. Just a reconnaissance flight, I guess.

An hour or two passed, and finally a car came hurtling down the road with some Spanish soldiers in it, and they carried me on to Madrid, speeding through the country as fast as their car would go. I got back to the Alianza in time for dinner.

It was cold in Madrid at the end of October, and there was no fuel for heating purposes, so it was more comfortable to keep on the move. Since I could not visit Seville or Cordova, the cities I most wanted to see in Spain, as they were in rebel hands, I settled for a trip to the ancient Escorial which the Alianza arranged, requisitioning a car for me from the Ministry of War, as was at times its cultural privilege. One of the great sights

of the world, this sixteenth century monastery, church and royal palace where once lived Phillip II, has over a thousand fantastic windows and hundreds of doors. Twenty-four miles from Madrid in the Guadarrama Mountains, where some of the worst fighting took place in the early days of the war, the Escorial itself was untouched. At least the rebels did not bomb it. They respected this national treasure, so the Spanish kings buried in its dusky Panteon still slept in peace, and the hand-illuminated scrolls in the monastery library were intact. After a trip through the Escorial, climbing up and down stairs, with Maria Teresa Leon stopping to explain the history of every object to me, I was more fatigued that day than if I had taken a tour of an entire battle front. Even though there was much of interest and beauty at the Escorial, museums always tire me out.

A trip to Tarazona later, while not exciting in any memorable way, gave me a chance to meet one of the Negro Internationals I had heard a great deal of, and about whom I wanted to do a piece for the *Cleveland Call-Post*. When I got to Tarazona at midnight (and it was fortunate for me, I did not arrive later or I would have missed him), the man I wanted to see was about to start out with two trucks on a food purchasing tour for the various kitchens at the Anglo-American Training Base. He had little time to talk to me as the trucks were about to get under way, but while the chauffeurs were gassing up for the journey, he told me briefly something of his work in Spain.

Abraham Lewis was his name. He came from Cleveland, where he was one of the active workers in the Future Outlook League. He had been in Spain almost a year. At first he was attached to a transport regiment. Now he was the chief quartermaster at the English-speaking Training Base, with a large staff of various nationalities under him. His responsibilities included the feeding, clothing, sanitary and recreational facilities of the entire base. Lieutenant Lewis, however, was not without experience in such work. He was formerly chief steward on an American boat and there acquired the knowledge of handling food and preparing menus. In Spain, though, the feeding of Internationals was no simple problem. In the first place, the Spaniards cook with olive oil, a procedure not agreeable to the pallet of most foreigners. Lewis had to find available substitutes for this oil that would appeal to the International tastes at his tables in a land where lard or butter were not easily to be gotten. Then there was the problem of cooks. Very few of the International Brigaders wanted to serve as cooks. They wanted to fight. So Lewis had to train Spanish cooks in American ways of cooking, stressing sanitation and efficiency—especially in the matter of time, having food ready exactly at the hour when it should be served. Since most of his kitchen workers could neither read nor write, written orders and listed menus were at first impossible. Out of twenty-seven cooks and helpers only seven were literate. So Lewis organized classes for them. Already seventeen had learned to read. For this achievement the U. G. T. Trade Unions, to which the Spanish kitchen employees belonged, complimented Lewis in an official letter.

The International Brigades in Spain were integrated several years before American military services started mixing Negroes and whites, and there were Negro officers in the Brigades with white men serving under them. The units of the American Medical Bureau in Spain were mixed, too. There were several colored ambulance drivers, including two teen-age kids, George Waters and Al Chisholm, who got there, I have no idea how, since they should have been home in high school. But they were driving ambulances up to the fronts under fire and bringing back the wounded. At the charming white villas of the International Convalescent Center at *Benicasim* there was jovial Ted Gibbs from Chicago, who chauffeured a big evacuation ambulance; and talkative Julius Rodriquez from Harlem, who drove ambulatory patients to the movies or to the country for picnics, and was in charge of the office work for the entire ambulance transport group. On the days when hospital trains filled with wounded pulled into Benicasim, these Negroes sometimes worked a twenty-four-hour shift. Among the wounded when I was there was Otto Reeves, a fine youngster from Dayton, who asked me to tell his parents he was O.K. when I got back to Ohio. But before I got home, Otto had returned to the Ebro front and was killed.

At the American Base Hospital at Villa Paz to which serious cases were evacuated, there were graduate nurses from all over the United States, among them a Negro girl, Salaria Kee. Dr. Arnold Donawa of Harlem was in charge of rebuilding the faces of soldiers there whose jaws were splintered, teeth shattered, or chins blown away. This tall, kindly colored man, a favorite with the patients, stayed in Spain until near the end of the war, and brought back with him a group of wounded Americans. Dr. Donawa showed me one of his patients at Villa Paz, a Spanish boy, whose lower jaw had been torn away by an explosive bullet and who had to be fed with a tube. Dr. Donawa told me the explosive bullets used by the Franco troops were the kind that explode inside a wound and leave splinters of metal in flesh and bone. They are generally used, he said, only for big game hunting in Africa, not on human beings.

The nurse, Salaria Kee, was a slender chocolate-colored girl. When Mussolini's troops invaded Ethiopia, Salaria was one of the initiators of the fund-raising campaign in Harlem which sent a seventy-five-bed field hospital to Ethiopia. When she had the chance to come to Spain to help the Loyalist government repel an Italian-

aided insurrection, she came.

"What! You're going to Spain in wartime?" she said her friends in Harlem exclaimed in amazement. "And alone?"

"Sure," Salaria answered. "I wasn't born twins. I have to go alone."

When I met her at Villa Paz, she had been there for six months, and had just become Mrs. John Joseph O'Reilly. On October second, she had married an Irish ambulance driver. An old judge with handlebar mustaches from the nearby village of Salices had performed the ceremony, the village band had played at her wedding, and a blinded American soldier, Robert Raven, had made a speech.

Salaria told me of some of the problems of the American Hospital at Villa Paz. In spite of the fact that it had recently been a royal palace, sometimes the plumbing did not work, and the water pressure had been so low that often water would not run at all, so the nurses and doctors had recently chipped in and bought a gasoline pump. But sometimes that did not work either. One day in caring for a patient who had to have a diet of soft-boiled eggs at regular intervals, when no water would come out of any faucets in the building, Salaria took a bottle of wine from the Spanish workers' table, and boiled the eggs in wine. Another time on a bitter cold day when a wounded French soldier, after long exposure, was brought in out of the rain with a mangled leg that had to be amputated immediately, the doctor ordered the chilled soldier surrounded at once by hot-water bags, otherwise he might die. But there was no hot water ready for such an emergency, and the diluted kerosene in the oil stove in the operating room would not light. Suddenly it occurred to Salaria that it was almost lunch time and they always had soup for luncheon. She rushed into the kitchen and filled a half-dozen water bags from a boiling pot of soup, and thus kept the soldier warm until the operation.

At Villa Paz I saw also Ed White, one of the first two men of color to come to Spain in the original Lincoln Brigade. The other, Alonzo Watson, had been the first Negro slain in the Spanish War. In the hospital at Quinto I talked with Crawford Morgan of New York. Under treatment at Benicasim were Frank Alexander of Los Angeles, George Waters from San Francisco, Andrew Mitchell of Pittsburgh, Jeff Wideman and Henry George of Philadelphia, and Nathaniel Dickson of Chicago. In the various transport units there were a number of St. Louis Negroes—Tom Brown, Frank Warfield, Jimmy Cox, Larry Dukes, Walter Callum. At Tarazona, I ran into Bert Jackson of Brooklyn and Vaughn Love from Harlem. At Albacete, I saw Oscar Hunter, a former social worker at Karamu House in Cleveland, William Baker from Honolulu, Canute Frankson, and several more whose names I did not put down. With the John Brown Heavy Artillery Battery, I met a French Algerian Negro named Frazal, and a former pitcher with the Cuban Giants, Domingo, also Goldwyn, a New Yorker from the 369th Infantry unit of the National Guard in Harlem. I met Tommy Paige from the Cordova front, Joe Taylor from the Ebro, and Tomas Callado in a Madrid hospital. With Campesino I'd seen Eugene Gavin of Youngstown, a tall machine gunner who lost an eye at Teruel. There had been four Negro aviators in Spain, including James Peck, but they had been invalided home shortly before I arrived. And among the men I never knew because they had been killed, were Milton Herndon, Morris Wickman, Norman Lisberg, Alonzo Watson, and the man whom the Brigades spoke of very often, Oliver Law.

Who were these Negroes who, like Law, Herndon, Garland, Donowa, and Abe Lewis, left their peaceful U. S. A. for a war zone in a foreign country, coming of their own free will to Spain? Nobody made them come. They were not conscripts like the Moors, or mercenaries—the money was next to nothing. They were not professional soldiers like the Germans, or draftees like the Italians. They came of *their own free will*. A number of them died there.

Who were they? There were a hundred or so that I talked with in the various hospitals, or on the Ebro front, at Albacete, Valencia, Tarazona and Madrid. I put their names in my notebooks. Yet their names cannot tell us who they really were, nor could any additional pages I might write about them. But they were there in Spain in 1937-38, American Negroes. History has recorded it. Before that time, the leading ambassadors of the Negro in Europe were jazz-band musicians, concert artists, dancers, or other performers. But these Negroes in Spain were fighters—*voluntary fighters*—which is where history turned another page.

#### ARTISTS UNDER SIEGE

*Cuidadito, compa' gallo, cuidadito!*

*Cuidadito, compa' gallo, cuidadito!*

*Take care, brother rooster, take care!* Guillén used to sing as he came up the stairs to my Alianza room. But one day in late November, he came up shivering. "Damn, man," he sputtered in his Cuban Spanish, "it's getting too cold in Madrid for Papa Gallo to crow any more. But I hear it's still warm in Valencia."

"When are you cutting out?" I asked.

"As soon as I can crowd into a military bus," said Guillén, his teeth chattering.

I knew it was time for me to be leaving, too, but I hated to quit that city I had grown to love. Like the Madrileños, even under doom, I did not want to leave. A year or so earlier, when the citizens of Madrid could have gone and, in fact, the government had begged as many of them as possible to evacuate the city, they wouldn't go. Now that they couldn't go, since there was no transportation, they wouldn't go anyway. But there was no real reason for me, an American, to stay there any longer, eating up their meager food, taking up their fighting time. I had gotten the stories for my paper, overstayed the time for which the editor had agreed to pay me, and seen almost all there was to see. Still I wanted to remain. It was mid-December before I left. Franco was threatening to sever the Madrid-Valencia road—and even more than that, to divide Loyalist Spain into two parts, cutting off the north from the south, by a drive through Teruel to the coast. The Americans in Madrid said it would be wise to leave before the city was entirely surrounded and a starvation blockade in force. I brought no winter clothes to Spain and should have gone home before the cold set in. But the longer I stayed in Madrid, the more I liked it. I might get hungry there, but I never got bored. And certainly there were abnormal deprivations plus the normal and great poverty—but not the dull relief W. P. A. kind of worried existence we had at home in Cleveland—with little hope in sight. Here in Madrid, where people had next to nothing—with the guns pointed at them every day to take that little away—they expected soon to have everything. At the Alianza poets were making poems about it, musicians making songs, artists painting pictures and Maria Teresa Leon preparing plays.

To get tickets to the crowded Madrid theaters was difficult without standing in line a long time, but fortunately through Maria Teresa I was able to see a number of plays, and could always attend the Teatro Lope de Vega, which she administered, or the Zarzuela where she performed and directed an excellent student company in Spanish and other European plays. Maria Teresa Leon, Alberti's wife, was a buxom blonde with a handsome face and a commanding personality. Her hair was very long, her complexion clean and wholesome, and her Spanish very clear and positive. She dressed well. And in Spain, where men always turn around to look at a woman, she was an eye-catcher.

There is an old Spanish custom taken for granted that a man may whistle or even speak to a pretty girl on the street without offense. But if the girl so much as turns her eyes, then—but only then—she may be insulted by a direct proposition. So long as the woman does not notice the admiration of the unknown male, she is safe from intrusion, but may hear after she has passed a whispered compliment to her pretty legs. Only loose women ever turn around to acknowledge such compliments. But with revolutionary zeal, some of the more ardent Loyalist ladies in Spain set out to put an end to what they felt was "intrusive and uncomradely" in this traditional Spanish way of flirting. Women, they said, were workers and citizens just like men, not mere objects of sex, and so should not be subjected to personal remarks from unknown admirers on the public streets. In Paris, London, New York, and other truly cultured centers where she had been, Maria Teresa said, such behavior on the part of men toward women was unknown. The new Spain should not tolerate it either.

One day, walking alone down the Paseo de Recoletos in Madrid, Maria Teresa was the subject of a passing soldier's ardent compliments, "Wow! What a blonde! Gee, *chica*, you're pretty!" Most women, secretly pleased, would have walked straight on, eyes ahead without the flicker of a lash. But Maria Teresa decided to teach the young soldier a lesson. She turned her head to tell him that that was no way for any comrade in Loyalist Spain to behave toward another—since he did not even know her name. But before she got the words out of her mouth, the young soldier took for granted that, having turned her head, she was a streetwalker, so he playfully slapped her on her shapely behind. Maria Teresa screamed indignantly. The corner policeman recognized the popular actress and immediately laid hands on the young soldier for daring to strike her, and she permitted the bewildered youth to be hauled off to police court.

That night at dinner, when Maria Teresa told the assembled diners about it, the few women there, of course, voiced indignation concerning the amorous soldier's uncouth behavior. But the men all looked embarrassed, and even Maria's husband did not support her position very strongly. Spanish males were all for preserving the right to whistle at a pretty face or figure in passing, and to give vent to a few fleeting sidewalk compliments.

But at the Alianza de Intelectuales, whose president was the Catholic writer, José Bergamín, and Alberti the executive secretary, women were on a par with men. There were few amorous doings there anyway. Everybody was too busy working: making posters for the war effort or the liquidation of illiteracy campaign, or editing and publishing books. I was busy translating, with the aid of Rafael Alberti and Manuel Altolaguirre, the "Gypsy Ballads" of Federico García Lorca, and his play, *Bodas de Sangre*. Alberti, Altolaguirre, and Arturo Barea had known Lorca well and still grieved for his execution at the hands of the Fascists. With workshops at the Alianza, Miguel Prieto had established a satirical puppet theater, La Tarumba, touring the trenches right up to the front lines. But most male members of the Alianza were soldiers and so able to work at art only when in Madrid on

leave. The leading man at Maria Teresa's theater came in from the trenches at University City to play his roles, then went back to the front after his performance.

Maria Teresa's student group presenting Lorca's Mariana Pineda often took their play to the battle fronts to perform in the open for the soldiers, many of the men standing throughout the whole show. Maria Teresa told me of a peasant soldier watching the play who suddenly exclaimed, "All my life I have done nothing but dig in the earth. Now here I am like a lord watching a play." After a performance the actors and the director made it a point to mingle with the soldiers and discuss the play with them.

"What we want to do—our theater groups," Maria Teresa Leon told me, "is make the peasants and workers, even while they are soldiers, realize that they too can learn to make up plays, direct plays, and act in them. The soldiers can talk with our actors if they want to, and they can become actors themselves."

Alberti added, "What the members of the Alianza want to do is make art life, and life art, with no gulf between the artists and the people. After all, as Lorca said, 'The poem, the song, the picture is only water drawn from the well of the people, and it should be given back to them in a cup of beauty so that they may drink—and in drinking, understand themselves.' Now our art is at the service of the Republic to help win the war, since we do not want the books we write to be burned in public squares by Fascists, or blown into bits on library shelves by bombs, or censored until all their meaning is drained away. That is why we artists help to hold Madrid against Franco."

#### HOW TO EAT A CAT

Miguel Hernandez, a young poet in peasants' shoes, came from Valencia to visit us at the Alianza for a week. He had been a shepherd boy. The Cuban writer, Pablo de la Torriente-Brau, had passed by the house earlier that year on his way to the trenches where he was killed. Miguel Hernandez, who had fought with him in the same regiment, told us about it. Louis Aragon from Paris and Egon Ervin Kish from Central Europe had visited the Alianza, too, and the painter, Alfredo Siqueiros from Mexico. But since the Alianza was more a work place than a center of entertainment, not too many foreign writers dropped by during their visits to the beleaguered city, for there was no food and little drink to offer a guest. If a guest came, and pesetas were available, the guest might be taken in the late afternoon to the old bar that had the good sherry. There, when other knick-knacks were lacking, a big bowl of walnuts or almonds might be placed on the table along with several little hammers. Sometimes at the cocktail hour, the cracking of nuts at tables was louder than the gunfire at the front. There being less and less food in Madrid as fall became winter, one did not leave a single kernel of a single nut uneaten.

Late at night I could hear the emaciated lions roaring in the Madrid Zoo put beyond the Retiro near the Alianza. I always wondered what they fed these animals. Some said they fed them the skinny horses that dropped dead of starvation. At the nearly abandoned American Embassy there was a famous dog, a great Dane, that some foreigner had left behind in the embassy's care. The dog could eat more meat than a whole family of people. The Spanish caretakers at the embassy slighted themselves to feed this dog the little that they were able to give him during the war. The dog was still surviving when I left the city, looking at visitors with big sad eyes.

The Gypsy dancers were still dancing in the music halls and El Niño Perez playing his guitar. Albacin, son of Madrid's prettiest Gypsy flower seller, was appearing in *La Copla Andaluza*. Don Juan Tenorio was playing at the Español. And at the Calderon Pastora Imperio, the famous Argentinista, had just come back from two hundred performances for the soldiers in the trenches. In the early fall a delegation of Mexican writers and painters brought to Madrid a stunning exhibition of art and posters. Every evening during the Mexican exhibition there were literary programs in which Spanish poets like Rafael Alberti and Leon Felipe took part, as well as the visiting Mexican writers, Jorge Mansisidor, Maria Luisa Vera, Juan de la Cabada, and the young poet, Octavia Paz. Silvestre Revueltas conducted the Madrid Symphony Orchestra in a program of his works. I found the jovial Revueltas a likable man, very simple in manner, and almost as stout as Diego Rivera. Revueltas set my "Song for a Dark Girl" to music, and it was later published in New York with both the English and Spanish text.

Revueltas, like most Mexicans I've known, had a keen sense of humor. He enjoyed the ironic anecdotes and wry jokes about the bombardments, the war, Franco, Mola and Queipo de Llano that continually went the rounds of Madrid. One joke concerned the pregnant wife of an African savage who asked her husband what they should name their son, Lion, Hyena or Leopard. The husband answered, "None of those, wife, they're not savage enough. We'll call him Mussolini." Another tale was that when Franco went to make a speech to a division of his troops at Cordova, as he stood up before them, he asked, "Does anybody here know Spanish?" And a little story that the Madrileños thought very funny concerned a soldier who, after weeks of eating nothing but rice in the trenches, came home on leave and his mother prepared a surprise dish for him for dinner. When she put it on the table, it was a pot of rice! In an almost lunchless city a common question was, "What did you have for lunch?" The answer

might be, "Boiled mule's tongue." Whereupon, the questioner, not to be outdone, would say, "Why, we had fried pony."

The bombardments that fall seemed heavier than ever in the city and the hard metallic bang of exploding shells clearer and sharper in the cold autumn air. Loyalist Intelligence Agents said the rebels were now trying out new model Krupp cannons, firing on Madrid from the Garabitas Hills a few miles beyond the city limits. The government was answering back from Carabanchel with the same old guns they had been depending upon for months. In the Plaza de Castelar just down the street from the Alianza, a shell had broken the nose off of one of the lions hitched to the chariot of the Goddess of the Fountain of Cibeles. Now that the fountain had been belatedly covered with sandbags, the wits of Madrid called her, "Beauty Under Covers."

With a Spanish soldier friend who came into town often on leave, I went to visit his parents in the Cuatro Caminos section of Madrid, a poor neighborhood East of University City. There every house had been damaged by shrapnel or flying shells. But the neighborhood was still thickly populated, with children scampering in the streets, women washing clothes in courtyards, and old men sitting in the chilly sunlight to absorb what warmth was left before the freezing weather came. My friend, Vincente, gave me packs of "draft killers," the hard little black cigarettes supplied the troops, which he lighted from one end of a fuse-like rope-lighter he wound about his waist. He said its long smoldering tip was used to touch off dynamite charges at the front. I in turn gave Vincente saccharin tablets to sweeten the family coffee. He introduced me to the little bodegas, wine-shops, in Antocha, a roughneck section of Madrid near the railroad yards where every night seemed like Saturday, in spite of the frequent crack of rifle fire, the staccato run of machine guns, and the boom of trench mortars and hand grenades on the Madrid front. When the enemy artillery opened up on the town and you knew again you weren't just near action, but in it, the folks in Antocha simply closed the wine-shop doors to keep flying shell fragments from bursting a wine keg—and the good times kept on. What people, those Madrileños!

The sixteen-story Telefonica had closed down operations on its upper floors since they were riddled with shell holes, and no elevators were running, but the lower five floors were still in use. The telephone girls still sat at their switchboards, and you could put through a call to Paris if you wished. The Madrid Post Office near the Alianza had hardly any windows left, but the mail went out on schedule by plane to Valencia. Across the plaza from the post office, the flower stand that had been at the curb for years still did business, in spite of the fact that the Ministry of War, at which the Fascists regularly aimed a shell or two, was only a few hundred yards away.

Ralph Heinzen, the United Press man in Madrid called the siege of the city one of the most notable of modern times, and one "that will go down in history with the sieges of Troy, Sagunto, Paris and Verdun." During the months that I was there, it was estimated that more than three thousand shells fell in Madrid, almost a thousand people were killed, some three thousand wounded, and twenty-seven hundred buildings rendered uninhabitable, many totally demolished. By the end of the war there were to be six thousand civilian dead and some twenty thousand Madrileños wounded. The Associated Press correspondent whom I knew, Charles P. Nutter, wrote, "*They Shall Not Pass (no pasaran)* still remains the blood-stained motto of war-battered Madrid, cold, hungry, forlorn, the capital of Spain."

War and hunger were daily companions there. With the coming of autumn and the scarcity of fresh vegetables from the country, even onions became less plentiful. Potato peelings and sausage skins were boiled in Madrid to make soup. At the Alianza even horse meat became a luxury, its coarse-grained flesh prepared to look as much like pot roast as possible by our skillful cook. She was adept at making gravies to cover up the peculiar looks of things. With lentils in one of the beautiful antique bowls belonging to the marquis, horse meat in gravy made a right nice dinner.

In extremely poor sections like Antocha and Cuatro Caminos, it was said that people sometimes ate their cats. I asked my friend, Vincente, about this. He shrugged. "*Quien sabe?* Might be," he said. "But I wouldn't eat a cat by itself, would you? The best way to eat a cat is stewed with a rabbit—then you don't know when you have a mouthful of what. Each time you take a bite, you can imagine it's rabbit."

## SALUD MADRID

On my last night in Madrid I did not go to bed at all. I had intended to go to bed, but I neglected to pack any of my belongings before I went out into the streets—and once out, I did not get back home until after three in the morning. The bus for Valencia left at five from a point a long way from the Alianza. On my return I had to pack hurriedly and start walking, for, with all the things I had to carry, I knew it would take me a long time to get to the bus stand. There was no transportation available save my own feet, no taxis, not even a push cart.

Herbert Matthews, Ernest Hemingway, and some of the other newspapermen were giving a little farewell party for me at the Hotel Victoria that night about ten. Earlier in the evening Bunny Rucker had come in town

from the Auto Camp to say goodbye and invited me out for a drink. We went to a café off the Puerto del Sol and when it closed, it being not quite time to go to the Victoria, I started to walk with Bunny to the point where his truck was parked. He was due back at camp by ten. One of the heaviest shellings I'd encountered in Madrid began while we were groping our way through a pitch-dark side street on the way to the truck. It was the hour for the theaters and cafés to close that the enemy often chose to shell Madrid in order to terrorize the throngs headed home from what little public pleasures were available in that city after dark. In the chill December air, the clarity of the preliminary boom! and whiz and spang! of shells passing, then striking the stone of a building or the concrete pavement, made each hit seem very near. No doubt, some were very near. Bunny and I took refuge in a wine-shop that we found still open. Tables and counter were crowded with Spaniards who greeted us with friendly *Saluds!*

"Internationals, welcome!" they said. Almost all the men in the place insisted on buying us wine, glass after glass.

Spang!... *BANG!*... spang!... The shells continued to fall, mostly toward the center of the city, it seemed, but often so near that their vibrations were distinctly felt inside the little bodega.

Some of the men at a long table began to sing, folk songs and flamenco, and everybody turned to listen while they drank. One husky, hairy Spaniard with a range from bass to high falsetto, threw back his head and cried some verses that were almost as frightful in their intensity as the crash of the shells. Flamenco and explosives on my last night in Madrid became an unforgettable combination! Wine and two candles burning in the crowded little wine house, and Bunny saying, "I guess I won't get back to camp by ten o'clock tonight." bang!... One of the men began to sing:

*Madrid, que bien resistes,  
Madrid, que bien resistes,  
Mamita mia, los bombardeos!*

This everyone knew, and when the contemporary wartime stanzas were exhausted, they sang together the old folk verses about the four mule drivers. Then they asked us to sing something in our language. I, who could never carry a tune, was unable to oblige. But Bunny sang "Go down, Moses, and tell old Pharaoh to let my people go." The men stamped and shouted for more, so he sang another spiritual, and another. Then the Spaniards sang some more, and the singing and drinking kept up all the time the shells were falling. Each time that there was a lull in the firing and I thought we could leave, by the time another farewell round was set up, the Franco batteries had turned loose on the city again. It was past eleven o'clock before Bunny and I, both far from sober, left the bar. We shook hands on a pitch-black corner in a canyon of enormous darkened buildings; then I found my way to the Victoria. Six or eight journalists were waiting for me there with wine and bottles of Scotch on the table. Later a few others who had been delayed by the shelling arrived, and we sat talking and drinking until after two o'clock. Hemingway and some others headed for the Florida or the Alfonso, so we shook hands on a dark corner, and I went down the Grand Via in the opposite direction toward the Alianza.

The lightless streets of Madrid were quite deserted, except for military patrols. The sandbagged shops and offices were solid walls of darkness, their roof tops dim silhouettes against an inky sky. An occasional sentry at a crossing watched me as I went by, but only one stopped me as I passed the Banco de España and asked to see my permit to be abroad after the curfew.

*He said, "Pase, camarada. Salud!"*

"*Salud,*" I said. "*Salud, Madrid!*" I knew this was the last time I would walk through the main streets of this city. "*Salud, Madrid!*"

A shell earlier in the evening must have grazed the corner of a building just across the street for there was scattered rubble and the fallen stone of what looked like a broken cornice all over the sidewalk as I went up the Paseo past the War Ministry toward the street where I lived. Guillén, who was catching the bus, too, was in bed sleeping soundly, his single bag already packed and sitting ready just inside his door. I did not wake him but went on to my room to gather my various belongings into some portable form. Because I had so little time, I stuffed my suitcases carelessly and quickly as full as I could get them. Then I stood in the middle of the floor puzzled as to what I should do with all the other things I had to carry—books by the dozens which various writers had given me, warmly inscribed; gifts and souvenirs, including a handsome pair of bullfight *banderillas* that a famous *torero* had placed in the neck of a bull at a great *corrida* and which a friend presented to me when he learned that I was an *aficionado*; a bottle of wine in a wicker holder another friend had brought me to drink on the way to Valencia; a box of pieces of shrapnel I had picked up in the streets after shellings, and a ledger from the rubble of the city hall at Quijorna; a lace mantilla one of the women of the Alianza was sending to my mother; and my typewriter

and manuscripts! The situation looked hopeless, for I had no transportation to get me to the bus a mile away, and no porters to help me lug so much. Besides, I was drunk.

The wine of the bodega, and the Scotch of the Victoria's party had finally gone to my head. I observed my belongings through an alcoholic fog. Drunk or sober, it was hard to figure out at that late hour what to discard. I couldn't bear to part with the banderillas, so I tied them together with a string. Of the books and ledger and manuscripts, I made a single heavy package. I stuffed my overcoat pockets full of shrapnel and other souvenirs. And I decided to hang the wine bottle around my neck. With two bags, the enormous package, my typewriter, the banderillas, and the bottle, I had no recourse but to hope that the amiable Guillén would not object to being a pack mule. Fortunately, he didn't, so about four o'clock, both of us, loaded down, started on foot toward the distant bus. I was so tired, so sleepy, and so unsteady on my legs, and the things I had in my hands, under my arms, and in my pockets were so heavy that I had to stop every few hundred yards and put everything down to rest. Guillén declared we were going to miss the bus if I didn't hurry. To get another permit for another bus on another date from the military authorities might take weeks. I replied that I didn't care—to go ahead if he wanted to—just drop my stuff on the ground and leave me.

"*Caramba, chico,*" Guillén cried, "Madrid might be cut off from the rest of the world soon—you might never get out."

"*Nichevo,*" I said. "*Que le hace?* Damn if I care! I can't walk any faster with this stuff—and I'm not going to leave my typewriter here, and these books the writers have given me, nor my banderillas, and my few clothes I've got. So go ahead."

But Guillén stuck with me, and we finally reached the bus, standing in the dark almost ready to depart and already crowded. When the motor began to sputter and bark and backfire, and the bus took off with a jerk and lurched through the dusky streets before dawn and past the bull ring at the edge of town, from the wine and the whisky, the weariness and the flamenco and the shells and the goodbyes of the night before to the men and women with whom I'd shared for so long the dangers of Madrid—plus the sadness of leaving a city that I loved—I began to feel sick at my stomach and in my soul. I rode the long way to Valencia all day until well after dark feeling very sick.

Filled with refugees from the ruined villages and towns near the fronts, Valencia was more crowded than ever. But the weather was mild and sunny, and there was still much more to eat than in Madrid. Some of the hotels even had hot water for a hot bath. But the nights were enlivened with sirens and air raids, searchlights cutting across the sky, bombs falling, and occasional shellings from the sea, and the air was full of desperate rumors. It was said that the government was preparing to move to Barcelona. Months ago it had moved from Madrid to Valencia. Now in the eventuality that Loyalist Spain were cut in two, it intended to move to Barcelona. Said the maid at my hotel, "The big shots can always go, señor. Governments can always move, *but the people have to stay.*"

For a week or so it looked as if I might have to stay in Valencia, too. There was no transportation available to the north. The trains to Catalonia were booked up for weeks ahead and crowded to the gunwales. Ticket queues were unending at the station, and there were no more tickets available for Barcelona for a month. People of means were streaming northward toward the French border—just in case. Cars could no longer be rented, since all transport now belonged to the military. Even Constanca de la Mora, the charming aristocrat in charge of the Government Press Bureau, to whom members of the foreign press appealed for everything, could be of no immediate help to me.

"So many people all of a sudden seem to want to go to Paris," said Constanca. (Everyone called her by her first name.) "Maybe after the rush is over, I can get you a seat on a train, perhaps by Christmas."

I had thought I might spend Christmas at home in Cleveland with my folks, but that hope grew dimmer as the days passed. Finally, an idea occurred to me. Almost every day I passed the downtown office of Cook's Travel Service. But no one ever seemed to be going in or out of the travel bureau, and it did not appear to be doing any business. There were no tourists coming to Valencia, and the posters in Cook's unwashed windows were all old and dusty. But the door was open. I knew that the night train for Barcelona carried one de luxe *wagon-lit* coach. I had, of course, asked at the station about a berth on this coach long ago, and was told that usually all its space was taken by the government for diplomats or military men. The stationmaster said that there was a long civilian waiting list for any free space in this car for weeks ahead.

Guillén wanted to get to Barcelona, too, where he intended to remain a few weeks doing some pieces on the Catalonians for his paper. So I said one day, "Guillén, I think I'll try Cook's." But Guillén laughed at the idea of a mere tourist bureau being able to get us tickets, when the Government Press Bureau itself could not.

"Cook's is open," I said. "They must be open for some reason, so no harm to try."

My one previous experience with Cook's Travel Service had been an unpleasant one. The first time I had gone to Havana from New York, I had sought to purchase a steamship ticket and make hotel reservations at the Fifth Avenue office of Cook's in New York, first phoning for information, and being assured that space was available both on the boats and in the hotels. But when I went to the office, an astonished clerk, seeing that I was colored, hurried off to confer with others, and came back to tell me in a somewhat embarrassed manner that Cook's was not equipped to give Negroes service in the Caribbean areas.

"But Cubans are all mixed with Negroes," I said. "Havana is full of colored people."

The clerk reddened and stammered, and said he was sorry. But I did not get my ticket to Cuba from Cook's nor from any American steamship agency or line. I sailed from New York on a British cruise boat and sought out my own hotel after I got to Havana.

In Valencia, however, I did not expect to find any such color difficulties. And there were none. I simply walked into Cook's bureau one morning and asked if there were two places available on the Barcelona *wagon-lit* any night that week.

The English clerk asked, "When would you like to go?"

I said, "Tomorrow."

He said, "Yes, I can give you a compartment for two."

It was that simple. I had heard from many travelers that the British-controlled Cook's was wonderfully dependable all around the world, and I had never heard of anyone having difficulties with them except Negroes in the color-conscious United States. When I found that Cook's in Valencia had tickets to Barcelona—when no one could get them for love or money—and the clerk made no fuss about it, but quite nonchalantly stamped them, I thought, "What a firm!"

Guillén was amazed when I got back to the hotel with the tickets, although a bit astonished at the price for such de luxe accommodations. We traveled the following night to Barcelona in style in a private room with plenty of space, while in other coaches people were packed in like sardines.

When I bought the morning papers at a stand on the Rambla de las Flores, I noticed the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra—the Orquesta Simfonica Catalana—would be performing that evening George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." I went to the concert and heard it beautifully played with Maria Campmany at the piano. The other numbers were "Scheherazade," "La Revoltosa," and the "Overture to Tannhauser." And, for once, no air-raided warnings sounded during the concert. The following afternoon I went to a music hall to see some Basque dancers. At the top of the printed programs there was a notice signed by Spain's two great labor unions to this effect:

#### JUST A MOMENT, COMRADE

The United Syndicate of Public Spectacles begs you to have the greatest respect for all the comrades you are going to see on the stage. They are workers just as you are. don't disturb the show and spoil its performance. Take art as it should be taken.

The Joint Committee  
of  
CNT—UGT

The CNT, the National Confederation of Labor, was an anarchist union, and the UGT, the General Union of Workers, was Socialist-Communist controlled. They had formerly been bitter rivals, and even now in the midst of war, they did not always see eye to eye. Certainly, a visitor did not have to be in Loyalist Spain long to see that it was not a Communist land, as many outside Spain claimed it to be. If there were Russians fighting in Spain, I never saw them. I saw German Nazis and Italian Fascists in Madrid's Prison Hospital, but of the thousands of Russians some papers said were aiding the Loyalists, I saw not a one. The only Russian whom I came across in Spain, other than reporters like Kolsov, was a nurse in one of the hospitals. In the cabinet of the Republican coalition government, when I was there, if I remember correctly, only one post was occupied by a Communist, that of the Ministry of Agriculture. In Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona, it was easy to tell from the press and the daily conversations of the people that political opinions varied widely. In fact, it seemed to me a major weakness of Loyalist Spain that, even in regard to the conduct of the war, action and opinion varied so greatly between the Socialist, Communist, Anarchist, and Republican parties as to cause not infrequent confusion in military plans. The Communists, although an important party, by no means controlled the government, the military forces, the press, the arts, or anything else so far as I could see. At Maria Teresa's theater in Madrid, for example, the actors and stagehands belonged to the UGT, and the members of the orchestra to the CNT. At one performance which I attended, the lights in the orchestra pit were turned on full during a scene on the stage that required darkness.

When I asked Maria Teresa why that was, she said, "Because the CNT musicians union will not co-operate with the actors who belong to the UGT." Even to an outsider like myself, not only in the theater was such disunity evident, but in much else in government Spain. Alvarez del Vayo, Socialist Minister of Foreign Affairs, once asked, "Why is it Spain's people are so great, but her leaders so small?"

On one thing, however, all parties seemed united. That was to lift the cultural level of the peasants and workers, teach them to read and write, have good manners, appreciate their national arts, and take care of public property—including the churches. Some had wanted to destroy the churches—particularly the Anarchists, who look advantage in the early days of the Civil War to try to settle by violence their long feud with Catholicism. But in the trench schools I had visited there were teachers of all parties working with the illiterates. And in the public parks of Madrid—where the antiaircraft batteries were stationed under the trees—there were also signs that read:

citizens, how we respect plants and animals is an index of culture. Trees, plants and flowers have life, just as do men and women. Look upon them as we do ourselves. A sincere regard for nature will lead you to respect all its works.

On a visit to a kindergarten in Barcelona, I found the children being told not to mark with their crayons on the walls of the buildings. Walls that the enemy did not mind marring with ten-ton bombs were being protected from children with chalk.

After a few days in Barcelona, I left Guillén there, and went on alone across the border to Tour de Carol, a charming French village in the Pyrenees. There I took the night express to Paris, bags, banderillas, books, typewriter, shrapnel and all still intact. But I no longer had any phonograph records to lug. Those I left with my friends in Madrid to play during the bombardments.

Out of earshot of shells and bombs for the first time in six months, at Tour de Carol that day high in the snow-covered mountains I sat down in the station buffet and ordered an enormous meal. Just across the border on the Spanish side, there had been nothing at all to eat. Now, less than a mile away, there was everything: fat cheeses, smoked turkey, hanging hams overhead, tarts, cakes and all sorts of pastries, long loaves of crackly French bread protruding from a wicker basket on the floor, a dozen brands of cigarettes and packets of chocolates on the newsstand counter. What a difference a border makes: on one side of an invisible line, food; on the other side, none. On one side, peace. On the other side, war. On one side, quiet in the sunlight. On the other side the dangerous chee-eep, chee-eep, chee-eep that was not birds, the BANG! of shells, the whine of sirens, and the bursting of bombs over crowded cities.

I stood alone on the platform of the little station at Tour de Carol that bright December day and looked down the valley into Spain and wondered about borders and nationalities and war. I wondered what would happen to the Spanish people walking the bloody tightrope of their civil struggle. In the last few years I had been all around the embattled world and I had seen people walking tightropes everywhere—the tightrope of color in Alabama, the tightrope of transition in the Soviet Union, the tightrope of repression in Japan, the tightrope of the fear of war in France—and of war itself in China and in Spain—and myself everywhere on my tightrope of words.

Anybody is liable to fall off a tightrope in any land, I thought, and God help you if you fall the wrong way.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

I arrived in Paris just in time for Christmas. The holidays were pleasant. Some Negro friends invited me to Christmas dinner—a wonderful home-cooked dinner it was, too. During the holiday week I saw the Cartier-Bressons, Nancy Cunard, Bricktop and the Roumains. Louis Aragon introduced me to George Adam, who had begun to translate my short stories into French, and I met Pierre Seghers, my publisher. For almost five years now I had earned a living from writing, so my dream was beginning to come true—to be a professional writer—and it had been my good fortune so far not to have to write anything I did not really want to write. Meanwhile, my interests had broadened from Harlem and the American Negro to include an interest in all the colored peoples of the world—in fact, in all the people of the world, as I related to them and they to me.

I liked being a writer, traveling, meeting people, and looking at main events—like the depression in America, the transition from serfdom to manhood in Soviet Asia, and the Civil War in Spain—in it all, but at the same time apart from things, too. In the Soviet Union I was a visitor. In the midst of a dreary moral-breaking depression in America, I lived in a bright garden cottage at Carmel with a thoroughbred dog and a servant. In the Civil War in Spain I am a writer, not a fighter. But that is what I want to be, a writer, recording what I see, commenting upon it, and distilling from my own emotions a personal interpretation.

Unconsciously, in doing this I found that music helped me, and everywhere I looked for it, and listened. All over Paris that winter there was Negro music—Comptom Glover at Harry's New York Bar, Maceo Jefferson at the

Big Apple, Georgie Johnson at the Boeuf sur le Toit, and anybody and everybody dropping by to play piano or blow a horn at Frisco's place—the popular coal-black Negro with the lighthouse smile. Una Mae Carlisle, Rollin Smith and Valaida Snow were singing at Montmartre clubs, and French jazz bands all over town were trying their best to beat it out like the Negroes. Meanwhile, I went to see Mauriac's *Asmodée* at the Comédie Française, and to hear the ancient Yvette Guilbert and Damia at the music halls, and Maurice Rostand reciting his poems, and to the Boule Blanche on the Left Bank to watch the Africans dancing.

But Paris did not seem as happy that winter as it had been in the summer. There was much talk of war in the air—not just war in Spain. The Parisian intellectuals declared Spain was only a training ground for Hitler and Mussolini, a place to try out Nazi bombing planes and educate Fascist pilots. The coming war, they predicted, would be everywhere. The charming but sad Jacques Roumain said, "I expect the world will end."

"I doubt it," I answered, "and if it does, I intend to live to see what happens."

He smiled, "You Americans!" he said.

But many Americans felt then as apprehensive as did the Europeans. A number of long-time residents of Paris were considering packing up to come home. I myself had wanted to spend the winter in France, but I'd had to send most of my money to Cleveland. Letters from my mother said that she was no better and that since my brother was back in college at Wilberforce, she hated to live alone, so she wrote that she had given up the house to move with some cousins. A great woman for linking her fate with cousins, my mother! But her illness worried me, so I thought I'd better go straight home and see about her. There wasn't much choice, anyhow, as I had just about enough money left to pay my passage. But this was not the first time I'd found myself in Paris practically penniless. I'd been so during my first weeks in the city long ago when I jumped ship and came there in 1924 looking for work. And since then I had been broke or almost broke in so many other cities around the world—and still had fun—that my personal predicament didn't worry me much. Sitting one night in the Bar Boudon on rue Douai, where the Negro musicians gathered, I remembered once during my childhood in Kansas my grandmother had given me an apple that had been bruised and so had a brown spot on it. I didn't want to eat the apple.

My grandmother said, "What's the matter with you, boy? You can't expect every apple to be a perfect apple. Just because it's got a speck on it, you want to throw it away. Bite that speck out and eat that apple, son. It's still a good apple."

That's the way the world is, I thought, if you bite the specks out, it's still a good apple.

In Paris, I stayed at an Ethiopian hotel—the only "colored" hotel in town—which amazed the Negro newspaperman, John Davis, when he stopped in Montmartre on his way to interview the Emperor Haile Selassie in exile near London.

"In Paris," he said, "of all places to stay in a colored hotel! Why?"

"For fun," I said. The hotel was amusing, with bushy-haired Ethiopians, Sudanese, Algerians and other non-Parisian characters coming in and out, and a panorama of Montmartre from its windows.

John Davis said he had to interview Haile Selassie the next morning at nine at His Highness's country place in England, so he took a night plane for London. But I learned from Davis later in New York that, when he arose very early the next day in London to drive out to see the Emperor, and got there promptly at nine, he was told that the appointment was for nine o'clock Ethiopian time—which meant four that afternoon. "Damn it all," said Davis, "I could have had an extra night in Paris!"

Before his departure from Paris we had gone night-clubbing along rue Pigalle and had met a charming girl who said she was from Java, part Dutch and part Javanese, but who spoke hesitant English and broken French with a Georgia drawl. John Davis whispered to me over the champagne he had bought that he was sure she was colored, from somewhere in Dixie, passing for Javanese in Paris, which amused him greatly. The girl was so exotic-looking that I doubted she was American, and disputed his insistence on it. I was wrong. Later I ran into the girl in New York talking perfectly good Harlesemese, and not passing for anything on Lenox Avenue where she was quite at home.

On New Year's Eve I went to the Paris Opera alone. Why I chose to hear *Samson and Delilah* that particular night, I don't remember now. Perhaps it was the only evening that I could get a ticket at the Opera before sailing for America. I didn't enjoy the performance much. My seat in the gallery was very high, far away from the stage and behind a pillar. The music rose beautifully to my location, but the singers and the ballet seemed miles off. The sets were ponderous and old-fashioned. When Samson pushed the temple down, each piece seemed to take a full minute to descend separately on quite visible wires into a heap of obviously artificial scenery. Visually the *Folies Bergères* did a thousand times better on sets. The Opera Comique was better, too, to observe from the gallery. I wondered why I had not gone there instead of to the Grand Opera.

After the Opera, I had intended locating a party that some Martinique friends of the French Guiana poet, Leon Damas, a protégé of Gide's, were giving in the Latin Quarter. But when I started down into the Metro, I found that I had left the address of the party at my hotel. Rather than go back to the hotel and get it, since it was nearly midnight, I decided not to go to the party. Instead, I walked down the almost deserted Boulevards toward the Madeleine, thinking there might perhaps be a midnight mass there with organ music in honor of the New Year. Midway between the Opera and the Madeleine, I noticed a slightly limping figure approaching me, head down in his overcoat collar for it was cold. I remembered that limp from Moscow. It was Seki Sano, the Japanese theater director I had met at a Meyerhold rehearsal. We were surprised to see each other. To exchange news, we went into the glass enclosure of a sidewalk café and ordered drinks. All but one of the tables on the glass-encircled winter terrace were empty. At that table a rather pretty woman sat alone. Through the glass outside we could see the lights of the lonely boulevard, for very few people were passing in the chilly darkness. Quite unlike New York on New Year's Eve, downtown Paris as midnight approached was very quiet. The French remain home on holidays.

Seki Sano said, "I read a year or two ago in the Moscow papers about your being expelled from Japan. I'm sorry that happened to you in my country. But I am expelled, too. I cannot go back."

"I'm sure someday you can go back," I said, "and I, too, if I want to go."

But Seki Sano was not so optimistic. "There are too many people wandering around the world now who can't go home," he said. "Lots of them are in Moscow. More are in Paris—people from the Hitler countries, from the South American dictatorships, from China, from my own Japan. No exiles from America—though I wouldn't be surprised if the day didn't come."

"That's one nice thing about America," I said, "I can always go home—even when I don't want to."

"*Bonne année!*" said the waiter bringing our drinks. "It's the New Year!"

Sure enough, faintly, somewhere out in the Paris night, we could hear bells tolling the entrance of 1938, so we lifted our glasses. But the woman at the nearby table suddenly began to cry.

Seki Sano said, "Pardon, madam, but won't you join us?"

The woman sobbed *thank you* in an accent that was not French. Russian, maybe? Or German? We did not know. An exile, too, like Seki Sano? We did not ask her. She had been drinking coffee. The waiter brought her cup to our table as she rose.

The woman finally managed a smile. She sat with us quietly until the bells stopped ringing, then thanked us again and said good night. She disappeared alone down the boulevard toward the Madeleine. Seki Sano and I shook hands and parted at the corner across from the Café de la Paix. He was going to the Left Bank and I to Montmartre.

Slowly I walked through the lightly falling snow that had begun to sift down over the Paris rooftops in scattered indecisive flakes. The streets were very lonely as I passed the Galleries Lafayette and the Gare Saint Lazare and turned up the slight incline leading to Montmartre. Even the little clubs and bars along the way were quiet. Where could everybody be, I wondered. How still it was in this old, old city of Paris in the first hour of the New Year.

The year before, I had been in Cleveland. The year before that in San Francisco. The year before that in Mexico City. The one before that at Carmel. And the year before Carmel in Tashkent. Where would I be when the next New Year came, I wondered? By then, would there be war—a major war? Would Mussolini and Hitler have finished their practice in Ethiopia and Spain to turn their planes on the rest of us? Would civilization be destroyed? Would the world really end?

"Not my world," I said to myself. "My world will not end."

But worlds—entire nations and civilizations—do end. In the snowy night in the shadows of the old houses of Montmartre, I repeated to myself, "My world won't end."

But how could I be so sure? I don't know.

For a moment I wondered.