That's why I went

MONICA FELTON



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THAT'S WHY I WENT

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by

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I

DEPARTURE

The invitation came at the beginning of the second week in April, 1951. There was no time for hesitation, since the party was to meet in Prague at the end of the month. Besides, I saw no reason to hesitate. The opportunity was obviously too important to miss.

Molly collected a visa form from the Czech Consulate and helped me to fill it up. Luckily, my passport had just been renewed.

"And after Prague?" I asked. "Where next?"

Molly looked at Freda. Freda looked at Tamara, and Tamara, who was born in Russia, smiled her sweet, wistful smile. Nobody quite knew, but they all guessed Moscow.

I had never seen Moscow. Even to pass through it on a journey would be something.

Freda, who had been a member of a delegation which had visited the U.S.S.R. during the previous summer, said: "You'll need a new dress for Moscow. There's sure to be a party, and everyone always dresses up."

So I went out to buy a smart dress. I finished by buying two.

"And after Moscow?" I asked on another occasion.

That was more difficult. I pulled out my atlas and we turned over the pages. Omsk . . . Tomsk . . . Irkutsk . . . the names of stations on the trans-Siberian railway that we had learned in geography lessons at school. I could still remember how I had enlivened my own geography lessons by writing stories about the more romantic-sounding places when I should have been taking notes. I had never written a story about Siberia. It was a waste of forest and tundra, too empty for dreams.

Tamara said: "You'll probably fly. It's hardly possible to take a train to Korea and be back in three weeks . . ."

"Especially," Freda added, "if you're going to visit both sides."

The invitation had come from North Korea, but we all agreed that the delegation ought to make an attempt to visit South Korea as well.

"How do you find flying?" Molly asked.

"Boring," I answered. "Though I don't get air-sick, if that's what you mean."

"It's important," Tamara said. "After all, we want you back alive."

We remembered that I would need to see a doctor in order to get whatever inoculations might be needed.

"Will you go to your own doctor?" Molly inquired. "Or would you like me to fix something?"

"You fix something."

By next day Molly had found a doctor who was willing to give me whatever injections I needed as soon as we could discover what those injections were. I left her to make inquiries from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine while I went off to Durham for the week-end. When I came back Molly had learned what we wanted to know, but the doctor who was to have given me the injections had flown off to China.

Somebody asked: "Isn't there a clinic for that sort of thing at St. Mary's Hospital?"

There was, and it was open on three mornings in each week. This was Wednesday, and I was leaving on Saturday. I pushed on a hat and jumped into a taxi. I arrived as a clock struck twelve, rushed up the steps and pushed open the swing doors.

The place was deserted. There was not even a porter at the entrance and I could hear no sign of life anywhere. Every room was empty. I was about to give up when I noticed a flight of stairs leading down to the basement. I was still hesitating at the top when a man appeared at the bottom. He was wearing a white jacket, and as he looked up I saw that he had a nice, kind, American sort of face.

"Can I help you?" he asked, in a voice that matched his face exactly.

"Yes," I said, "I want injections of cholera and t.a.b.——"

He was climbing the steps towards me. "I'm afraid the clinic closes at noon . . ."

"Oh!" Perhaps I sounded as disappointed as I felt, or perhaps he was even kinder than he looked. At any rate, he answered: "It costs a guinea and the clerk's already gone. But if you don't mind not getting a formal receipt . . ."

I didn't mind that. I went down the stairs, and had reached the bottom when he asked: "Where are you going?"

It would have been tactless to tell an American that I was going to North Korea. "To China," I answered. That was certainly true.

"To China?" He sat down at his desk, and I sat beside him. "And what are you going to do in China?"

I told him, which was also true, that I was going with a delegation of women and that I hoped to speak and write about my experiences when I came back.

He picked up a syringe. "And how will you go? Via Moscow?"

"I think so. It looks like it."

"Well . . . Well, I had no idea that the Russians ever let people in like that——"

"Like what?"

"To travel across the country and to see what goes on."

I pulled up my sleeve. I said: "I don't think they're really as black as they're painted."

He considered that. His face was thoughtful as well as kindly. "Perhaps not. Perhaps you're right . . . I don't know . . . But the Czechs are terrible. Really terrible. And so are the Rumanians. I know that for a fact." He put down the needle. "Now if you'll come back for your second dose in a week or ten days——"

"But I can't." For the first time I was really worried. "I'm going before that——"

"When?"

"I don't know. Some time during the next week."

"Oh!" He thought for a moment, and called to the nurse who had taken my guinea and whispered something to her. Then he turned to me again. "China!" he repeated. "I think you're a very brave lady to be going to China at a time like this . . ."

I felt myself blushing. I had calculated all the risks that I was about to take, but I was embarrassed at being treated as a heroine. "It's important," I said, "to try to find out the truth——"

"Very. It's the most important thing in the whole world."

I thought so, too. That was why I was going to Korea: to try to discover the truth, and then to tell it. To have said so aloud would have sounded pompous, but I was sorry not to be able to tell this nice, kind, friendly American the ultimate object of my journey. The nurse came back, carrying a small ampoule wrapped in several layers of tissue, and handed it to the doctor. The doctor passed it across to me. "There's your second dose."

"Thanks . . ."

"You'll be going via Paris?"

"I'm not sure."

"Well, if you do you'd better go and get the injection at the American Hospital . . . It's always safer to get things done by Americans . . ."

I wondered, got up, thanked him again; and again I was embarrassed to hear him talking about courage.

We shook hands. "I wish," he added, with a sudden look of sadness in his gentle eyes, "that there were more people in the world who cared about the truth . . ."

I wished that, too.

Freda came that evening. We had already covered all the ground, but now, with my senses sharpened by the lucidity of a slight fever, we discussed everything again. We were both of us careful to avoid mentioning that when people go to a war they are apt to get killed, but Freda, with her cool common sense, insisted on discussing once more all the other risks that I was about to take.

"Stevenage?" she began.

The chairmanship of a new town is a part-time job, but for the last year and a half I had given nearly all my time to Stevenage. I had no doubt that everything would go on smoothly during my absence, even though the vice-chairman had said that he, too, was taking a holiday over the Whitsun recess. I had to be back in plenty of time to prepare myself to give evidence about the new town before the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons on June 7th, but since the invitation had stated that I should not be away for more than three weeks I had almost another three weeks in hand.

"Even so . . ." Freda was looking at me, her grey eyes very direct.

"If I get sacked for going to Korea," I answered her unspoken question, "I'll be sorry. But it's a risk I've got to take . . ."

In 1945 Stenevage had been a part of our hope for a new and better kind of world. Most of those hopes had already faded, and now the fate of Stevenage depended, I was sure, on the fate of the world. Again I was too embarrassed to say what I felt, or even to put my feelings clearly into words. I asked Freda to fetch me a cool drink. She brought it. "And if you're accused of committing high treason?"

"There's nothing treasonable about going to Korea. Not even North Korea."

"Of course not."

My left arm throbbed as if an alarm-clock inside it were just about to go off. I said, rather irritably: "I know why I'm going —and when I come back I'll take the consequences . . . And now I think I'd better go to sleep . . ."

Molly arrived the next morning with my Czech visa. She was so solicitous that I wondered whether I ought not to make a will. "Won't you be lonely?" she asked.

"Probably."

"Don't you wish we could afford another English delegate?"

"No," I said, "I don't." If there were two of us I would

cease to be myself and become one of the English. We would be labelled, forced, like twins, into a single identity. Loneliness, I was sure, would be far, far preferable. I asked: "Do you know who the other delegates are?"

Molly shook her head, looked at me doubtfully and hoped that I would like them.

I shared her doubts.

I pictured the earnest faces which would confront me at breakfast every morning: blonde Scandinavians with their hair scraped back from sunburned but still homely faces. They would speak—I could hear it—slow but accurate English which they would practise on me relentlessly and at the most unsuitable moments. The delegates from France and Belgium would be sharp and eager and blackberry-eyed, with figures like tilted hour-glasses and with an unshakable vivacity of manner that would reduce me, I knew, to an outwardly haughty, and inwardly terrified, silence . . .

I said: "I think I'll manage better by myself." Much as I wanted to go I was not looking forward to the journey.

At last I was ready, and it was time to leave. Somebody had sent me gardenias, and I was pinning them on to the lapel of my suit when Elizabeth arrived. She was horrified to see that I had not packed a little black frock. Nobody she observed, tearing the wrapper off the latest number of *Vogue* as she did so, should ever go anywhere without a little black frock.

A little black frock was hanging in the cupboard, but I couldn't find its belt anywhere. Bernard and Renée were coming to drive me to Northolt, so I telephoned to ask them to buy a black belt on their way down from Hampstead. Renée reminded me that it was Saturday afternoon and the shops would be closed, but she thought she had something suitable that she could lend me.

"It's like a wedding," Elizabeth remarked, and poured another dry martini. "Something borrowed, something blue——"

"I don't wear blue," I said crossly. I was about to leave

Westminster to go towards what everybody agreed was the bitterest and most cruel war in the whole of human history, and now the significance of what I was about to do seemed to be getting buried beneath a mass of cosy trivialities. Now, because the morning had got into a muddle, it was already too late to go out to lunch. I went into the kitchen and opened two of the tins that had arrived in a food parcel from South Africa a few weeks earlier. There no longer seemed to be any point in saving up anything for the future. We were still eating when Bernard and Renée arrived. I took a last look at my flat, and then we were off.

At Northolt Molly was waiting, and two or three of the other women were with her. They had brought me a pen as a farewell present, and their manner was full of such affectionate solicitude that I wanted to tell them that there was nothing to worry about. Instead, I stood helplessly between the two parties who had come to see me off, watching them eye each other with the mixture of suspicion and distaste which I ought to have expected and prepared against. Elizabeth and Bernard and Renée stood symbolically on my right, and Elizabeth's elegant detachment could not conceal the fear she felt for my fate on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Molly, on my left, was silent; but her face shone with the beatific conviction that I was, whatever else might happen, at least going to a better and happier world than any that she had ever known.

An official approached. "For Paris?" he asked me.

"No. Prague."

"Well, at least," Elizabeth exclaimed with satisfaction, "you don't look like a fellow-traveller."

I turned to Molly, and sensed that the cold war was about to burst into flames. Then the loudspeaker saved us. The moment had come to say good-bye.

The formalities in the customs' shed were unimportant. I walked slowly into the next room, and handed my passport to a man behind a desk. He flicked over the pages, until he came to my Czech visa. This was the moment I had been dreading. He asked: "Are you going anywhere after Czechoslovakia?"

"Probably to Russia."

"Thank you." He handed the passport back. Now nothing could stop me from going to Korea. I drank a cup of coffee in the waiting-room, and stared out at the bleak, grey, wintry day, imagining the sunny spring that would be waiting for me in Prague. I did not know who would be meeting me or what would happen when I arrived, but suddenly I was looking forward to everything, facing the future.

A voice summoned passengers to get on to the plane. There were only three of us: beside myself two obvious trade unionists who looked as if they might be on their way to a May Day celebration. I saw them glance disapprovingly at my white gardenias and then turn away again. Then I looked round. The two farewell parties were standing behind the barrier, waving a last good-bye, and I saw that they were some distance apart, as completely separate as if they had never known of each other's existence.

2

PRAGUE

The plane circled down out of sunshine into an evening as grey as the afternoon had been in London.

The steward opened the door. At the foot of the gangway a woman stood alone. She was so tiny that I could excuse myself for not having noticed her

"Oh!" she exclaimed as soon as she caught sight of me, "I thought you were never going to come!" Her English was slightly accented, but perfectly idiomatic.

"But you weren't expecting me before this, were you?" I asked.

"Oh!" she threw back her head, looking up at me. She was fairly young, shabbily dressed, and yet at the same time very neat. Her eyes, behind thick spectacles, were grey and eager, and she moved like a bird on a city pavement, with quick, nervous hops. "Oh!" she repeated, as we moved towards the airport building, "I've been expecting you for ages! Absolutely ages!"

"Well, here I am." I shivered slightly, and realised that I had probably caught cold. "And where are the others?"

"Well, the delegate from Cuba came yesterday . . . I'm afraid she's not at all well. But she's a lovely person, perfectly lovely. I know you're going to like each other."

"I hope so," I said, perhaps a little too coolly.

"Oh, I'm sure you will!" She looked at me with sudden doubt. "You are Monica Felton, aren't you?"

"I am." I asked: "Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm just somebody from the women's organisation. Not anybody special."

"But what's your name?"

She smiled diffidently, her manner suggesting that she was really too humble to have a name. "Call me Regina."

"Tell me, Regina," I began again, "when are the other delegates coming?"

"Soon. We don't quite know. Tomorrow, I hope." But she sounded uncertain.

Somebody marked my luggage, and another official glanced at my travellers' cheques and gave me a form that I should have to fill up before I left the country.

Regina brightened, tilting a smile up towards my face. "Would you like to go to Moscow tomorrow morning?"

"Moscow! Yes," I agreed, brightening too, "that would be fine."

"All right. I'll try to arrange it . . . I don't know whether I'll be able to, because there's going to be a special plane to take the whole delegation. But if you really want to go straight on?"

"Yes. I'd like to."

We drove towards the city. Everything was just as I remembered: the suburbs with their square, heavy blocks of flats, grey-coloured but prosperous, with lace curtains at the windows and a central European tidiness that made the streets look as if every building were inhabited by childless, middle-aged bank clerks; but many of the windows were heavily plastered with posters and slogans, and with little cut-out figures of the dove of peace. The streets, too, were hung with bunting, triangular paper flags suspended from strings that ran from lamp-post to lamp-post. One glance at the wilted flags was enough to show that spring here was as dank and chilly as the English spring had been.

"These are for May Day," Regina explained superfluously.

I nodded, and began to look forward to May Day in Moscow.

We reached the hotel. Like the airport, it seemed almost empty.

A young woman with gleaming black hair, and with a brilliant red coat huddled around her shoulders, sat conspicuously in the middle of the lounge. With her was an older

woman, whom Regina introduced as one of our hostesses, another member of the women's organisation.

"And this," Regina added, throwing an affectionate arm around the shoulders of the red coat, "is Miss Candelaria. Miss Candelaria Roderiguez. From Cuba."

Miss Candelaria Roderiguez was much younger than Regina's description had led me to imagine. Her big, handsome head, with its classically regular features, rolling eyes and olive skin, might have been torn straight off a poster advertising Havana cigars; and from the neck down she was huddled into such an extraordinary assortment of woollen sweaters that she seemed to have no shape at all.

"Shall we have dinner?" Regina suggested.

Miss Candelaria Roderiguez put her hands on the arms of her chair. A spasm of pain crossed her face as she lifted herself up. "Such terrible lumbago!" she explained. "Terrible!" We moved slowly towards the restaurant. "Coming I pass two days Holland. And all the time it rain. Rain. Rain. Rain. And cold! Such terrible cold! Terrible, terrible cold!"

"It's cold here, too," I said.

"Cold! I think I die of cold! . . . And in my country such a beautiful climate. Beautiful!" Her eyes shone. I could see that she was already extremely homesick. "Such a beautiful country, my country . . ."

A waiter brought large glasses of Italian vermouth.

"And in your country," Miss Roderiguez leaned towards me a little, and then hastily put a hand to her back, "in England it rains always . . .? . . . Yes? . . . No . . .?" She smiled sympathetically, with a warmth that suggested that she was imagining all the sufferings that had ever been caused by the English climate.

"Not always," I answered. "Though sometimes it seems like always."

I was beginning to like her.

Food arrived: thin, delicate slices of Prague ham, finely textured and exquisitely pink; a clear soup, with noodles floating in it; enormous wiener schnitzels, with far too

many potatoes, and a salad served in a thin, sweetened dressing.

"Eat it all up!" Regina begged. She was very sweet, like a nursemaid with two difficult, rather naughty children. "You know, you must eat."

"It's delicious," I said. "But there's so much."

Her face clouded. "Ah, in England!" She had already told me that she had spent the war years in England. "In England things are pretty bad, aren't they?"

I said: "Things have been better than they were . . . but now prices are going up again . . ."

". . . and you get only eight-pennyworth of meat a week?"

That was true. Nevertheless, I felt a slight surge of patriotic resentment. "We can get quite a lot of things off the ration," I explained. "Chicken, ham . . ."

"But they're expensive?"

"Very," I was forced to admit. I looked at the ham that the waiter was now putting before the people at the next table. "How much does that cost?"

She told me. At the official rate of exchange it worked out at about four shillings a pound. She patted my arm. "Well, you must eat as much as you can while you're here . . . You see, when you get to Moscow they'll be terribly offended if you don't eat everything . . ."

"But if I'm going tomorrow morning?"

"Oh!" she jumped up. "I'd forgotten. I'll just go and telephone."

Soon she came scurrying back. Her face was grave, announcing before she spoke, her sorrow at my disappointment. It was impossible, quite impossible to get me off to Moscow tomorrow morning. She was very, very sorry. Her sorrow was so real and so transparent that I could not repress a slight feeling of guilt at seeing her suffer so much.

I excused myself, and went to bed.

I could not sleep. I seemed to be no nearer to Korea than I had been when I left London; and, indeed, when I thought of the map I realised that my journey had hardly started.

And yet, as I tossed about beneath the heavy padded quilt, London already seemed very far away. I though of Miss Candelaria Roderiguez from Cuba, and reflected on how lucky I was to have met people who at least understood my own language. I did not feel lucky. I got out of bed and swallowed a sleeping pill. It helped a little, but not much. I tried to imagine Korea, and at last fell asleep, dreaming uneasily.

By next morning there could no longer be any doubt that I had caught cold. Outside it was raining, a steady, cold downpour. It would be stupid to attempt to go out. I took a bath, and went back to bed again.

I struggled downstairs in time for lunch. Miss Roderiguez was again sheltering under her red coat, and beneath it she seemed to be wearing more sweaters than ever.

"How did you sleep?" I asked her.

"Bad. Terrible, terrible bad." Her face was drawn, her dark eyes melancholy. "Never, I think, never I go to Holland again. Never!" I saw her wince.

"I'm going to the airport," Regina said, "after lunch. To meet the other delegates. Then I'll arrange for a doctor to come and look at you both this evening."

I could sense that we were both a great disappointment to her. And it was not to be wondered at. For women who were going to face the dangers and discomforts of Korea we were, both Miss Roderiguez and I, making an extraordinarily bad start.

"Please!" Miss Roderiguez agreed. "Please!" She was undoubtedly worse. She could hardly move, and when she did her expressive face showed that every step was agony. "I must get better!" she exclaimed. "Such terrible, terrible pain!" She tossed her head. Her thick black hair fell around her shoulders like a curtain, but as she lifted her eyes and looked at me I noticed that her jaw was strong and resolute, contradicting the pliant femininity of the rest of her appearance. "But I go to Korea!" she declared. "I go! I go—whatever doctor say!"

"Of course!" Regina agreed soothingly. "Dear Candelaria, of course you'll go . . ."

"What do you do in Cuba?" I asked, trying to change the direction of the conversation.

"In Cuba?" She seemed surprised that I should not know. "I lawyer."

"Oh!" It sounded so improbable that I was startled into silence. I could picture her spending her days lying under an awning, and perhaps dancing a little in the evenings. But a lawyer . . .

Regina sent me back to bed. She returned an hour or two later, and her face was more anxious than ever. "There was nobody there. No delegates. None."

"What's happened?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid that this means that you won't be able to leave before Thursday——"

"Thursday! But this is Sunday!"

"You see," she explained, "tomorrow is impossible—because the others haven't come. Then Tuesday is May Day."

"But why Thursday?" I insisted. "Why not Wednesday?"

"Because they're going to use the airport for the celebrations. So you'll have to fly from Brno. So if you go to Brno on Wednesday, and leave on Thursday . . ."

"Oh!" There was nothing to do but resign myself to make the best of things.

Regina went away to look for a doctor. Presently it appeared that all the doctors she knew had gone away for the week-end.

"Would you like to go out and have dinner somewhere else?" Regina asked, when at last I went downstairs. She stroked the red coat in the chair beside her. "Candelaria dear, do you think you could manage to get into a taxi?"

Candelaria's eyes came to life. "Wonderful!" she agreed. "Wonderful!"

A wet Sunday evening in Prague seemed indistinguishable from a wet Sunday evening in London. Most of the restaurants were closed. We drove round and round the city, until at last Regina remembered a place that would certainly be open.

The place was full, and the people were just the sort of mixture one might expect to see in a Lyons Corner House on a Sunday evening, some smart, some shabby, some gay, some self-absorbed and indifferent. Nearly all of them were much more intent on their food than most English people allow themselves to be when they eat in public. The effect was not beautiful, but the whole place had an air of hearty enjoyment, very striking after the subdued luxury of the Alcron, and the dreariness of the outdoor world. The food was good, and not expensive.

Regina asked about London. She evidently knew it well, and her knowledge about general conditions in England was up-to-date and reasonably accurate; yet, although she had got most of her facts right, it seemed to me that she put an unnecessarily gloomy interpretation on them. Listening to her, one could have believed that we would all be starving in the very near future. I tried to explain that things were not as bad as that. Not nearly. She smiled sadly, and I could see that she was writing me down in her own mind as a reactionary, someone who was not to be trusted. I felt annoyed, and tried not to show it.

A waiter came past, carrying a big tray of cream-filled meringues.

"Have one!" Regina begged, intercepting my greedy glance.

"No, thank you." I could not remember when I had last tasted real cream, but I was not going to say so.

"Then shall we go?" The evening was a failure. Although I had been in Prague for little more than twenty-four hours I was already getting tired of the unmixed company of my own sex, and as we moved towards the door I saw Candelaria turn round and stare at a cheerful party of young men and girls who had been sitting just behind us. There was a Miranda-like look on her face, as if she had already half-forgotten that the world had such creatures in it.

Next morning it was still raining, and my cold was no better; but I was determined that since I had to stay in Prague

I would at least learn something about what was going on. I had told Regina what I wanted to see, and when I came down Irena was waiting to accompany me.

We drove out towards the suburbs, chatting amiably. Like all the other hostesses I had met, Irena spoke good English, and was obviously well educated. Her husband, she told me, was an ordinary worker, employed in an engineering factory, and earning a fair, but not large, wage. Their only child, a boy who was not yet eight years old, had, she declared, a wonderful future before him. When he grew up he would be able to become anything he wanted. Anything.

I said: "In England we've been reading that children in Czechoslovakia are being forced to go and work in coal mines as soon as they leave school."

"Forced?" she repeated.

"Yes. Forced."

She was indignant. In Czechoslovakia, she said, boys and girls could become whatever they wanted. Their choice was real—and the government, through the schools, made certain that the children's opportunities were not limited by the sometimes old-fashioned ideas of their parents about the prestige that belonged to different occupations. "Until recently," she went on, "most people wanted their children to go into a profession, or at any rate to have a clean job, a job in an office. But now the children are taught at school that the most important thing for all of them is to do something towards building the future—and that for the future many of the dirty jobs are the most important—the mines, the factories, all sorts of work that we were brought up to despise . . . And my child will do whatever he wants—and he'll want a job where he can do something to help make things better . . . Better for everybody . . ."

We drew up outside a large, unfinished block of flats, one of four that were being erected around a big, enclosed square which, I was told, was to be turned into a garden for the tenants and a playground for the children of the neighbourhood. The space was much more generous than anything to be seen

around the new blocks of flats that were going up in London, but the buildings themselves, at any rate on the outside, compared very unfavourably with the work that the more enterprising local authorities were doing in England. Still, I had known for a long time that our own housing standards were the best in the world, and I resolved to be tolerant.

We went inside. A lift took us up to a flat which was already completed. The front door led into a large, square-shaped entrance hall. On two sides doors opened into the living room and bedrooms, and on the third side a door led to an inner lobby, its walls lined with big, deep cupboards, and with the kitchen, bathroom and lavatory all opening off it. I walked around, astonished into silence by the spaciousness of it all. The rooms were big, much bigger than any that were to be found in recently built blocks of flats in England: the smallest room, which measured fifteen square metres, was nearly twice the size of the third bedroom in any English council house. The bathroom was neat and sensibly arranged, but the kitchen, with its tiny sink and rather primitive-looking gas cooker, was not nearly as well fitted as the rest of the flat would have led me to expect. There was no doubt that as far as gadgets went our own standards were certainly superior; there was no doubt, either, that, in spite of the unprepossessing exterior, most of the families I knew in London would be far more comfortable here than they would be even in the best accommodation they might hope to get from their local council.

I sighed. There was nothing in this flat that an English architect could not provide—and provide much more attractively—if only the money could be found to pay the bill. That was the trouble. Already, the rents which we were being forced to charge at Stevenage were beyond the means of many of the people who wanted to come and live in the new town. A three-bedroomed house could hardly cost less than thirty shillings a week inclusive of rates, and in London a flat comparable with the one I was looking at now would cost at least £2 10s. 0d. a week, and possibly more. I turned to the foreman and asked how much the tenants paid here.

At the current rate of exchange the inclusive rent worked out at rather less than fourteen shillings a week. I inquired about building costs, wondering how big were the subsidies that were needed to keep rents as low as this, but neither the foreman nor Irena was able to tell me. They obviously did not think the rents particularly low, and showed some surprise at my astonishment.

We went downstairs. A chemist's shop was being fitted out on the ground floor, with tiled walls and a handsome laboratory. In the basement a tenants' laundry, equipped with electric washing-machines of the latest type, was already in use. The woman who came in to switch off the machine she had been using was, like all new tenants everywhere, bubbling with enthusiasm. We listened to her praises and drove off again, to look at more new buildings.

The morning was nearly over when Irena asked: "Would you like to see the school where my son goes?"

I said that I would.

"It's an old building," she explained, "from before the war. Nothing very special to look at, but . . ."

It was four stories high, and built in the heavy modernist style that was popular in central Europe during the inter-war years. In the high-ceilinged lobby children were coming and going, smiling and self-possessed. We were not expected. Irena stopped one of the bigger boys, and asked if he could find the headmistress. Presently she came. She was about thirty, with beautiful blonde hair and a face that had the stamp of her profession marked all over it. She was, she said, delighted to have the opportunity of showing the school to an English visitor.

We went into a class-room. In it were about thirty boys and girls who seemed to be around eight years old. Some were standing around a table, absorbed in discussion. Others were chatting with the teacher, firing questions one after the other. When we entered nobody even looked up. The headmistress introduced me, explaining who I was and that I was on my way to Korea. She asked the children: "Are there any

messages you would like our visitor to take to the children of Korea?"

At least half of them had something they wanted to say. The first was a dark, curly-haired boy, with round eyes set in a round cheerful face. Irena interpreted: "He says that they all send their love. He says, too, that they are very sorry for the sufferings of the Korean children. They hope the war will be over soon."

We moved on.

In an upstairs class-room a group of older boys and girls were listening to a talk on botany. The teacher explained that the talk was related to what they had already learned about physical geography, and we listened for a few minutes while Irena whispered to me a quick translation of what was going on. The lessons seemed as lively and up-to-date as a news-reel, with questions and answers about new techniques of afforestation, and about new varieties of seeds that were designed to yield bigger crops. Then, after a few minutes, the teacher broke off to allow Irena to tell the children about my journey. In a few minutes the first question was fired at me. "Why," one of the boys asked, "do people in England allow their government to support the cause of the American imperialists?"

I answered slowly: "Most English people see the events in Korea quite differently. The majority of them believe—honestly and without any doubt—that this war was started by an act of aggression by the government of North Korea."

Hands were raised. Did the English not know that the Syngman Rhee government had been planning for years to invade North Korea and overthrow the People's Government? Could I not make my fellow-countrymen understand that the action taken in the name of the United Nations was illegal?"

"You see," the teacher smiled, "our children already have a good understanding of world affairs. It is an important part of our task to teach them to be citizens."

Conditioning, I remembered, was the word. Or indoctrination: big words, words that people used to describe the spreading

of ideas which they themselves disliked. I smiled wryly, making the inevitable comparison between these lively, critical, indoctrinated kids and the docile blankness of English girls I knew whose minds were being kept antiseptically free from the infection of any contemporary ideas. I pulled myself together, recognising that I was being unfair. Of course there were many schools in England, too, where citizenship was also taught as a subject. But that was different. That was education. And, like most education, it lacked fervour.

It was time to go.

Back at the hotel Regina was waiting. Her face glowed. "Two more delegates!" she exclaimed. "Two more! Isn't it wonderful?"

She skipped ahead of me into the restaurant.

There they were, sitting opposite each other, cool, detached and sophisticated.

"This," Regina said, introducing the older, "is Miss Ida Bachmann."

Miss Bachmann looked as if she had walked straight out of a Bergdorf Goodman page in the *New Yorker*. She was, at first glance, the perfect, idealised image of the smart American woman correctly got up for a European tour: of medium height, slim, very erect, and, in spite of her grey hair, of no particular age. Her eyes were bright blue, her cheeks pink, and her nose slightly, just perceptibly, snub. She looked as if she took it for granted that life was a serious business, but as if, too, she had never ceased to find it amusing.

The other delegate was tall and fair and quite a beauty. Her hair was curled into a fringe beneath the brim of a butter-coloured felt hat. Her face was rather narrow, the nose finely cut and aquiline, the mouth wide and full-lipped. She scrutinised me with calm politeness.

"I'm Kate Fleron," she said, "from Denmark."

"So now," Regina exclaimed with satisfaction, "we have four delegates. Four!"

Compunction smote me as I remembered Candelaria. I asked how she was. As I spoke Candelaria appeared, and shook

hands with the new arrivals. "And what do you do in Denmark?" she inquired of Kate Fleron.

"I edit a paper in Copenhagen." The paper, she said, was called *Free Denmark*. Later, as Kate and Ida and I got to know each other, I learned that *Free Denmark* had been started as an underground newspaper during the German occupation, and that its editorial board had been made up of people of all political parties, ranging from conservatives to communists. Kate herself had worked on the staff of the paper, and then, after serving a term in prison and in a concentration camp, had become the editor-in-chief. The paper was now the only one of Europe's underground newspapers which still survived on the same broad basis as that from which it had started.

"And you?" I turned to Ida Bachmann. "What do you do?"

"I'm a librarian."

"Where?"

"In Denmark."

"In Denmark!"

She laughed. Her laughter was jolly and unforced. "You thought I was an American, didn't you?"

I nodded.

"Everybody always thinks that . . . I lived in the United States for years. All through the war." During the war she had been the head of the Danish section of the American Office of War Information, and she had, for a short time, held the rank of colonel in the United States Army.

I remembered the Scandinavians whom I had conjured up for myself before I left London, and felt suddenly rather foolish. "Is there someone coming from Sweden?" I asked, "Or Norway?"

Ida Bachmann seemed to think not. It seemed unlikely that any organisation in either country would be able to raise the fare. And then we were suddenly back on to the old subject again; who were coming? When would they arrive? And when should we really start on our journey to Korea?

"On Thursday!" Regina insisted, with a conviction that struck me as being a little over-emphatic.

"You mean," I inquired, recalling our last conversation on the subject, "that we go to Brno on Wednesday—and to Moscow on Thursday?"

"No." Regina's smile was sweeter than ever, and her manner very, very patient. "You go to Brno on Thursday——"

"But you said Wednesday!"

"Did I?" She was again the nursemaid, dealing with a difficult, but not wholly bad, child. "You see, the other delegates still haven't arrived. And they won't come tomorrow——"

"Because it's May Day?"

"Because it's May Day. So they'll come on Wednesday. And you'll go to Brno on Thursday. Definitely."

Time stretched out, as if the future were infinite, as if we had nothing else to do with our lives but to go to Korea. I was not, I was sure, the only member of the party who was in a hurry to go, and who would be anxious to get back. Candelaria was already homesick, and the two Danes were both busy women. We hurried through lunch, and spent the rest of the day killing time.

When I woke up next morning the sun was shining.

"A perfect May Day!" Regina exclaimed, and led us to the high window in Wenceslas Square from which we were to watch the procession. Wenceslas Square is not really a square but a very wide street enclosed at the top by the towering dark bulk of the National Museum. Now, though it was still only eight o'clock, the first part of the procession had already emerged from the two side streets that curved away on either side of the Museum, and the ranks had joined to march in columns, twenty or thirty abreast, down the length of the Square. At the bottom they would pass the pavilion where President Gottwald and the members of his government sat watching. A group of boys and girls in white shirts or blouses and with red ties around their necks went past us carrying gaily-decorated maypoles. Behind them was a big contingent of factory workers displaying all sorts of emblems: slogans written on banners, brilliantly coloured garlands held on

sticks, a model aeroplane, and a model sports car, and then, trundled on wheels, an enormous globe that was made entirely of flowers, white for all the countries of the world and blue for the sea. Next came peasants in traditional costume, carrying more flowers and little cut-out figures of the dove of peace.

There were no soldiers, and no military display, but the dove was everywhere. The building workers carried cardboard models of brick walls, with doves perched realistically on top. The nurses and doctors carried their doves on sticks, and another group had theirs safely enclosed in a bird-cage that must have measured at least six feet across. The biggest dove of all was made of flowers, and twelve men were needed to carry it.

"Do you hear that the meat ration's going to be cut next week?" somebody behind me asked.

"No. Why?"

"Because it'll take at least a month to eat up all those pigeons . . ."

The crowds had thickened. Now and then people would slip out of the procession to join friends who were standing on the pavement; and as the morning wore on more and more people kept stepping off the pavement to join in the procession. It was as jolly and informal as Durham City on the miners' Gala Day. After three hours or so we decided that the time had come for us to join in. We went downstairs, pushed our way to the edge of the pavement and then, after a minute or so, slipped into a mixed crowd of chattering, laughing men and women. Somebody touched my left arm, and I turned to look. Moving along beside me was a little boy, who might have been perhaps eight years old. He was fair-haired, unusually handsome, but dressed in rags—the only ragged child I had ever seen, or ever did see, in Prague. He slipped his hand into mine and looked up, meeting my eyes with a grave calm smile. Irena asked him his name. He told her, and then refused to answer any more questions. We reached the bottom of the square, and, as the procession turned to the left, I looked at the pavilion where the members of the government sat watching. President Gottwald,

reduced to life-size, had suddenly become a little red-faced man with tears running down his cheeks. The effect, after the grandiloquent posters, was extraordinarily moving. The child's grip on my hand tightened and then, when Kate and I decided we had seen enough, he released his hold and went on by himself, back into the crowd, and disappeared.

The sunshine and the celebrations had made us all much more cheerful, but we were impatient to be on the move, and our impatience showed in everything we did. However, next morning three more delegates turned up: Trees Soenito-Heyligers from Holland, fair-haired and spectacled and, like Candelaria, a lawyer; Eva Priester, an Austrian journalist, and Madame Hannevart from Belgium. So now we were six. No, we were eight: Milusa Svatosova from Prague, whom we had already met, was coming with us as our guide and interpreter. The others would arrive next morning, and in the afternoon we would go to Brno where a plane would be waiting to take us to Moscow. From now on everything was going to be easy.

It was half-past eleven next morning, and I had finished my packing and was ready to go downstairs to meet the new arrivals when Regina came to my room. She was so distressed that she hardly knew how to tell me what had happened. The other delegates had been delayed in Paris, and now we could not hope to leave before Monday. . . .

Downstairs there was a glum silence. Our hostesses hovered about the lounge, smiling bravely. The delay was certainly not their fault, but we were their guests and they felt responsible. They had entertained us eagerly when all that we wanted was to be off, on our way around the world. We felt ungrateful, and we were too angry to offer gratitude even to those who deserved it.

"But there are a lot of things to be seen here," one of our hostesses reminded us.

That was true. I asked if we could visit Lidice.

Nothing, it seemed could be easier.

Anna would be delighted to take me, and Kate and Ida said that they would like to come, too.

I had visited Lidice in 1947 when the bare and ravaged landscape was still a place of pilgrimage to people from all over the world. Now, in England at any rate, the name was already half-forgotten, except among the miners and their wives. It was very nearly nine years since the Nazis had destroyed this small mining village as a reprisal for the death of the Nazi ruler of Prague; and at the time the whole world had been horrified to hear how all the men of the village had been rounded up and shot one evening as they came home from the pit, how all the women and children had been sent to concentration camps, and every building and every tree torn down. The very shape of the landscape had, in a frenzy of hatred, been bulldozed out of recognition, the hills flattened, and the valley piled with earth and debris. The Nazis had declared that not a memory would be left of what Lidice had once been; and in saying so they made the village unforgettable, one of the supreme symbols of their rule.

In 1947 the plans for Lidice's reconstruction had seemed symbolic, too, and mining communities from all over the world had contributed towards the cost of rebuilding. The landscape was still naked. No ruins were visible, and the brown earth had been turned to such a depth that it looked as if a century would be needed to develop a top-soil. Reconstruction had just begun, but it was still at the stage of drains and ditches. I remembered a small builders' camp, a hut with a visitors' book. That was all.

Now, as we approached, we could see that Lidice had come to life again. The new houses, still a little raw, were set back in long, open-fronted gardens. Lace curtains hung from the windows, and some of the gardens already showed bright patches of spring flowers. Here and there trees had been planted too, and their young leaves were a thin, tender green, almost translucent in the sunlight. Someone directed us to the mayor's office, and in a moment or so the mayor herself came out to

meet us. She was a little, square, weather-beaten woman of about fifty, with brilliantly blue eyes set in a face so disciplined that it seemed to have been carved out of some tough, heavy-grained wood.

As we walked along together she told us that 520 people had been living in Lidice at the time of its destruction. Not one man had been left alive; 176 of them had been shot in the village itself; and twenty had been killed in Prague. The women and children had been sent to Auschwitz and Ravensbruck. It was known that during the later stages of the war some of the children had been adopted by Germans—a device apparently used by childless couples in Germany who could, by claiming to have children, escape from being sent to work in the east. As soon as the war was over an attempt was made to trace the survivors; 58 of the women had either died or disappeared, and of the 150 children who had been living in the village in 1942 only 15 were ever found. The mayor herself had, of course, lost her husband. She lifted her head and her face grew more rigid than ever as she answered our unspoken question: "Yes, I had children. Three . . . I myself was shifted from one concentration camp to another . . ." Her voice broke. She raised a fist and thrust away her tears. "No, I have never learned what became of my children. We have never been able to find out . . ."

In the garden in front of one of the houses two children were playing together. They looked up as we passed, smiling and waving.

"You see," the mayor went on, "those of us who were left alive have all come back. And some of the women, those who were younger, have married again. They have been able to make a new life for themselves . . . "

She led us up a garden path and knocked at the door of one of the houses. An elderly, grey-haired woman smiled cordially and invited us in. The small entrance hall led into a charming and beautifully furnished living room. Behind was the kitchen, and upstairs were two bedrooms and a bathroom. The kitchen, though better equipped than the kitchens I had seen in Prague,

was not as well designed as the kitchen of an average English council house; but everything else in the place was of an astonishingly high standard. The rooms themselves were spacious and unusually well planned, and the standard of craftsmanship and finish was far higher than anything I had seen in any new house anywhere for a very long time. When I had stared around the sitting-room for a few minutes I looked at Kate and Ida, watching them measure the house by Danish standards. Ida, who had visited housing projects in half the countries in the world, declared that she had never seen anything like it.

The mayor explained that a house was being built for every one of the survivors, and the houses would belong to them and to their heirs for ever. Each occupant had been given enough furniture for the sitting-room and the principal bedroom. The furniture was as handsome as the rooms: simple in design and very well made. And as we went from house to house we saw that although all the furniture was of much the same style there was enough variation in design to give each house a separate and individual character.

The mayor asked if we would like to see the house in which she herself lived. It was of a different type from the first we had visited—four types, we learned, were being built altogether —with three bedrooms, and a large, heated attic under the rafters that could be used for drying clothes in wet weather. She had already shown us the big, airy basement, with its store-room, wash-house and separate compartments for keeping coal and wood. Now, as we admired the attic, Kate asked: "Who was the architect?"

The mayor smiled. We followed her into one of the bedrooms. Over the bed hung a large, faded, enlarged photograph of a man. It was a bad photograph, blurred at the edges and darkened around the eyes so that it was impossible to guess at the personality it had once represented.

"We have several architects," the mayor answered. I could see that Anna was looking at the photograph. So were Ida and Kate, and so, of course, was I. "But of course, we tell them

what we want. We have a committee—we, the women—and we have been meeting together for a long time. We discuss the way things ought to be for women in the world, and how to make the housework easy so that we can have time for other things. We tell the architects—and then when they have made their plans they bring them back for us to criticise——"

I was still looking at the photograph.

"Is that your husband?" Anna inquired.

The mayor nodded.

"And the children?"

I saw Kate wince. There were tears in her eyes.

"I have no photograph," the mayor answered. "I have nothing that ever belonged to my children. Nothing at all." Again she pushed back her tears.

Kate whispered: "Don't let's ask any more questions."

Ida and I nodded. Our visit, we saw now, had already reopened too many wounds. We got up to go.

As we walked together along the newly made road the mayor was calm again. "Will there be another war?" she asked, looking first at me, then at Ida and Kate.

We shook our heads. We did not know. In this place and with this woman, it would have been an offence to offer platitudes or false hopes.

"It's difficult," Ida said, "difficult to tell."

The mayor shook her head. "I couldn't bear it!" Suddenly she was sobbing. The tears ran down her face, unheeded, and her hands were flat against her sides. "I couldn't bear it again! Not again! I ask nothing for myself any more, but for these others—the children, and those who are still young——"

She turned her head. The hill sloped down sharply, and at the bottom, in the valley, we could see the new cemetery, where the bones of the dead had been laid. A great wooden cross, rough-hewn and tall as a high tree, stood above the graves, ringed with a great crown, a triple circle of barbed wire. Up above, the sun had gone and the clouds were gathering for a storm. There was a flash of lightning, and then the first drops fell. Anna threw her arms around the mayor,

hugging her, promising peace. And the three of us who were foreigners looked at one another, unable to promise anything at all.

* * *

We returned to Prague. We went to Gottwaldov. We spent a wet week-end driving through the mountains of Slovakia, visiting rest-homes and sanatoria. Then we came back to Prague again, hoping against hope that the other delegates would have arrived.

They had, and now it was they who were impatient, anxious to be off, and wondering where the rest of us had got to. We found them sitting at a press conference, and as I took my seat between Kate and Ida I looked round quickly, trying to guess where they came from. Lilly Wachter and Hilde Cahn were stout and kindly and unmistakably German. The French delegate who, somebody whispered, was a novelist and journalist, was tall and slender and graceful, with wide-set sparkling dark eyes and delicately cut features. Near her were delegates from Tunis and Algiers and, across the table, Mrs. Nora Rodd from Canada, the oldest of the party, her silvery hair plaited in a coronet around her head, her blue eyes rapt and intent as she listened to the delegates who, one after another, got up to explain how they had come to be chosen. Then, at last, the journalists left, and we settled down to business. Someone suggested that our first job was to elect a chairman. I disagreed. It seemed to me quite wrong that anybody should be elected to do anything until we had all had some time in which to get to know each other. Several of the delegates agreed with me, but we were out-voted, and Mrs. Rodd was elected chairman. And I could see that I had already been labelled as awkward.

Other arguments followed, each one hotter than the last. People began to talk about the importance of preparing an agreed report about the things we should see in Korea, and at this I started arguing again, determined not to commit myself to any agreement in advance. I said that I had been told that the delegation was made up of women of widely different

political views and that it was possible that we might disagree even over the interpretation of facts . . .

At once Eva Priester was on her feet. If, she demanded, I was not prepared to sign a report then why had I agreed to come?

I replied that I was prepared to sign anything with which I agreed, but that I could not guarantee agreement with anybody about anything. Other delegates took the same view and Kate went further. She felt that her own position as an independent observer without any political attachments would be prejudiced if she were to sign any common document. Then, while we were all still trying to guess at other people's political opinions, the argument got mixed up with the question of whether we were going to attempt to visit South Korea. Opinion seemed to be fairly equally divided, but finally it was agreed that the attempt should be made. Agreement, however, brought us no nearer. When the meeting broke up we were still strangers, and our politeness was without any cordiality.

Later we dined together in a private room. There were fifteen of us in all. In Moscow we were to be joined by a Soviet delegate, and later by several Chinese. Now, already, we were a crowd, nervous and ill at ease.

As we ate Regina went around the table distributing passports with the Soviet visas inside them. Another of the hostesses was with her, and presently I heard them asking each other, in a whisper that was certainly not meant to reach anybody else: "How are we going to tell Candelaria?"

I turned round. Candelaria was sitting at the head of the table. She was wearing black velvet, her hair was curled, and she looked radiant. The Prague doctors had cured her lumbago, and she was ready for everything: for everything except the incident that was about to happen.

Regina approached her. Candelaria held out her hand. "You've got my passport?"

Regina shook her head. "Dear Candelaria, I'm afraid there's a small misunderstanding . . . Come with me, and I'll tell you."

Candelaria got up. Her mobile, expressive face was rigid. She followed Regina out of the room.

"What is it?" I asked the other hostess.

"It's her visa . . . her visa for the Soviet Union . . . we don't know why, but it hasn't come through . . . Some delay somewhere . . ."

"You mean she won't be able to come to Korea?"

"I don't know. It depends . . . If it comes through in time we'll put her on the first plane, and she'll be able to catch you up. But I don't know . . ."

I went upstairs to finish my packing. I had nearly finished when Candelaria arrived. She held herself tightly, but her eyes were blazing.

"Fools!" she exclaimed. "Fools—these women! And they think I fool . . . I arrive Prague first, before anybody—is that right, Monica?"

I nodded.

"And I ask: how about visa for Soviet Union? They look my passport. Okay, they say. Okay! And they do nothing. Nothing! And now—today—they look at passport again—and say—" her voice was cold with mockery—"dear Candelaria, no visa——"

"But you'll get one?"

"Oh, I hope! But you see—these women—their fault—they not ask . . . And now, if I not go . . . And Regina, she think I baby. She think I cry . . . Cry! Cry when they so stupid—but I not cry . . . You know, Monica, in Cuba everybody always smiling, but here—here because I smile they think I fool . . . But if my visa not come through I make trouble . . . Real trouble . . ."

She meant it. She was going to Korea, and nothing was going to stop her.

And then, at last, she got up to go.

"See you in Moscow," I said.

Her smile came back. "Bless you, Monica. See you in Moscow."

3

TO MOSCOW

Next morning we were up at five, and there were no more delays. The farewells to our Prague hostesses seemed to take hours, but it was still only eight o'clock when the plane began to move. Now, at last, we were really on the way to Korea. I took a last glance at the cosy patchwork of the landscape of central Europe, closed my eyes and went to sleep. When I woke we were already landing at Lvov. The customs and passport examination took barely half an hour, and then we were off again. I dozed once more.

"Moscow!" somebody shouted through my dreams, and I woke up.

I was standing at the top of the ladder, feeling dishevelled and a little confused when I heard a joyful voice from below: "Monica!"

It was Mme Parfionova, the vice-president of the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee, whom I had met in London a few months earlier. She ran forward and I fell into her arms.

She was fat like a dumpling, and as warm as if her corsets encased the original spirit of human kindness. Everyone who had met her in England had been charmed by her frankness and humour, and by her rare combination of simplicity and understanding. I was so delighted to see her again that arriving in Moscow seemed suddenly like coming home. In London she had seemed, with her round, smooth face, fair skin and tiny, soft nose as typically Russian as the melon-faced peasant girls whom Low used to draw before the war. Here, in her own world, hatless and with tight plaits of light brown hair bound together across the top of her head, she looked, if that were possible, more Russian still. There were a dozen other women at least, and flowers for everyone, huge bouquets, laughter, chatter, an all-pervading sense of ease and friendliness.

Parfy—in England everyone had called her Parfy—tucked me into a big car and wrapped a rug about my knees. Several other delegates got in and then another Nina, a young one. Interpreter Nina we called her, to distinguish her from the five other Ninas whom we were to meet in the course of the next two days.

We drove along a smooth arterial road, past birch woods, fields, groups of untidy log-houses. Then we came to modern blocks of flats and were in the city.

The walls of the Kremlin came in sight. We recognised the handsome eighteenth-century building of the old university, the Lenin Library, the great towers of old churches rising towards the sky. Then we drew up outside an hotel and stepped out on to the pavement.

"Come along in," Nina bade us.

We did not want to go in. We wanted to stare. In front of us a wide square, stretched away to the red walls that encircled the Kremlin, and around us the streets were thronged with traffic. Shining cars and smart, single-deck trolley-buses were moving in all directions, and crowds of people kept dashing off the pavements, ignoring the traffic lights, and started to thread their way through the stream. The picture book had come to life. A tall young man in a long overcoat slouched past us, his hands thrust into his pockets, his eyes focused on a point so far away that he seemed to be almost unconscious of where he was going. Behind him came two girls walking arm-in-arm and laughing together as if at some secret joke.

"Please come!" Nina insisted, and led the way into the hotel.

A minute or so later I was in a big, lavishly furnished room, old-fashioned but very comfortable. French windows opened on to a balcony. Opposite was the Red Square. Dusk was falling, and the brilliant colours faded to a monotone, the lofty towers still outlined sharply against the waning pallor of the sky. Then suddenly, kindling the peak of one of the tallest towers, a red star began to glow.

I turned back into the room, took a bath, and put on the

little black dress which Elizabeth had advised me to pack. Downstairs there was to be a quiet dinner party.

Mme Parfionova was waiting for me, and Nina came and sat beside us. Six or seven other hostesses were scattered among the delegates. Far away, at the other end of the big table, was Mme Maria Ovsyannikova, who was to be the representative of the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee on our delegation. We had already shaken hands formally, and now I stared across the room, trying to guess what sort of person she was.

"You two are going to like each other very much," Mme Parfionova remarked, observing my glance.

I nodded, trying to conceal my doubts. Mme Ovsyannikova was small and stout and tightly corseted, with a face which looked as if it had been tightly corseted, too: the small and delicately feminine lines of forehead, nose and cheek-bones disciplined into keeping with the strong jaw and firm, decided mouth. Her black silk dress was smartly cut and there were pearls around her throat, but her stiff, reserved bearing, so sharply contrasted to the warm homeliness of our other hostesses, made her look as if she despised these concessions to polite custom. I found her rather frightening, but I was certainly not going to admit it.

"Yes," Mme Parfionova went on, "you'll find that she's had just the right sort of experience for Korea. She served in the Red Army all through the war——"

"Oh?"

Mme Ovsyannikova had been, I learned, a colonel, and had served at Stalingrad. Now she was the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Soviet Women* and was, besides, well known as an economist. I thought she looked cold and hard and bossy, and it took me some time to discover that I was wrong.

Meanwhile, we chatted and drank toasts in sweet red wine, and then decided to take the advice of our hostesses and go to bed early.

We said good night and went upstairs. Then, just as we

were going to our rooms, Ida suggested: "Why don't we go out and take a walk?"

"A walk!" Kate and I stared. It seemed a very long time since either of us had been for a walk.

"Will they let us?" Kate asked.

"Well," Ida suggested, "we can try . . ."

We put on our coats and crept downstairs, like children afraid of attracting the notice of the adult world. We peeped over the banisters. Our hostesses were standing in the lobby below, putting on their coats, getting ready to go to their own homes. We felt trapped, but it was too late to retreat. We came down the last flight.

"Going out?" somebody asked.

We nodded, but without speaking. We were kids waiting to be ordered back to bed.

Our hostesses smiled. "Would you like one of us to come with you? Or would you prefer to go by yourselves?"

We gasped. "By ourselves . . ."

Mme Hannevart was standing by the bookstall. Kate grabbed her arm. "Come on! We're going for a walk——"

"Who's taking you?"

"Nobody. Just us——"

"But will they let us go out alone?"

"Of course. Come on!"

On the pavement we stood for a moment, and each of us took a deep breath.

"Goodness!" Kate exclaimed. "It's like being in a free country!"

Ida answered rather tartly: "This is a free country."

"Is it?" Mme Hannevart answered. "I wonder . . ."

We braced ourselves, turned to the left, and crossed an enormous street. The traffic seemed hardly less dense than it had been when we arrived. Crowds of people were moving along the pavements, some of them hurrying and others strolling easily and stopping every now and then to look into the shop windows. We passed a brightly lit display of scents and cosmetics, and then stopped in front of a window filled

with sweets and chocolates. In one corner of the window stood a gaily coloured figure of a girl, life-size or perhaps a little bigger. Her arms hung at her sides and her hands turned inwards, just at hip-level, to hold a tray filled with sweets wrapped in coloured paper. As we watched the tray moved slowly upwards, into the girl's stomach, out of sight, and then reappeared once more through her hips. We watched fascinated, as the process repeated itself again and again, the sweets eternally consumed and eternally reappearing.

"Let's go in," Ida suggested, and pushed open the swing doors that led into the shop.

Inside, we saw that the place sold not only sweets and chocolates, but cakes and sandwiches, delicatessen, and all sorts of groceries. All the goods were on glass or marble shelves, and screened from dust by tilted sheets of glass. Although it was after eleven o'clock quite a number of people were still shopping, and the white uniforms of the girls behind the counters looked as fresh as if they had just been put on. (Next day we learned that all shop assistants work on a shift system, and that because of this it is possible to keep shops open as long as necessary. In Moscow all food shops stay open until midnight, and other shops until eight.)

After a few minutes we went out into the street again and walked on slowly. Presently we came to a Metro station and went into the big, shining entrance hall. We had all heard about the Metro and we longed to go for a ride, but we had no money. So we stood beside the ticket barrier, just staring around, watching the people as they stepped on and off the escalators.

It was Kate who suddenly said what we were all thinking: "How happy everybody looks!"

It was true. We went on watching, checking this impression, determined to maintain our objectivity, to resist the almost religious ecstasy of some of our fellow-delegates. By the standards to which we were accustomed—the standards of Brussels, Copenhagen and London—most of the people, especially the women, looked rather dowdy; but scarcely any had the tense, preoccupied, frowning look which we had all

come to take for granted as the characteristic set of the adult human face. Most people were smiling, not broadly, but as if a small smile were part of their settled attitude to life. There was no denying the fact: our first impression of Moscow was of a city of conspicuous happiness.

"Have you been here before?" I asked of nobody in particular. We had strolled up into the Red Square and were standing opposite Lenin's tomb.

"Yes," Mme Hannevart answered, "I have. I was here in 1930. And, you know, today Moscow isn't the same city . . . Of course——" she made a small gesture in the direction from which we had come, "—the buildings have changed, but that's not the chief thing——"

"Then?"

She had a soft, low voice, and a scientist's slow precision in expressing her meaning. "It's the people. When I was here before Moscow was a city of peasants. They trod the pavements as if they were walking over their fields, as if their feet were sinking into the earth at every step. But now . . . Look!"

Ahead of us a small group of people were striding along, their heads lifted, their gait powerful and easy. Behind them were two lovers, arm-in-arm, leaning towards each other as they moved.

"Look!" Mme Hannevart went on. "Those are men and women who look as if the future belongs to them . . ."

That was it, exactly. They were not arrogant: but they looked as if they owned the world they lived in, and as if they loved it, too.

I came down next morning to find the delegates staring palely at what seemed to be the Russian notion of breakfast. There were dishes of caviar, big plates of cheese and ham and cold sausage, bottles of something that looked like yogurt, creamy slabs of butter, and three kinds of bread—white, brown and black. Elderly waiters in starched white jackets and with shaven heads were carrying tea and coffee and apple-juice, platters of baked eggs and dishes of strawberry jam.

"Eat!" one of our hostesses begged. "Please eat!"

The injunction was repeated in several languages. From now on everything was going to have to be translated, and the delegates had already begun to group themselves according to the language they preferred to use. At the far end of the table Mrs. Rodd had pulled back the window curtain and was gazing across the sunlit square towards the Kremlin. Above the soft red of the old walls the cream-coloured buildings sparkled against a clear, pale sky. The people walking down below were still wearing overcoats, but we could sense a feeling of spring in the air.

"Now I wonder," Mrs. Rodd asked, "which would be Stalin's window?"

"Please!" another hostess insisted. "Please eat! You must build your strength! Strength for Korea!"

The brilliant yokes of three eggs stared up at me. They were done to a turn, and I found myself eating the whole lot.

"That's the way!" Nadia agreed. She was a big, stout, strong-looking woman with a long, rather horse-like face and merry grey eyes. In fact, nearly all our hostesses were big and stout and strong-looking, and most of them were merry, too, bubbling with vitality and obviously enjoying every single minute of their lives. Nadia, though she was not young, seemed the merriest of all, and when she suddenly grew sad, as she did when we began to talk about Korea, her sadness had the same sort of intensity as her merriment. "And now—" she leaned forward across the table, "—a slice of ham?"

"I couldn't."

"Oh, please try!"

I couldn't even try. We got up and went to put on our coats.

Two architects were waiting to take us on a tour of the city, and to show us the plans for new development. Old Moscow, we could see as we drove, had been dominated by the towers of the Kremlin, rising above the flat expanse that stretched around it in every direction. In new Moscow the same conception was being enlarged. The curve of the Moscow River,

running in an almost complete circle, was to be emphasised by carefully placed skyscrapers, whose towers were designed to repeat, on a contemporary scale, the motifs of both old and recent tradition: the flatness of the landscape broken by dramatic leaps towards the sky, the red star shining from once unimaginable heights.

We paused on a bridge. Behind us the Kremlin walls curved parallel with the river, and the river itself, in the brilliant light of the spring morning, was like aluminium filmed with milk, its silvery whiteness sharpening the contrast between the old red walls and the young, translucent green of the bursting trees. Facing us, on the other side of the bridge, the steel outline of a huge skyscraper glinted in the sunlight.

We drove out of the city, through wide streets that opened on to vistas of old, closely huddled wooden houses, past big ugly blocks of flats and office buildings, to look at an area which was about to be opened up as a new residential quarter. Presently the bus climbed a hill. The road was lined with trees, and children were hopping and jumping along the grass verges, laughing and shouting at each other as they went. On our left the fields stretched in gentle upward slopes towards the sky, and on our right the river, bordered by stacks of timber and a confusion of sheds and warehouses, had widened out into a curve that seemed to enclose the whole city. We got out and looked back in the direction from which we had come. One of the architects was standing beside me. He was a little man in a light grey suit, pale and square-faced, with a diffident formality of manner; but both the diffidence and the formality disappeared as soon as he began to talk. "You will notice," he lifted a hand towards the panorama in front of us, "that this is the highest point anywhere in the neighbourhood of the city. And climatically it's the healthiest . . . We made a careful survey of all the environs of Moscow in order to find out which was the most suitable for residential purposes——"

"And what will you build?"

The new quarter, he explained, was to be focused around

the new university, with the layout planned so as to seize the advantages offered by the wide cross-river vista, while the river banks themselves would be cleared and redeveloped for recreational purposes. "In the capitalist world," he went on, in language which used to be heard in England when nationalisation of the land was still in the Labour Party's programme, "in the capitalist world physical planning is still largely dictated by the cost of land. You put buildings that are commercially profitable on the most expensive land—and the workers are housed where land happens to be cheap . . ."

I nodded.

"And in the same way the capitalist countries put high buildings in the centre of their cities because that is where the land is most expensive . . . And where the land costs less you spread horizontally . . . But here, where all land belongs to the people, we don't build multi-story buildings because we are forced to do so but because, rightly situated and properly spaced, they give point and emphasis to a whole neighbourhood. In fact, we are really free to plan for the way in which people want to live . . ."

The planning was superb, both imaginative and practical. The new roads that we drove along were wide enough for the traffic of any foreseeable future, some of them constructed with outer lanes for local traffic and a central track, divided from the outer lanes by belts of trees and shrubs, for fast-moving vehicles. The architecture, on the other hand, I found heavy and dull, and many of the new buildings were so over-decorated that they looked as if their architects had scraped the very bottom from the stewpot of classicism. Most of the delegates were in raptures.

"Now isn't that beautiful?" somebody demanded of me as we passed a whole forest of Corinthian pillars. "Isn't that just perfectly wonderful?"

If the aim of the architects was to satisfy popular taste they had certainly succeeded; but the taste they satisfied was not mine, and after a little hesitation I decided to say so. I felt that whatever my failings as a guest might be I would, at any

rate, make certain that such criticisms as I wanted to make should be heard here before I expressed my opinions in London. The two architects and our hostesses all seemed interested.

"In our country," Nadia said, "we welcome criticism. And especially from friends. Of course we ourselves, we criticise everything . . ." She felt in the pocket of her overcoat and, when nobody was looking, pulled out a toffee and slipped it between my fingers. "All the same," she added, "I think you'll like the Stalin Prize building . . ."

I didn't. It looked like the result of an unsuccessful marriage between Fifth Avenue and Cromwell Road. I shuddered and turned away.

"I suppose—" one of the architects turned to me as we moved on "—that you've heard about our technique for moving back buildings when we widen our streets?"

I had, in fact, first learned of this technique towards the end of the war when I had been a member of the London County Council town planning committee and Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Mr. J. H. Forshaw had produced their County of London Plan—a plan which, carried out over a period of fifty years, was to transform London into one of the healthiest and most beautiful cities in the world. New roads were to be built, old roads widened, and green wedges to lead out from the centre into the open country—improvements whose cost, the authors had argued, could be considerably reduced by following Moscow's method of avoiding the demolition of important buildings by sliding them back on their foundations. Now, I knew, the County of London Plan had been whittled away until there was very little left of its original boldness of conception or even of its detail; but the notion of being able to move a whole building had struck my fancy, and I wanted to know more about how it was done. The architect explained how temporary connections were made for gas, water, sewage, and electricity through flexible rubber pipes, so that whatever work was done inside the building could continue while the whole structure was raised from its foundations and pushed back on rollers.

"Of course," he said, "the process isn't cheap—but even when a building is of no particular historical importance it still costs very much less to move it than to demolish and reconstruct——"

Somebody asked: "How much less?"

"It varies. Naturally. On the average the cost is about thirty-five per cent of what the cost of a new building would be —sometimes less, sometimes rather more. Of course as our technique improves we can cheapen the cost . . ." The bus stopped outside a five-story building that ran for several hundred feet along the line of a wide thoroughfare. The architect pointed. "That's a recent removal. We pushed it back nearly a hundred metres so that we could straighten out the street we're in now——"

"And what's the building used for?"

"It's a hospital. There was an operation—a very delicate eye operation—going on while we were moving the building——"

"And did the patient recover?"

He looked shocked. "But of course . . ."

One of the delegates turned to me: "Well, this'll be quite an idea to borrow when you start putting London into shape."

I answered sourly: "I'm not on the London County Council now," and turned away, speculating on how London had come to abandon its future.

Comparisons were odious, but there was no doubt that we all loved Moscow. We wandered about the streets, staring at the people. We went sight-seeing, and made a tour of the Metro stations, gaping at the marble walls, bronze statues and elaborate lighting, and gaping even harder at our fellow-passengers. We went to the Bolshoi Theatre to see a performance of *The Red Poppy*, and decided that art and propaganda were not incompatible after all. I spent a morning alone at the city's permanent building exhibition, discussing housing standards and building techniques with an engineer who showed me a dazzling collection of plans and models and who was silently and politely shocked by what he plainly regarded

as the inadequate dimensions of rooms in English local authority houses. Then we had a formal meeting of the delegation to discuss our plans, and argued again about whether we were going to ask the United Nations to allow us to visit South Korea. Kate and I were still determined that the attempt ought to be made, but we got less support than we had done in Prague, and Madame Ovsyannikova made it perfectly clear that she had nothing but contempt for those of us who had made the suggestion. The arguments were dividing the whole delegation into factions, and we were all growing more and more suspicious of each other. After two days it began to seem that we should never be able to reach agreement about anything. And already it was time for us to move on again.

On our last evening there was a party. We were too tired to go, but we went just the same. We went reluctantly, certain that our real need was for sleep. Sleep, however, was the one necessity for which none of our hostesses ever seemed to make any allowance. We came to the conclusion they must be made quite differently from us, and somebody guessed that they only slept on Sundays. Certainly it had happened to several of us that if we asked last thing at night for something to be arranged we would find, as soon as we got up next morning, that the thing was fixed down to its last detail. Yet nobody ever seemed to get tired, and nobody ever made a fuss.

"If you come to the party for an hour or so," one of our hostesses urged us, "you can still go back to the hotel and sleep for two hours before it's time to go for the plane. Two whole hours . . ."

We finished our packing, and came downstairs to go to the party. And there, standing between the marble statues in the entrance hall, was Candelaria, looking exactly as she had done on our last night in Prague before she knew that her visa had not come: wearing the same black velvet dress, the same air of hopeful excitement.

"Monica!" she rushed towards me and seized my hands. "You see—I come! After everything, I come . . . But, oh, such a terrible, terrible journey . . ."

"But you're looking wonderful."

"Wonderful! And feel wonderful, too!" Her smile was wide, wider than I had ever seen it. "Now I go to Korea, and nothing stop me—nothing . . ." She lowered her voice, making certain that she should not be overheard. "And Moscow? How Moscow?"

"Fine," I answered. "Fine. When did you arrive?"

"Just one hour. Time for hairdresser and to change my dress . . ." She twirled around, displaying her freshly made curls. "Good hairdressers in Moscow—you think so, too?"

I thought so, too.

We were pushed into a car and driven a hundred yards, to the Hotel Metropole. A man in a dinner-jacket ushered us into an enormous hall, dim and yet gaudy, the floor scattered with gilt and plush chairs and scores of little tables. There was a fountain in the middle of the hall, and a pond around it with goldfish swimming in the water, and there were women everywhere, most of them in long, trailing evening dresses that were very tight about the hips and a good deal gathered around the necks and shoulders. There were a few men, too, not many but enough to show that the world did not consist entirely of women. This was, in any case, a women's party, not in our honour but given for a delegation of French and German women who had come to Moscow for May Day.

We, in our travelling clothes, felt dowdy and out of place, and after our two days' sightseeing most of us were hardly capable of moving a muscle. Even our smiles were fixed rigidly, as if at the slightest jerk they would slip off our faces and reveal the natural feebleness of our constitutions: but we were determined that our hostesses, though they might realise that we were all rather diminished, should not discover how incapable we felt of facing the next stage of the journey. So we sat bolt upright on our gilt chairs, sipping at glasses of sweet wine, and focusing our attention on the stage, where a concert was about to begin.

Parfy, sitting next to me, whispered: "Didn't you want to go back to the hotel and sleep for a little?"

I nodded gratefully. I had not imagined that it was possible to be so tired. The car that had brought us was still waiting at the door, and I staggered into it, went back to my room and threw myself on the bed. I had just begun to doze when the telephone rang. It was Interpreter Nina, reminding me that I ought to be downstairs again in ten minutes. The time was a quarter to one, and we were leaving for Korea at one o'clock. Our luggage was already piled in the hall, a bus was waiting outside to take us to the airport, and the people who had been at the party were standing around, smiling and tender, ready to bid us good-bye. We were just about to set off when I discovered that I had lost my gloves.

"Please!" one of our hostesses peeled hers off and pushed them towards me. "Take these!"

"No. Thank you—but I couldn't——"

"You must! Please! You can't go to Korea without gloves —and it would be such a pleasure to me——"

"But mine must be somewhere. I can't really have lost them——"

"Well if you find them you can bring these back. Please!" She put an arm around me and gave me a comfortable, motherly hug. "See if they fit."

They were good gloves, and they fitted perfectly. I had borrowed Renée's belt in London and now, here in Moscow, Anna's gloves. The world, west of Korea, seemed a cosy place . . .

4

ACROSS SIBERIA

It was half-past three when our plane took off, and a grey dawn was breaking over a flat green world. Beyond the city we passed a scattering of villages, each with its houses set back behind fenced gardens, and with light-coloured patches showing where repairs had been made to what we guessed were bomb-damaged roofs. Presently the wide open country stretched away, empty, flat and wintry-looking. We watched tractors moving across boundless fields, cattle grazing beside a sluggish-looking river, a patch of black, bare forest whose trees were here and there misted with the faint yellowish-green of bursting leaves. A city appeared on the edge of the northern horizon, and before we lost it I caught a glimpse of tall, boldly shaped buildings outlined in white against the unbroken greyness of the sky. Then I closed my eyes and presently fell asleep. When I awoke the plane was about to land at Sverdlovsk in order to refuel. I craned forward to catch a glimpse of the Volga, and then we glided to the ground. The airfield was a vast expanse of dusty earth, sparsely covered with coarse, tussocky grass. We climbed out, holding on to the railings to steady ourselves against the bitter, driving wind. Although it was already the second week of May the cold was intense, striking through our clothes and leaving us gasping at the very notion of what the winter must have been. Then we roused ourselves, determined to see everything that there was to be seen: but that was little enough. Other planes were landing, taking off, and people were coming and going across the turf carrying heavy suitcases, market-baskets, bundles wrapped in what looked like old-fashioned counterpanes. We shivered, gave up and climbed back into our seats, waiting for the plane to warm up.

Beneath us the world was huge, and unimaginably empty.

Vast prairies stretched away behind us, ahead, and on both sides, green pastures that looked as if they had never been touched by man. After a time prairie gave way to forest, dense, huge and pathless. Once, after we had again landed to refuel and had once more taken off, I glanced at my watch as we crossed a boundary between open plain and forest in order to try to estimate the distance between one clearing and the next. We could hardly have been travelling at a speed of less than a hundred and forty miles an hour, and might very well have been moving much faster, yet, though I watched steadily, an hour and fifteen minutes passed before there was even a gap between the trees. I started thinking of the little world of Stevenage, of the timber restrictions that prohibited the Corporation—and every local authority in Britain—from using wood on the ground-floors of houses. I remembered the metal doors and door-frames that were being substituted for wood. I thought of newsprint and the shortage of books in County Council schools, of furniture and pit-props and window-frames and shuttering for concrete.

Kate leaned across the aisle and asked: "Don't you feel well?"

I shook my head. I said: "Nothing makes sense . . ."

Ida pulled out her map. It was ten hours since we had left Moscow, but the time, instead of being half-past one, was already half-past five. Flying towards the sun, we were six hours ahead of London, four hours ahead of Moscow. Omsk was already behind us. The city had been far bigger than any of us had imagined, and we would have liked to have had time to visit it properly. Instead, we had wandered around the airport garden, examining the statues of Lenin and Stalin, and trying to talk to the children who were playing on the footpath that led to the airport building. Our next stop, still two hours ahead, was Novosibirsk, where arrangements had been made for us to spend the night.

When we arrived it was almost dusk, and a reception committee was waiting to receive us: ten big, motherly, smiling women dressed in thick, dark overcoats and with dark felt hats

pulled down over their ears. They carried, too, bunches of early spring flowers, narcissi and daffodils, which they presented to us as we shook hands. The leader made us a little speech, but her words were carried away by the wind, which blew more wildly and coldly than ever. "Come!" one of the women detached herself from the crowd and, taking my arm led me towards a car. In a moment we were on our way to the city.

The road was wide and straight, but unmetalled, muddy, and pitted with ruts. For perhaps half a mile it ran through level, open country, and then was raised on an embankment to cross a steep ravine. Both sides of the ravine were covered with an untidy mess of small wooden houses and shacks that seemed to have been thrown up without any sort of order, not built along roads but dotted about casually, with footpaths leading from one group to the next. Beyond the ravine the houses grew sparser, as if we were leaving behind what might have been the original and now partly abandoned settlement. Then the car glided on to asphalt, the road climbed a hill, and tall, naked-looking buildings, some of brick and others rendered in stone or concrete, appeared on either side. Some of these buildings might have been offices, but most, as we could see from the lace-curtains and rubber plants that filled the windows, were blocks of flats, apparently of recent construction. Low avenues of trees were planted along the street. Their branches were bare and so tightly pruned that they looked like writhing skeletons.

"I am afraid," Elena interpreted for one of our hostesses, "that spring has come to us very late this year——"

"Isn't it always like this?" I asked. Though the footpaths were clear there were patches of snow lying in the gutters.

"No! Oh, no! We find it exceptionally cold for the time of the year . . ." The inhabitants of Siberia, I began to realise by next day, are as sensitive to criticisms of their climate as the inhabitants of the British Isles. They have the same trick of pointing out that the weather has just been, or is just about to be, very much better; and they have, too, the same conviction

that their climate, whatever its disadvantage, is certainly the healthiest in the whole world.

In the town centre the shops were brightly lit and the windows, though less lavishly decorated than the shop-windows in Moscow, displayed a similar variety of goods: textiles, footwear, kitchen equipment, glass and china, and the usual enormous quantities of food. The people promenading up and down the streets wore drab but warm-looking clothes, and they carried themselves with the same easy, cheerful air. Nobody was smart, but I saw nobody, either, who was not wearing good leather boots or rubber galoshes. The car slowed down as we passed a big, square, pompous-looking opera house. "Perhaps later in the evening . . ." our hostess suggested. There was only one thing I wanted to do later in the evening, and that was to go to bed and sleep. Nevertheless, I asked what the performance was that night.

Ballet, our hostess answered. She was rosy-cheeked, snub-nosed, cheerful and easy. "Besides the opera house," she added, "we have two other theatres here—one for ordinary plays, and one which belongs to the children——"

"The children?"

She was about to answer when the car stopped in front of an hotel. It was small, rather shabby, but freshly painted and clean, and the whole staff seemed to be standing in the entrance hall, as smilingly eager to receive us as our hostesses had been. "Please hurry!" Someone begged as we went to our rooms.

"But why?" I heard somebody ask. The whole night was still before us.

"Because there is to be a banquet—and the mayor and city officials have already arrived."

We sat down at long tables in a dim, cosy restaurant, doing our best to make conversation, but rather handicapped by the shortage of interpreters. Soon we were reduced to a rather feeble pantomime and learning, as we rose to every toast, that while one might, when an ordinary health was proposed, drink as much or as little as we liked, the health of Stalin must be drunk until the glass was drained. We drained our glasses cheerfully,

hoping that it would soon be possible to go to bed. At eleven, however, our host rose and announced that we would all now go to the ballet.

It was too much, and several of us refused. We were to leave at seven next morning, and even if we went to bed now could hardly hope for more than six hours' sleep. Our hostesses were insistent, and around me I could see that one delegate after another was beginning to yield. I slipped away quietly and went to bed. Five minutes later there was a tap on my door. It was Candelaria. "Monica—can you give me a sleeping pill?"

"Of course." I sat up and reached for the box. "One or two?"

"Thank you. Just one." She went to the wash-basin, picked up a glass, put her hand to the brass tap, and then suddenly laughed. The tap had come clean away in her hand. I crawled out of bed and we tried to fix it, but the thread in the screw was broken, and a steady stream of water was running into the basin. We rang for the chambermaid, who, after playing around with the basin for a bit, went off to fetch a plumber. It was a pity, I thought, that I had not gone to the ballet, since at this time of night it was obviously going to be hours before a plumber could be found. I said: "It's like Sir Walter Citrine."

Candelaria stared. "Who?"

"A trade union leader," I explained, "who came to Russia before the war and found that there weren't any plugs in the wash-basins——"

"But there are plugs——"

"Yes."

"Then what do you mean?"

I tried to explain. I was in the middle of a sentence when the chambermaid returned, bringing a plumber. In a minute the tap had been repaired, and the whole incident, from start to finish, had not taken more than five minutes.

We looked at breakfast with jaundiced eyes. As usual

there was far too much of everything and, as usual, it all looked appetising.

"Eat!" our hostesses implored us. "Please eat!"

I asked for another cup of tea.

"But you must eat, too," Mme Ovsyannikova told me sternly. "You must build your strength——"

"One can eat too much," I answered, and pushed away the platter of eggs that the waitress had placed in front of me. Mme Ovsyannikova, setting an example I was too weak to follow, helped herself to a cream-puff and we eyed each other with cool, restrained disapproval. From time to time we had exchanged a few polite commonplaces, but we had made no progress at getting to know each other. She seemed, as she had seemed on our first evening in Moscow, cold, reserved and inaccessible, and I suspected that she thought me frivolous and careless. I turned to Kate: "How was the ballet?"

"Terrible. It was *Swan Lake* and there was a fat man . . . he must have been at least sixty . . ." She smiled reminiscently. "But I suppose it's something to have ballet at all in Novosibirsk . . ."

Siberia that day was blacker than ever. There was a black sky overhead, and the earth beneath was blackish-brown, speckled here and there with half-melted snow. The vast open spaces seemed even vaster and more open, the villages fewer and more tightly huddled. Yet every now and then we passed, as we had done during the previous day, big new cities, their tall buildings gleaming whitely against the murky sky. Away on our right we could see great mountains, their icy, jagged peaks rising towards the roof of the world, and beneath us the country was not flat but gently undulating, still alternating between forest and open prairie, sometimes greyish green, sometimes with the brownish tinge of bracken and dried heather. Inside the plane everyone was quiet. The size of the world and its fantastic emptiness had stricken us to silence, forcing us to an awareness of the distance between our own limited imaginations and the vastness of reality. Next time, I

told myself, suddenly resolving that there was going to be a next time, I'll cross Siberia by land so that I can really see . . .

Beyond Irkutsk, the country took on a new wildness. Lake Baikal was as black as the earth around it, reflecting the threatening darkness of the sky. Here and there around the shores of the lake we could see small settlements, the houses packed tightly together, their roofs as uniform as match-box lids. Then, while we were still over the lake the clouds suddenly parted, and at last we were travelling into the blue: a blue that was pale and yet startlingly brilliant, with shadows defining the rounded tops of mountains and turning the landscape to a warm, peaty brown that was broken now by the sudden green of spring. Ahead of us another lake glittered, reflecting back the blueness of the sky, and on the other side of the lake was our last stopping-place on Soviet territory, Chita. Another day's journey was almost at an end.

We stepped out, lifting our faces to the sunshine, and then tightening our nostrils against the sharp, gritty dust. The reception committee rushed forward to meet us. There were more flowers, more speeches, smiles and hand-clasps. And, perhaps because the sun had at last begun to shine, or perhaps because we had been flying for only eight or nine hours, we were miraculously much less tired.

The plane had landed near the middle of the airfield, and the town of Chita was behind us, circling under the curve of a range of mountains that ran a few miles to the north of the route along which we had come. In the foreground the lake shone, even brighter and more blue than it had seemed from above. The mountains were round, softly contoured and brilliantly green, with dark stretches of woodland running like fingers across the turf. Here, though the wind was still cool, I could see that spring had already arrived. The whole earth sparkled.

The people walking beside me seemed to sparkle, too. There was a man—though what he was doing among so many women we never discovered—who wore a dark felt hat pushed

back from his forehead to show glittering black eyes set in a narrow, ruggedly handsome face; and on my other side was a woman quite unlike any of the women we had met on the journey so far. She was plump, but with an elegant, nineteenth-century plumpness, her tight waist accentuated by the swing of her well-cut black coat, her face, not quite young but still noticeably pretty and very much made-up, framed in carefully arranged yellow curls and crowned with a wide-brimmed picture hat. She wore patent-leather shoes with high heels and her stockings looked anything but sensible. She took my arm, and, smiling gaily, pointed to a little hut that stood two or three hundred yards away.

Leaning against the garden fence, like two symbolic figures demonstrating that Chita was the meeting-place of east and west, were a young woman and an old man: the woman with round, flat, Mongolian features and a round, fixed stare, as if she had spent so many hours for so many years idling at the fence and watching the passengers come and go that she could no longer find anybody interesting; and the old man looking like a figure out of a Russian folk-tale, with a white beard falling to his waist and young blue eyes that smiled at me with a warmth that seemed to embrace the whole world. We were shaking hands and smiling wordlessly when a woman who had been standing inside the fence talking to Mrs. Rodd suddenly detached herself and came across to me. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "I simply cannot tell you how much I have been looking forward to meeting you——"

"To meeting *me*?"

"Yes. Ever since I heard that you were coming."

She was tall and dark-haired, thin-faced and sallow-skinned, with earnest dark eyes that stared at me as if she were trying not simply to memorise my features but to guess at everything that had ever happened to me in my life. "Yes," she repeated, "when I heard that there was going to be an English delegate I was so excited that I could scarcely sleep."

I felt dashed. I was no longer myself, merely one of the English. "Are you English?" I asked.

Her eyes widened. "You could not really think that, could you?"

I could, easily. With her dignified bearing, dull but not shabby clothes and grave, rather noble face she might easily have been the headmistress of a rather good girls' school in an English country town. Her accent, certainly, was exactly right.

"No," she insisted, with a little deprecatory gesture of her hands, "you are flattering me. I have been so nervous——"

"Nervous?"

"Perhaps I should not say nervous, but frightened——"

"Ladies!" It was Mrs. Rodd, calling us to order. "The cars are waiting—please hurry!"

Anastasia—she had already told me her name—and I got into a car together. The road was a dusty track, pitted with ruts. In the clear, glittering light we could see the town straight ahead of us, apparently a mile or two away. Around us the countryside was bare and treeless, folded into low, rolling hills, and the ploughed fields that bordered the road were naked, showing no sign of whatever crops they would bear later on, but the woods that ran up the mountain-sides beyond the city seemed to sparkle as the early evening sun fell on them. "Frightened of what?" I asked Anastasia as soon as we got settled.

Her face was sombre. "I must explain that I teach English at the school here in Chita, and I have never until now had the opportunity of meeting an English person——"

"But your accent is perfect!"

"Not perfect, I think, though of course I know that it is good. You will have discovered that we have excellent methods of teaching pronunciation in our Soviet society . . . But I have been worrying so much in case you should find my vocabulary inadequate or that I make incorrect use of words. When one has no opportunity of conversing with English people it is not always easy to choose the right word, and I hope that you will give me your opinion honestly and without flattery."

"Just go on talking," I suggested, "and I'll criticise later——"

"But I would prefer that you should talk rather than I."

We compromised. I asked what English authors were read in the English classes at Chita. Shakespeare, she answered, and most of the English classics. Among modern authors Anastasia's own favourite was Bernard Shaw. "But," she continued, her face becoming once more grave, "there are so many things in English life that are difficult for us, here in Chita, to understand . . ."

We had already been travelling for nearly half an hour, but the town, which had seemed so near when we left the airport, grew no closer. The rough, winding road was forcing the driver to go very slowly, and whenever a farm-cart or a lorry came towards us he would swerve to one side and stop to allow the other vehicle to pass. But it was not only our own slow pace that made the journey take so long. There was, I had begun to realise, a deceptive quality in the light, dry air which like the air of the desert, brought distant objects into such sharp focus that again I had to adjust my sense of space. We were still in the country, and in the field on our right a group of farm workers were finishing their day's work.

"For example," Anastasia continued, her voice taking on a tinge of melancholy, "I have been trying to imagine the courage that you must have to go to Korea . . . Of course in England you have already had experience of the sufferings that are caused by war——"

"But so have you!"

"No. Not really. Not directly. Of course there were many people here in Chita whose relatives were killed at the front, but we ourselves, we who lived here, we did not suffer the sort of hardships that war brings to people who are near it . . . In London and in Moscow people shared a similar kind of suffering, even if not to the same extent. Here, on the other hand . . ."

I stared, startled by the realisation that what Anastasia said was true. Geographically, of course, Moscow was considerably nearer to London than it was to Chita, but I had not until now thought of London and Moscow being closer in any other sense.

Silenced, I turned to look out of the window. We bumped over a level-crossing and lurched into the town. On our right were several streets of new wooden houses, the slats turned to pale gold by the evening sun. Beyond them the road twisted, wide and dusty, between single-story log-houses, most of them of fair size with windows on either side of the porch and with a strip of fenced garden in front. Their walls and roofs were weathered to a monotonous, dingy grey, the monotony was broken by elaborate patterns of fretwork carving around the doors of most of the houses, the lace curtains at the windows and potted geraniums and aspidistras on the window-sills. The total effect was sprawling and unlovely, yet cosily domestic. "There are more things than you would imagine," I heard myself remark, "that are almost universal——"

"Please explain. I am afraid that I have not understood your meaning."

This was not, I felt, the moment to embark on a discussion of the universality of lace curtains and aspidistras. Instead I asked Anastasia to tell me about the man and woman I had been talking to when we first arrived.

"Ah! You mean our actress—unfortunately she will not be at the banquet tonight, because she is performing in the *Cherry Orchard*. But perhaps later we shall go to the theatre..."

There was no time to answer. The car had turned another corner and drawn up in front of the hotel where we were to stay. The hotel shared the frontier-like atmosphere of the rest of the town, and Anastasia hastened to apologise for the discomforts which we were going to have to endure. Certainly the hotel was not comfortable, but the restaurant was cheerful, and our hostesses were as homely as if we had known them for years. Soon the orchestra struck up with a gay, rousing dance tune. Candelaria pushed back her chair, got up and invited Mme Ovsyannikova to dance. Soon nearly everybody else was dancing, too. Chita had turned into a party.

But it was still early when a messenger came and whispered something to Elena, our Russian interpreter.

"The Chinese planes," Elena announced, "have arrived at the airport——"

"Oh!" somebody interrupted. "Surely we're not travelling any more to-night?"

Elena shook her head. "Not to-night. But we must be ready to leave again at five in the morning. So if the members of the delegation would like to have some sleep . . ."

Fortunately our hostesses seemed to have forgotten about the *Cherry Orchard*. We got up slowly and went to bed.

5

THE LAST LAP

It was mid-afternoon of the next day when we reached Mukden. The city, sprawling up to the gates of the airport, was a flat, dusty grey, and, after the cold of Siberia, stiflingly hot. Our cars dashed over tram-lines, scattering traffic to the sides of the roads: lorries, mule-carts, single-deck motor-buses and bicycle-rickshaws whose drivers pedalled madly, ringing their bells in answer to the shrieks of the motor horns. We stared about us, too exhausted to be able to see anything clearly, but feeling, just the same, a sense of disappointment that Mukden should look so European and so dull. Then the car in which I sat with Mrs. Rodd drew up in front of a wide flight of steps, and suddenly we were surrounded. A little boy, neatly dressed in dark shorts and a white shirt and with a red scarf tied around his neck, rushed towards me, thrusting into my arms a huge bunch of peonies and yellow daisies. Other children were presenting similar bouquets to Kate and Ida, Candelaria and Gilette. Then a small girl clutched at my right elbow, and pushed another bouquet towards me. As she did so a third child, who had been looking despairingly for a delegate without a bouquet, skipped forward and fell at my feet. As I took it two Chinese girls, both of them apparently about nineteen years old and both dressed in navy-blue cotton trousers and jackets, tucked their hands around my back and started to propel me gently up the steps. The children tugged gently at my skirts, smiling up at me and whispering to each other. The light, butterfly touches made me feel like Gulliver in Lilliput, clumsy and helpless.

I was pushed through a big, marble-lined foyer, past potted palms and begonias, up a short flight of stairs into a lounge that was as big as a fair-sized cinema. Chinese girls, all dressed alike in navy-blue suits and all so young and fresh-looking that in our

exhaustion we could hardly begin to distinguish between one and another, glided around, shaking our hands, introducing themselves as our hostesses. Then I saw that there were men in the room, too, and presently they were introduced. Some were Chinese, some European, and they were, it appeared, journalists and press-photographers.

"Are you very tired?" one of our hostesses asked.

"Very," I confessed, wondering how long it would be before we should have a chance to go to our rooms. We were still wearing the thick layers of clothing in which we had wrapped ourselves for the journey across Siberia, and here in Mukden the heat was stifling.

"Never mind! The water's getting hot, and as soon as the reception is over you'll be able to have a bath."

The reception was being given to us by the government of North China, and the speeches, each of them made first in Chinese and then translated into Russian, French and English, sounded as if they were going to last for hours. The speakers stood in front of a big stage, and looking down on them from the walls were huge, full-length portraits of Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. The portraits, though not very good, achieved a reality that was suddenly lacking in the living people around me. I could no longer focus my attention on anything.

The three children who had given me flowers had settled themselves beside me. The little boy leaned forward, took a banana from the plate of fruit that stood on the table in front of us and offered it to me. I shook my head, suggesting that he should eat it himself. He refused, still pressing the fruit on me with smiling, self-possessed politeness. I took it and offered it to one of the little girls. Soon we were playing a charming, exquisitely mannered game of refusal, persuasion and reluctant graceful acceptance. Then the boy climbed into my lap, signalling across the room to make certain that all his friends were watching. At the other end of the room Mrs. Rodd rose to reply to the speeches of welcome.

". . . And," she concluded, after some suitable expressions of appreciation, "we are all very happy to be going to Korea to

show up the conduct of the American imperialist aggressors . . . and those of us who've come from western countries are downright ashamed of the policies of our own governments——"

There was a loud burst of clapping, in which I did not join, and everybody stood up. Kate came across to me, followed by her own particular bunch of children. "Well?" she asked.

I said: "I'll criticise my own government at home. But that sort of talk won't do here."

"Exactly. Shall we speak to her?"

"Of course. When?"

"Now, if you like," The other delegates were already on their way to their rooms. We intercepted Mrs. Rodd and led her to a corner.

"Mrs. Rodd," Kate began, "Monica and I think that we ought to tell you we are very much worried by your speech——"

"Worried. My! What have I said?"

Kate reminded her. "And," she added, "we joined this delegation in order to try to discover the facts about Korea. But if the things you've said get into the press everybody will think—and quite naturally—that we're starting with our minds made up and our eyes closed——"

"But I only said what's true!"

"There's more than one view," Kate insisted, "on what is the truth about the causes of the Korean war—even in this delegation. And as a delegation we ought to keep out of political arguments——"

"Well, there's something in that . . . But I've said it now . . . What can I do?"

"When the delegation meets," I suggested, "you could explain that the things you said in your speech you were saying in your private capacity—and you could give an undertaking not to make that sort of speech in the future——"

"Why, surely. I'll be glad to."

One of our hostesses approached, and we allowed ourselves to be led upstairs. I had just turned on the bath taps when Kate came in. She sat down. "We're not much of a team, are we?"

A maid came in to ask if we would like some tea. Then the door opened again, and one of our hostesses entered. She was slender and very good-looking, with wide-set eyes and warm, sun-burned coloured skin, and thick shining hair that was pushed back behind her ears to fall in a level line round her neck. "Hullo," she greeted us in a voice which, underneath its American accent, had a note of faint, almost secret, amusement, as if she were constantly finding life much funnier than she had been taught to expect. "I'm Li K'eng, and I'm coming to Korea with you."

"Oh, good!" we exclaimed, liking her at once.

She sat down and watched me pour out the tea. "You know," she asked. "that our women's organisation is sending three delegates?"

We felt that we knew nothing. We were about to say so when Ida arrived.

"Yes," Li K'eng went on, "there's Bai Lang—she's a writer. And Liu Chin-yang—she's an administrator——"

"And you?" Ida asked. Her tone suggested that Li K'eng was really too young to have settled to anything.

Li K'eng laughed, and pushed back a lock of her short hair. "I run a training school for nursery teachers—you know we have such a terrific programme for reconstruction that more and more married women want to do some sort of work outside their own homes—so we have to train the right sort of staff to run nurseries." Her brilliant smile faded a little. "I sent both of my own children to a residential nursery as soon as they were a month old."

"And how old are they now?" Ida asked.

"The boy is seven. The girl's five."

We stared. There was an embarrassed silence.

"Forgive me," Kate murmured, "but you look so young!"

Li K'eng laughed again. "Young? I'll be thirty-seven this year."

"Impossible!"

"But it's true!"

By the time we left Mukden we had given up guessing the

ages of our hostesses. The nearest guess we ever made was out by five years.

"But your children?" Kate asked. "Didn't you feel terrible at putting them in a nursery when they were so young?"

"No, not terrible . . . Of course, I'd much rather have looked after them myself—but we've so much to do in China today that even our babies have to make sacrifices for the sake of future generations. And they're well looked after——"

"Won't they feel resentful when they grow up?"

"I don't think so. They'll understand why it was necessary. . . . Oh!" her hand was already at the door. "I wish you could stay in China for long enough to see what we are doing . . ."

We wished that we could, too.

Next morning the whole delegation assembled for the first time, and we found that besides the three Chinese delegates we had also a delegate from Viet Nam, Li-thi-Que. We were seated and already waiting to hear from the Chinese about the plans that had been made for the last stage of our journey, when Kate whispered to me: "Do you think I should remind Mrs. Rodd to say something about her speech?"

"If you like," I agreed. Kate crossed the room. Then, after a moment or so, she came back and sat beside me. Mrs. Rodd got up. Her statement was brief, but perfectly frank, just what Kate and I wanted. By the time the interpreters had finished with it the Soviet delegate was on her feet. "May I ask," she demanded, "who objected to our chairman's speech?"

"I did," I said. "And so did Kate Fleron." I looked at Kate. "And I want, on behalf of both of us, to say that we are perfectly satisfied with Mrs. Rodd's undertaking to make no such statements again."

The interpreters repeated what I had said, and then the Soviet delegate rose to reply. "But I am not satisfied! I demand that we be told exactly what objections were made, and on what grounds."

I explained, trying to keep my answer as short as I could. "This delegation," I said, "is made up of women from countries which support different sides in the war in Korea, and our

own aim is not political but humanitarian. We shall do no good to anybody—and we shall only do harm to the cause of truth—if we start by making speeches about capitalist tigers."

Then the storm broke. Mme Ovsyannikova rose once more, and this time she was condemning me fiercely. The governments of the western world were responsible for the sufferings of the Korean people, and it was a duty to say so. As for me, my attitude had made it plain that I lacked sympathy and understanding, and that I was trying to interfere with other people's right to express their views.

At once half a dozen other delegates were on their feet, each following Mme Ovsyannikova's lead. I was cold, heartless, without imagination, lacking in both intellectual honesty and moral courage. Bai Lang, one of our three Chinese delegates, who had recently been to Korea with a Chinese party, described some of the things she had seen and, turning to me, accused me of trying to add to the sufferings of people who had already approached the limits of human endurance, and as she talked about the wickedness of American capitalists, she made me feel, for the first time in my life, like a Rockefeller or a Barbara Hutton.

I did not enjoy the sensation, and I resented the tone of moral superiority in the voices of my accusers; but somehow I managed to keep my temper and to stick to my point. I had been invited to go to Korea to join a fact-finding commission, and I said so not once but, as the morning went on, at least fifteen times. When I had discovered the facts I was prepared to draw whatever conclusions might seem appropriate, but I would be damned—and I would even turn round and go home again—before I would be bullied into going to Korea with my conclusions already made. I was awkward, I proposed to remain awkward, and so did Kate. She made it plain that even though we were within a day's journey of the Korean frontier she would rather give up the whole expedition than abandon her freedom to reach conclusions on the basis of evidence instead of on prejudice.

I knew that quite half the delegates felt as I did, but, apart

from Kate and Ida, nobody said a word to support me. The atmosphere grew more and more tense until at last Mrs. Rodd, very pink but still pacific, adjourned the meeting. At once I was surrounded. One delegate took my arm. "Wonderful!" she exclaimed. "And how right you are, too——"

"Then why didn't you say so?"

"Well . . . well, I come from a very small country, so I can't expect to have much influence . . ."

Another delegate flung an arm affectionately around my shoulder. "Oh, but you're marvellous! And how I agree!"

"But you didn't speak——"

"No . . . you see, I'm afraid I'm not a very good speaker . . ."

"There you are!" Kate observed when several other delegates had crept up to admire us. "Communists always behave like communists and social democrats behave like dormice . . ."

We went off and drank a cup of tea by ourselves, conscious of being ostracised. When we came back the attack started again. Soon, I saw, the other side would have exhausted their ammunition. But we would be no nearer to real agreement. Then, to my astonishment, Mme Ovsyannikova got up once more. "The English delegate," she began, "has stated that her aim in going to Korea is to find out the truth. And the Danish delegate has said the same thing." She shifted slightly, turning to face us. "But that, after all, is the aim of every one of us in this room——"

"Exactly what you've been saying!" Kate muttered under her breath.

"And since that is so," Mme Ovsyannikova went on, "I want to suggest that it is time that we all made a serious attempt to work together in a co-operative spirit——"

She stepped across the room to where Kate and I were sitting, and bestowing on each of us a smacking kiss, while all the women who had condemned us broke into thunderous applause. Neither Kate nor I much cared for the embraces of people of our own sex, but at least it was an armistice. And the

embrace had acknowledged that we should have no more political speeches from our chairman. Now we could get on with the arrangements for our journey.

Bai Lang rose once more, this time to speak on behalf of the Chinese women's organisation, who had planned the final stage of the journey for us. Bai Lang herself was a writer, plump and pale, with merry eyes that grew sober as she explained the conditions we should find ourselves in when we got across the frontier. "Tomorrow evening a train will take us to An-tung, on this side of the Yalu River, and on the following evening we shall cross the river into Korean territory. However, I must warn delegates that we shall find ourselves in war-like conditions before we reach Korea. Half-way between Mukden and An-tung we shall be entering an area which is subjected to constant bombing by the United States air force. For our own safety it will be necessary—both here and in Korea —to make all journeys at night. And—because we do not know where there may be spies—we feel that it will be better if you do not leave the hotel until we are ready to depart for An-tung. If anyone wants to take a little exercise there is a private garden at the back of the hotel."

We got up, staring out of the windows to the clear, warm day outside. Bai Lang's talk had sharpened our imaginations again after the drugging effect of the long journey. We had become aware of the possibility that we might never return, and the sunshine was unimaginably precious. But there was still work to be done. Somebody had suggested that we should elect an editorial committee, whose job would be to sift the information collected by the different groups of delegates while we were in Korea and to shape it into a report. Mme Ovsyannikova was suggested, Gilette Ziegler, Eva Priester, Bai Lang and Kate. All of them were professional writers, but Kate refused, still determined, as she had been in Prague, that she could not involve herself in any common statement.

I said: "I'd like to be on it." It seemed to me that if ever we were going to attempt to reach an understanding between the eastern and western members of the delegation this was the

time to try; and if there were to be more disagreements I preferred to be in on them from the start.

Everyone seemed rather surprised but the people who had argued against me most bitterly seemed pleased, too. Now we were really going to try.

As far as we could tell we were the only guests staying in the hotel, and the atmosphere was somewhere between that of a rather undisciplined girls' school and a condemned cell in which the victims were determined to die heroically and in silence. At one moment the delegates would be shrieking with embarrassed laughter as they tried on Chinese trousers that were so hopelessly too tight that they could not even be pulled over the hips, and then, almost at the next minute, two or three people would be huddling together into a corner, writing farewell messages into each other's notebooks, messages that were only to be delivered if the worst came to the worst... And then at last it was time to go.

It was wonderful to see the world again. We had been in the hotel for a little more than forty-eight hours, but as we got into the cars that were to drive us to the railway station we were as excited as if we had been shut up for a month.

The delegate who was sitting next to me whispered: "I don't believe they're really afraid of spies——"

"Then why did they ask us not to go out?"

"Because they don't want us to see how frightful conditions are here. And there are probably bandits all over the place—and they were frightened that we might get robbed or beaten up."

"But Mukden doesn't look very different from any other big city."

"The buildings don't. But you wait. When we come back they'll fish up some other excuse to prevent us from going out. You'll see."

We were already at the big railway terminus, and our train was waiting. It was about six o'clock in the evening, and unless the air raids were unusually heavy we should, we had been

told, arrive at An-tung City somewhere between two and three in the morning.

"Who would you like to share with?" Li K'eng asked me.

"With you," I said.

She threw her small travelling bag to the upper berth. "Now let's make ourselves comfortable. You lie on your bunk, and I'll squat on the floor. Then we can talk."

We shut the door and arranged ourselves. "What do you want to talk about?" I asked. "Anything special? Or just talk?"

She laughed, throwing back her head in a gesture that I already recognised as characteristic. Her teeth were very white and slightly curved at their tips, like freshly peeled almonds. "Something special. I want to hear about you."

"About me?"

"Why not?" she laughed again. "I've already told you about my life, and I'm sure yours must be much more interesting."

At dinner the night before, as we ate the delicate, exotic Chinese food, someone had persuaded Li K'eng to talk about herself. Her father, she told us, was a poet, a believer in Confucianism, very conservative in outlook and bitterly opposed to the education of women. Li K'eng's mother was different. As a girl she had persuaded her brothers to teach her how to read and write. Then she was forced into an arranged marriage in the traditional Chinese way. But her mother-in-law was unusually sympathetic, and eventually agreed to send the young wife to school. After three years she graduated and became an assistant teacher, and went on teaching until her first child was born. There were seven children altogether and, in spite of her husband's opposition, the mother insisted that all of them, girls as well as boys, should be properly educated. Li K'eng herself had, after completing her education in China, spent some time at an American University. She became a teacher in Shantung Province, and then when the war with Japan started she went to central China to do educational work and propaganda. Much of her work had been done with

the Y.W.C.A., and, in spite of the difficulties made by Chiang Kai Shek's government, more and more students were devoting their time to trying to spread mass education. Li K'eng herself would settle in a town or village for six months, teaching people how to read and write, and instructing the women in the care of children. The peasants were often hostile, and the men could not see what advantage was to be gained by teaching women, while the women resented the notion that a stranger should profess to be able to show them how to look after their babies. But soon the atmosphere would change, and people would become interested and begin to learn. Then, after building up the rudiments of an organisation, Li K'eng would move on again, and each time the formal teaching would be mixed with political meetings, the making of wall-newspapers, and propaganda work of all sorts. In 1943, feeling that she knew too little about child care to do her job with real competence, she took a special course of training, and then started organising children's nurseries. Many women suspected that the nurseries were really a peculiarly cunning device for stealing children, and Li K'eng found that she was obliged to start on a very small scale. But the children who went to the nurseries were fed scientifically, and soon their health was so conspicuously good that the mothers of other children would watch and wonder, and eventually ask to see what was being done. Meanwhile Li K'eng had married—against the wishes of her parents—a young engineer whom she had met in the course of her political work, and their own two children, as she had told us when we first met, were being brought up in a nursery while she ran her training college.

"But mine's a commonplace story," she remarked now. "Come on! Let's hear about you."

I started to tell her. I had got to the point when I stood for the London County Council in 1937 when someone opened the door of the compartment. It was one of our hostesses, a young woman who liked to be called by the English version of her name: Clouds.

Li K'eng moved a few inches along the floor. "Come and

sit down. We're just in the middle of how they run elections in England, and it's absolutely fascinating!"

The astonishing thing was that I could see that she meant it. The dreary grind of the Labour Party machine—the committee meetings, the selection conferences at which candidates were chosen, canvassing, street corner meetings and loudspeaker vans, the members of the women's section addressing envelopes and taking it in turns to bring the tea—suddenly, as I looked across the narrow floor to the faces of Clouds and Li K'eng, I, too, saw the picture from the outside, and was as fascinated as they were at the intricacy of British institutions.

"And you were elected?" she asked.

"Yes. I was a member of the London County Council for nine years."

"And what did you do? How was it organised?"

I told them. I was still telling them when, perhaps half an hour later, we heard Mrs. Rodd's voice echoing down the corridor. "Ladies! Ladies!"

"Come on!" Li K'eng jumped up. "Let's go to the dining-car."

The black-out blinds were drawn tightly, and the dining-car, with red and white cloths on the tables and movable, armchair seats, was invitingly cosy.

"Now," I said to Clouds, "it's your turn to talk about your life."

She leaned forward, resting her elbows on the table. Her face was fresh-coloured with severe, rather irregular features whose contours were softened by loosely waved hair that was cut rather long so that it fell almost to the shoulders of her jacket. "All right," she agreed, "where shall I begin?"

"Why, at the beginning."

She thought for a moment or so, and then shook her head. "No, I think I'll go farther back than that. If you want to know the sort of person I am I ought to tell you something about my parents."

Clouds' parents both came from rich families. Her mother's father was a big landowner, and her own father, a professor of

mathematics, came from a family of Shanghai merchants. The parents had first met, quite accidentally, during the revolution of 1911, when the young man had come to the house of the mother's father to warn him of a plot to kill him and to burn down his house. The couple did not meet again for two years, when Clouds' mother was astonished and thrilled to find that the bridegroom to whom her father had affianced her was the young man she had met in her parents' village. But, in spite of the element of romance, the marriage was not happy.

"Of course," Clouds observed, "we are absolutely right to have broken away from the custom of arranged marriages. But a freedom of choice for a woman is still so new that we still can't help being shocked to find that things can still turn out badly when people marry each other because they really want to——"

"It happens," I said.

"Of course. But we imagine that it won't—and anyway a free marriage that turns out badly is still never quite so inhuman as an arranged marriage . . . Shall I tell you about my uncle?"

I nodded.

"Well, you've read how in well-to-do Chinese families there is always a huge household, with all the aunts and cousins and husbands and wives? That was the sort of family I was brought up in—simply enormous. I was sent to a boarding school—I'll come back to that later—but in the school holidays I was at home, and I saw what went on. I had this uncle—quite a young man—who was married to a very beautiful girl. The marriage had been arranged in the usual way—but he was madly in love with her. Madly. I've never seen anybody so much in love. And she detested him—she couldn't bear to see him or to have him come anywhere near her . . . I liked them both, but there it was. He worshipped her. And she was so miserable that she couldn't eat, she couldn't take any interest in anything, and after a year she died. And my uncle's heart was broken—absolutely. He used to go to her grave every day —every single day—and stay there for hours, just standing and watching . . . Then, after another year, he died, too. Not from

any illness. He died of grief... Imagine, the two of them, one dying of hate and the other dying of love... Could that happen in England?"

I thought not.

"Of course," Clouds went on, "it made a terribly deep impression on me. And I wasn't happy when I went home. Times were bad, and the family weren't so rich any more—and all my cousins resented the fact that I was being given such an expensive education... And I wasn't learning anything, either. It was a very good school—but I was lazy. Until I was sixteen I spent all my time reading novels—even in class I'd always have a novel tucked under my desk. Most of the boys and girls —it was a mixed school—were already interested in politics. But I wasn't—until one day I happened to be going down a corridor and saw the police coming to arrest some of the boys and girls who had signed a protest against the beating-up of workers who had been on strike. I ran off to warn them, and some of them managed to get away and hide—but about twenty of them were caught and sent to prison. I went to see them, but we weren't allowed inside . . . Of course when a thing like that happens to your friends you begin to wake up and think what it's all about. I joined the student organisation —and I've been doing political work ever since——"

Someone was moving down the aisle. "Ladies! Please go and try to sleep——"

"Never mind," Clouds said, "maybe I'll be able to tell you the rest when you come back from Korea."

Sleep was difficult. There were two air-raid alerts, but we heard no bombs. In the berth above me Li K'eng was perfectly still, breathing quietly. I lay awake, tossing from side to side, thinking about people. And then, just as day was breaking, we reached An-tung. Jeeps drove us through the sleeping city to the headquarters of the women's organisation —an old temple on the outskirts of the town. Beds were waiting, and we tumbled into them, for on this day there was nothing to do but rest.

6

SINYJU

It was an hour after dark when we set off on the last stage of our journey. We climbed into the jeeps that were waiting in the courtyard, and the engines spluttered and roared as we turned through the gates and raced down the hill towards the city. We ourselves had been warned to be silent lest our strange voices might betray us to spies, and we clutched at our small pieces of luggage and stared about us with such concentrated attention that we might have been seeing the world for the first and last time. The street lamps were unlit, but the moon was rising, and in the half-light we could see the heavy shapes of buildings, factories and offices and houses, so grey and anonymous that they seemed to belong to no particular place, but rather to be the last shabby repetition of the universal pattern of industrial civilisation. Here and there the dimness was punctuated by the light of a candle or an oil-lamp burning at the back of a shop and illuminating, like a torch thrust out from the recesses of a crowded cave, all sorts of curious and familiar objects: tea-pots and coiled lengths of rope, big brass bowls, sacks of rice and of flour, piles of cucumbers and radishes, twists of what looked like liquorice or peppermint rock but which might have been black boot-laces and pink ribbons. Sometimes, too, we would see people squatting among the litter, and the shifting, uncertain light would throw into relief the head of an old man, yellow and immobile as faded ivory, or the shape of a hand lifted in some slow, mysterious gesture.

A few men were walking in the streets, and their flat, stiff straw hats and loose garments made thin, fantastic shadows against the moonlit walls. They walked quickly and nervously, with a furtiveness that seemed to suggest a fear of something moving towards them, something that might overtake and

destroy them before they could reach the shelter of their homes. I closed my eyes, suddenly aware that the sense of terror and of secrecy were in me, that I was transferring my own vague and fearful expectations outwards, into these strangers, endowing them with emotions which probably had nothing in common with the things they really felt. I looked again. The city was already thinning out to its fringe, and around us were great piles of stacked timber and a sprawl of low wooden huts. We bumped over a railway track, and the road came to an end as we crossed a broad, flat expanse of waste. On the left I caught a glimpse of the Yalu River, steely pale in the soft, hazy light and so wide and still that it looked like an endless lake. I stared, trying to penetrate the brightness, but the distance seemed boundless and Korea, facing us on the other side, was invisible and, even now, beyond the reach of imagination.

After a mile or so the convoy stopped in front of a small wooden hut. Some of us were already inside the hut when the siren wailed, as it had wailed at intervals throughout the day. Now, though it was no closer, the sound seemed more menacing. As soon as the last note had died away we heard the roar of approaching engines. Somewhere in the distance two bombs fell.

"What's that?" I heard a delegate ask.

"Gunfire," Eva Priester answered. I remembered that she had been an air-raid warden in London during the last war. To me she whispered: "I always say it's gunfire—but I don't think the Koreans have any ack-ack . . ."

The hut measured perhaps four yards across in each direction. The walls were of varnished yellow pine which reflected by the light from two candles which stood in saucers on a bare, scrubbed table. Chairs were ranged stiffly around the table, and we sat down to wait, looking round to make certain that everybody had arrived. In a moment or so three strangers detached themselves from the gloom, and one by one they came forward to introduce themselves. The first was a tall man who might have been a little over forty, very erect,

pale-faced, with chiselled irregular features whose angles, sharpened by the flickering upward beam of candle-light, seemed neither European nor Mongolian, but rather to have the abruptness of a Mexican or Aztec carving. Beneath the high, sloping forehead his eyes were narrow, and gently smiling. He was, he explained to us in German, Dr. Han, vice-minister of Foreign Affairs in the Korean People's Republic, and he had come across the river to welcome us and to escort us to the other side. With him was a young man dressed, like Dr. Han himself, in ordinary civilian clothes, and a girl in khaki uniform very like that worn by members of the women's services in England. The young man, Mr. Kim, was to interpret for those of us who spoke English. He was small, thin, and brown-skinned, with soft, almost babyish features and a shy, deprecatory manner, and his tone of voice in speaking English was so apologetic that it took us a little time to realise that his command of the language was, in fact, accurate and fluent. The girl, who soon came to be known by us all as the Little General, so that she ceased to have any other name, was short and squat, with the wide, determined, snub-nose faced of a Chinese doll. She, we were told, would interpret for the Russians. Later there would, Dr. Han added, be other interpreters, both men and women.

Mr. Kim collected our passports, and we again relapsed into silence. Korea, I said to myself, rehearsing the background information that I had picked up through the reading I had done in the course of the journey, is almost exactly the same size as the United Kingdom without Northern Ireland: about six hundred miles long from north to south, and averaging about a hundred and fifty miles from east to west. Before the war started it had a population of about twenty-six million and had, in fact, the eleventh largest population in the world. Its coal resources were not much greater than those of Italy, but it was rich in most other minerals and exceptionally well supplied with water power . . . And in the last year, most authorities seemed to agree, something like a million

Koreans, perhaps more, had been killed or had died of their wounds.

The all-clear sounded and Dr. Han, in his quiet, steady voice, announced that we could now leave. A hundred yards or so beyond the hut we could see, moored to a primitive landing-stage, the shape of a motor-boat. We climbed aboard, down into the single cabin, and huddled close together on the bench that curved around its sides. An oil-lamp hung from the ceiling, casting a yellowish glare over the pale, tense faces of the delegates. Outside, somebody pulled a shutter over the gap through which we had entered. The engine started, and its feeble and yet regular throbs seemed to echo a weary domesticity, like an old but still serviceable sewing-machine. Kate and I looked at each other, shaking our heads in doubt. It was hard to believe that we were really moving. Nobody spoke. The engine chugged quietly for five minutes, and then stopped. We had arrived.

As I followed the other delegates on to the deck I could hear the sound of clapping. A hand reached out to help me ashore, and guided me up two or three yards of the muddy incline. At the top I looked up. In front of us, moving slowly towards the shore and still clapping as they did so, was a crowd of Korean men and women, perhaps thirty of them, perhaps fifty, possibly even a hundred. Most of the men were in civilian clothes, though a few were in uniform; but all the women were dressed alike in the long white robes which we recognised as the national costume of their country, a costume that had perhaps hardly varied during centuries of Korean history. As they came nearer I looked up once more, lifting my glance beyond them, and saw, silhouetted with fantastic sharpness against the brilliance of the moonlit sky, the ruins of what had until recently been a city, the city of Sinyju. Jagged walls, twisted girders, vast piles of shapeless rubble tangled the skyline, composing a picture of such absolute destruction that it seemed to transcend reality, to leap away from the special and individual tragedy of whatever had happened here, in this particular place, and to become a

symbol. It was a design that might have been devised for Plymouth or Coventry, Frankfurt, Berlin, Warsaw or Stalingrad. The vision belonged to no particular place. It was universal, as much a part of our time as the aeroplanes, the trains, the jeeps, the cars, the motor-boat, all the different vehicles that had carried us half-way round the world and brought us here.

A woman separated herself from the crowd and, thrusting a bouquet into my hand, became a person, throwing her arms around me, looking into my eyes, smiling and then suddenly turning from smiles to tears. Her black hair was parted in the middle and brushed away from her broad, open-looking face and was then fastened in a knot at the nape of her neck. Her stiff blouse, worn over the skirt like a jacket, was so high-waisted that it fell only to her breasts, and was fastened at the neck with a narrow, single-looped bow, and the ankle-length skirt, made of the same coarse white calico as the blouse, fell in loose, heavy folds. She dried her eyes, smiling again as she did so, and, speaking French, asked me where I had come from.

I told her, and her smile deepened, but she said nothing. There was nothing that I could say, either. We moved forward. In the shadow cast by a broken wall four or five jeeps were waiting, their drivers dressed in khaki uniforms, and with peaked caps pulled forward over their faces. The road, cleared of rubble, was broad and straight, but on both sides of it everything was destroyed. Patches of brick-strewn emptiness alternated with the tall, skeleton shapes of ruined buildings, and their dead frontages, filtering moonlight through what had once been doors and windows, struck the eye like a grave-yard echo of the offices and factories we had passed only an hour or so before when we drove through the living city of An-tung. Here, as the jeep lurched over pot-holes, I turned first in one direction and then in another, looking for some sign of survival. For nearly a mile there was nothing, not a glimmer, not a movement, not a hint of anything that made it possible to guess when life had stopped. I knew from

the maps that Sinyju was a long way from the farthest point ever reached by the armies advancing from the south. The damage that I saw was the result of bombing, not of fighting, but though I knew that the city had been raided I had not visualised destruction on this unbroken, overwhelming scale.

The jeep turned a corner and pulled up outside the tall grey mass of what was still recognisably a building—the first we had seen that was not a roofless, empty shell. A path had been cleared across the rubble, and as we stepped on to it I saw that another crowd had gathered, this time of girls and young men, nearly all of them in uniform. They stepped back to allow us to pass but, as we moved towards the doorway, one after another pressed forward, some patting us on the shoulders, others wringing our hands, or rushing forward to hug us as if we were old friends and indescribably precious.

We were silent, moved almost beyond bearing by the eagerness of these young, smiling faces, by such simplicity and warmth in such surroundings. At last we came to a door and entered a wide, dimly lit corridor. Kate was walking beside me, and we were both trembling. I felt her touch my arm. "Why are they so excited?"

I shook my head. "I don't know," I answered. "I don't know."

"But what do they expect?" she insisted. "What do they think that we are going to do for them? Twenty ordinary women—and all that out there . . . As if we could stop it . . ."

The corridor led to a big, square room, bleak and windowless. The walls and floors were bare, but a few chairs and tables were scattered about. We sat down, still clutching our bouquets, feeling the pathos of the wilted lilac and of the ragged strips of pink silk with which the branches had been tied together. Our hosts and hostesses moved about, introducing themselves, uttering a few words of greeting and of welcome. Looking around, I could no longer be certain of the identity of the woman who had spoken to me when I stepped ashore and who had escorted me to this place: the uncertain light, and perhaps, too, the long white robes which gave to all

the movements of the women the same soft, almost floating rhythm which made them seem, though only on that first occasion, undifferentiated, stamped to a single pattern, Koreans, the personification of an idea that was undiluted by the idiosyncracies of their own special individualities. But the idea itself remained vague: we had still not begun to form any clear impressions.

Yet even then, in those first few minutes, two people stood out sharply: a man and a woman. The man was the mayor of Sinyju. He was about thirty-five, of medium height, slender and very pale, with a narrow face that broadened out above the cheekbones to a wide, high forehead. It was partly this extraordinary, almost translucent pallor—all the more striking in contrast to the rosy brown skins of most of the people in the room—that made him remarkable; but partly, too, it was the brilliance of his large, wide-set eyes, eyes that slanted up a little at the outer corners, giving him an air that seemed both alert and dreamy, as if his bright attention was given simultaneously both to the outer world and to some inner vision at which no stranger could possibly hope to guess. In contrast, the woman beside him seemed full of simplicity and down-to-earth common sense. She might have been a year or two older than the man, and had a big, flat open-looking face with candid eyes which, behind thin-rimmed spectacles, were wide and smiling. Unlike all the other women in the room she was dressed in European style, in a tailored suit of a light cinnamon colour, two or three shades darker than her skin, and with a plain white silk blouse showing beneath the collar. Somebody whispered that she was Che Den Zuk, Minister of Information in the government of the People's Republic of North Korea.

She crossed the room and shook my hand. "I am afraid," she said, "that I speak English very badly." She certainly did not speak easily, but her wide smile was full of the friendliness of a person who has never at any time in her life had real difficulty in making herself understood. "We are so very glad," she added, "that we have an English woman among

the delegation—and we shall do our best to show you whatever you want to see while you are in our country. I am afraid that it will not be pleasant—but I think that you will find that the truth speaks for itself."

Before I could reply Mr. Kim, the interpreter, approached. Supper was waiting in another room. We had dined just before we left An-tung, and it was impossible that anybody should be hungry again. I glanced at my watch and was surprised to see that it was already after midnight. As we walked down the corridor and entered a large, bare dining-hall somebody explained that the building we were in had been the city's Cultural Centre. Next day we were to see that it had not, as we imagined that night, escaped the bombing. Though the external walls were standing, the three floors above us had been so damaged as to be unusable. And now, as we took our places at the long tables, the lights went out. Raiders were again approaching.

No sound reached us from the outside world, and after a few minutes the lights went on again. The girls and women who had greeted us on our arrival now scurried backwards and forwards, bringing food from a near-by kitchen and placing dish after dish in front of us: thin, tepid soup, platters of hard-baked eggs, great lumps of brown, leathery-looking meat, and salads made of chopped radishes and green sprouts of garlic mixed together in a sweet, vinegary sauce. As we made some show of eating the mayor rose to make us a speech, and Mr. Kim, seated among the English-speaking delegates, translated sentence by sentence. It was a short speech, welcoming us simply, thanking us for having come to see the country for ourselves, and promising that we would be given every facility to learn whatever we wanted to know. There was no oratory, no flamboyant phrase, no outburst of indignation against any other country, but, instead, a calm, factual statement about the destruction of Sinyju, followed by the suggestion that next morning we should first meet and question the members of the People's Committee of the city and then spend the rest of the day in examining the damage and in

talking to any other people we might wish to meet. Other speeches followed, but they were brief, too. Confronted by the starkness of reality there seemed no longer any need for words.

We drove to the outskirts of the city, to spend the rest of the night in a house that belonged to members of the women's organisation. It was of only one story, and the three rooms it contained were tightly packed with beds; but they were real beds, and we were soon asleep. When I woke sunlight was streaming in through the windows and someone was leaning over my bed and shouting, telling me that another raid had started and that I must get up and hurry into the shelter. I flung on my clothes and rushed out. The house, I could see now, was built around three sides of a narrow courtyard. On the fourth side, in front of the boarded fence that divided the house from the lane outside, a dug-out had been burrowed into the light, sandy soil. Inside it the delegates were squatting on the ground or leaning against the timbers that shored up the walls, talking quietly, but already anxious to get out into the open, to see Korea by daylight.

The alarm—the first of three that occurred in the course of that day—did not last long. Soon we were crowding into the jeeps, on our way back to the city centre. The sky was high, clear and very pale, giving to the morning the fantastic beauty of a glass bowl inverted over a littered, unwashed plate. In the soft, bright air the dead city was dust-coloured, and a thin sediment of dust was scattered on everything: on the houses that were still left standing at the outer edges of the city, on the tall ruins of the central area that we had seen the night before, and over the vast expanses of flattened wilderness that lay between the centre and the suburbs. The houses that had survived were mostly single-storied, and built either of wood that had been weathered to a dull, stony grey, or of pressed earth, yellowish-brown in colour, and overhung with dark, heavily tiled roofs. There were even a few shops, open-fronted and stocked with odd lengths of calico, canvas shoes and bits of hardware; but most of the city had been so utterly destroyed that it was impossible even to imagine what many areas had

looked like before the bombing. A few roads had been cleared. Between the roads the ground was littered with bricks and with fragments of charred wood and broken tiles, but there was not a wall, not a doorway, nothing. Then, about half a mile from the city centre we passed the ruins of what seemed to be a church. The roof had fallen in, but three red brick walls still clung to the square, uncompromising twin towers that lifted themselves at either side of the western front. It was easy to imagine stained glass and a grey slate roof and to visualise the whole structure in the environment of some industrial town in England. In Middlesbrough, I remembered, and in West Hartlepool there were nineteenth-century churches and chapels built of similar dense, smooth bricks, impervious to time and soot, looking exactly as they had looked when they were first opened, seventy or eighty years ago. But here the twin towers were without the familiar background of terraced houses, of wharves and factory chimneys. Beyond them was no sign of industrial activity, nothing to break the distant skyline, no sign of human habitation but the little ridged mounds, hardly higher than molehills, which marked the dug-outs which people had, in the last few months, tunnelled beneath the wreckage of their homes.

At the Cultural Centre the mayor and the members of the People's Committee of Sinyju were already waiting to receive us and we settled down to try to find out what sort of place Sinyju had been before its destruction. Like every city in Korea its development, the mayor explained, had been retarded in the past by the policy adopted during the Japanese occupation, which had lasted from 1910 until 1945. The Japanese—as I had already learned from Professor McCune's book and the other material I had read in the course of the journey—had subordinated Korea's industrial development to the needs of Japanese economy. No Koreans, with the exception of a few rich collaborators, had been allowed to hold any post of responsibility. Until 1920 it had been illegal for Koreans to start or to own any industrial enterprise, and when the law was repealed they were still confined, for

another decade, to the manufacture of such things as mats, lacquer and other domestic articles. After the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 the policy had changed because of the needs of Japan's growing armed forces, but though industrialisation had been officially encouraged the value of Korea's industrial production never became much more than five per cent of that of Japan, and a large part of it, even during the Second World War, was still cottage industry carried out by people in their own homes. The industries that were developed were seldom self-contained, but were dependent on components made elsewhere or on processes that could only be carried out in Japan, so that, for example, while electric light bulbs were manufactured in Korea the tungsten filaments were made in Japan, even though the tungsten itself had to be exported from Korea for the purpose. With such a policy it was inevitable that the standard of living should be appallingly low, even when measured against a scale that had been accepted as normal in the Far East. Then, during the Second World War, Korean resources were exploited to the utmost for the Japanese war effort. The standard of living was pushed down still further. And when the war ended even the new industries that had been started were suffering from lack of essential replacements and proper maintenance.

Yet in the five years between the liberation and the outbreak of the Korean war there had been an enormous rise in the standard of living of the people of North Korea, and it soon became obvious that the mayor still felt an immense pride in the past achievements of Sinyju. The city had, in 1950, a population of 126,000 people, of whom 30,000 were industrial workers engaged in various types of light industry, including the processing of soya and of tofa—a kind of soya—and the manufacture of shoes, matches, salt and chopsticks. Production had increased rapidly, and Sinyju, like all the industrial cities of North Korea, had a constant labour shortage which had been filled to some extent—as it had been filled elsewhere—by the immigration of unemployed workers

from South Korea. Along with this rise in industrial production there had been a big improvement in the general standard of living, and a rapid development in social services and in the provision of cultural amenities of all kinds. Sinyju had not only been a market centre for a wide area of the surrounding countryside, it had also served as a focal point for the cultural life of the region, and had possessed a number of theatres, cinemas—used mainly for educational purposes—a training college for teachers, seventeen primary schools, fourteen secondary schools, and various institutes for adult education. In addition there were seventeen Christian churches. The churches, as well as some of the other buildings, dated from the time of the occupation, but much of the city had been rebuilt since 1945, and the mayor, speaking in a cool voice that was quite at variance with the wide eagerness of his eyes, described how education for all children had at last become a reality, and how older people had seized their opportunity to learn to read and write, to find out something about the rest of the world and to learn of the new techniques in industry.

Now the buildings which had housed the new life that people were making for themselves were, almost all of them, destroyed. For the first few months of the war Sinyju had remained relatively unaffected, and the first air attack on the city had not occurred until November 8th, 1950. On that night the bombers had arrived in waves, dropping high-explosive bombs which were followed by incendiaries. As soon as the fires began to blaze further waves of planes had come over, this time flying low and machine-gunning the people who were out in the streets trying to put out the fires that had started in their houses. (This account, given to us in the first place by the mayor, was confirmed in detail by many people whom we met accidentally and talked with in the course of the day.) On that night more than 5,000 people had been killed. Of the 11,000 dwelling houses in the city, 6,800 were destroyed on that one night, and of 3,017 state and municipal buildings, 2,000 were also destroyed, including fifteen churches, sixteen of the seventeen primary schools, and

all but two of the secondary schools. Two hospitals had received direct hits, although both had flat roofs which had been marked with large red crosses. (Later, when we climbed on to the damaged roof of the Cultural Centre to get a panoramic view of the city we saw, a little below us on the other side of the street, the spot where a direct hit had torn straight into the red cross marked on a hospital whose gutted shell was now as useless as most of the other buildings in the city.) Two further raids had followed in the course of the next week and had completed the destruction. During the succeeding six months raiding had gone on steadily, day after day and night after night, tearing at the nerves of the people, but doing little further damage because there was almost nothing left to destroy. And in this whole vast area there had been, apart from the bridge which spanned the Yalu River, nothing that international law would have recognised as a military objective.

When we had finished questioning the city officials we went out once more, this time to wander about the ruins in small groups and to try to form our own impressions of how people were living: for though many people had been killed, and though most of the young men were at the front and many of the women and children had gone to seek refuge with relatives in country districts, there were still tens of thousands of families living among the ruins. The majority lived in dug-outs, in cellars underneath bombed buildings, or in tent-like hovels made of matting. Some had rigged up shelters for themselves against such walls as were still standing, occasionally by piling up rough walls of rubble, but more often by nailing a strip of matting to a solid wall, stretching it out and supporting the further ends on poles, and then making matting walls to fill the gaps. Where houses stood they were swarming with people, but it was soon obvious that for the majority four wooden walls and a roof were a luxury for which it would be senseless to hope as long as the war lasted.

Wherever we went—and our interpreters never once suggested that we should go in one direction rather than

another—people would stop whatever they were doing to stare at us. The few men who were about wore rough, shabby western-style clothing, but all the women were dressed in stiff, short white jackets and long flowing skirts, and, in spite of the appalling conditions in which they lived, all of them looked fresh and clean, their white garments spotless, their thick hair shining and carefully dressed, sometimes cut short but more often fastened in a classical knot at the nape of the neck.

"Why," I heard one of the delegates ask, "do all the women wear white?"

Although we ourselves had been warned in Mukden to take no white or even coloured clothing with us to Korea, every woman we had seen so far—with the single exception of Che Den Zuk—had been dressed in white.

The interpreter smiled. "You know," he asked, "what the Japanese did?"

"No?"

"They made all our national emblems illegal. They tried to stamp out the Korean language, so that in such schools as there were the children were taught in Japanese—until we ourselves started a few private schools where children could be educated in their own tongue. They tried to root out of the ground our national flower—and they even made it illegal for women to wear the national costume of our country. So now . . ."

There was no need to finish the sentence.

A few yards away, watching us from across an expanse of waste, a woman was standing alone, with a baby tied to her back. Her face was stern, unsmiling, but she lifted her hand in a small, hesitant gesture and, taking this as an invitation, we went across to greet her, and, with the help of the interpreter, explained who we were and asked her to tell us where she lived. In a moment or two we were taking turns to follow her into the hole in which she lived with her husband and four children: a hole that was hardly bigger than a grave and whose walls, though shored up with timber, looked as if they would

crumble at the touch of a child's fist. Inside the hole were the family's possessions—a candle and a shallow metal basin. There was nothing else. For food the family were dependent on the rice and soya distributed by the city authorities, and they were able to get water from a stand-pipe two or three hundred yards away.

"Where did you live before the war?" somebody asked.

"Near here." The woman gestured towards the flat emptiness around. "We had a house. A proper house——"

"How big?"

"Three rooms. They were burned—the whole place. And everything in it . . . But we were lucky——"

"Lucky?" somebody echoed.

The woman smiled, and a sudden warmth lit her deep, unfathomable eyes. "I have my husband, and all the children. There was shooting going on when we ran from the fire—shooting from the aeroplanes. Most families lost somebody —but we were lucky—very lucky——"

"And your husband? What does he do?"

"He works on clearing the rubble. He is not a young man any more—too old for fighting. So we wait." She looked up, staring towards the brilliant sky, and I saw her hands close until her knuckles were tight and shining. "How long will it go on? How long? How long?"

We shook our heads, unable to answer, and then said goodbye and moved on.

A short distance away another group of women stopped us. They had been chatting together quietly, and now they wanted to know who we were and what we were doing. When we explained they, too, wanted us to go and see how they lived, and to tell us about the things that had happened to them. It was impossible to go everywhere, but we followed one woman to her dug-out, which was hardly different from the place we had just visited, except that it contained a few more odds and ends of personal possessions: two bowls instead of one, a jug, a paper-bound book and a few rags. The woman herself was quite young, not pretty but fresh-looking and smiling, eager

to talk, and apparently full of hope, although her husband was away fighting and both her parents had been killed in one of the early raids; but her three children were still alive, and in spite of everything, still healthy.

There were children everywhere and, unlike the adults, many were filthy and obviously neglected. Many, too, were plainly frightened at the first glimpse of our strange faces and would run away as soon as we approached. It was not long before we learned to carry a few sweets or bars of chocolate with us wherever we went in order to have a quick means of scraping acquaintance with any children we chanced to meet, but on this first day in Sinyju only Kate and Ida had thought of bribery as a method of approach, and I saw them, some distance away from where I was standing, hold a package out to a tiny girl who was staggering beneath the weight of the baby who was tied to her back and who was, at the same time, dragging along a little boy who seemed not much smaller than she was herself. The little girl, I learned from Kate and Ida later, was six years old. Her mother had been killed by a bomb, her father was at work all day, and she herself was in charge of the baby and of her three-year-old brother and of the dug-out in which they all lived. These children, though dirty, were still fairly neatly dressed, but many of the children we saw were ragged and so wild that it seemed probable that they were altogether homeless. Later, when I questioned Che Den Zuk she told me that the government had set up orphanages all over the country, but though every effort was made to find and rescue children who had lost their parents the problem of finding them, making certain of their identity and getting them into homes was one which could never be entirely solved as long as the bombing lasted and while fresh children were being orphaned every day. Later on, too, some of the delegates visited a number of orphanages, and before we left Korea we managed to learn a good deal about the provision that was being made for the care and education of homeless children. The orphanages were, in accordance with modern practice, usually small, accommodating between

thirty and fifty children, and were in large houses that had been taken over in country districts which, though not safe from air-raids—for there was no such thing as safety in any part of North Korea—were secluded and relatively quiet. The children were well clothed and, as things went, well fed, and all but the youngest were taught for some hours each day; but many of them were described as being tense and nervous, scarcely beginning to recover from the horrors that they had witnessed and often endured. It was Trees, whose own small son was celebrating his second birthday in Amsterdam, who described one little boy whom she saw in one of these orphanages who walked about very slowly, apparently unharmed physically, but apparently, too, unable to respond to any show of affection. On inquiry, Trees found that he had, in fact, become deaf and dumb after the experiences he had endured during the bombing of Kaichen. And there were, Trees added, many other children with symptoms of serious neurotic disorders, but the staff who looked after them seemed to be skilful as well as kind, coping cheerfully with difficulties which might have seemed overwhelming—shortages of food, equipment and medical supplies, all of them badly needed if the children were to be helped back to normality.

But here in Sinyju the children eluded us. On the other hand the adults, and particularly the women, could hardly bear to let us go. Wherever we went we found no break in the monotonous pattern of ruin; but everywhere people were moving about, some working, some chatting with neighbours, and all of them eager to stop to tell us their stories. One of the men we met, Kwon Mun-Su, led us to the hut which he had put together from the rubble to make a home for his wife and three young children. He himself was stocky, square-shouldered, with rather heavy, lumpish features and slow, ruminative eyes, like a tired ox. The hut in which his family lived was divided into two sections by a rubble partition, but there were no doors and no windows, and the light filtered dimly through gaps in the clumsily laid matting roof. The larger section of the hut, which was used for living and sleeping,

measured three metres by two, and the small section, which was used as a kitchen and equipped with a rough charcoal stove, was three metres long and a metre and a half wide. Apart from the stove there was no furniture of any kind, but the family, more fortunate than most, possessed a blanket. This blanket, and the amount of living space inside the hut made Kwon Mun-Su the envy of all his neighbours, and we ourselves, hearing this, could not be surprised. We had already seen enough to realise that the standard at which this particular family lived was a long way above the average. Most people had, quite literally, barely enough room to turn round, and any sort of personal possession, apart from the clothing they stood up in, was a rarity.

We had seen enough. It was time to continue our journey. Before we returned to the Cultural Centre I stood with Mr. Kim looking round for the last time at the splotched, meaningless emptiness, still trying to build out of the ruins some sort of picture of what the past had been like. As I stood there a woman approached. She carried a baby on her back and looked like many of the other women whom we had seen during the day; squarely built, sombre, with wide expressionless eyes, but with brilliant colouring that seemed to be characteristic of the women in this part of the country. She turned as if to go away, and then changed her mind and, coming very close, asked Mr. Kim to tell her who I was. He replied that I was English. Her face seemed to tighten. She blinked, shook her head and for a moment I thought I was going to hear a cry of pent-up hatred for all the people of the western world. Instead she turned her gaze towards me again, looked straight into my eyes and then, giving a little jerk to the baby, leaned forward, threw her arms around my neck and, embracing me, began to cry, to cry as if I were the friend she had been looking for all her life.

After a little I pulled out my handkerchief and offered it to her. We smiled suddenly, like children, and like children we helped to dry each other's eyes. I asked what had happened to her.

Her name was Chang Yun-Cha, and she told me that the house in which she had lived with her father, her husband, and her children had been set on fire by an incendiary bomb during the first raid on the city. The whole family had run out of the house, and her husband and father had both been killed before her eyes by machine-gun bullets as they were trying to put out the fire. Now she and her children, who had all survived, were alone in the world, living—like most other people in the city—on the food distributed by the city authorities, and sleeping at nights in a cellar underneath a bombed building.

"Tell me," she asked, repeating the question that everyone of us must have been asked at least a dozen times already, "will it soon be over?"

I shook my head, "I don't know. I don't know."

We said goodbye, embracing again, and Mr. Kim and I turned back walking towards the Cultural Centre. We were approaching it from a side which I had not yet seen, and as we drew near I noticed that a large square space which might perhaps have been about an acre in extent had been cleared of rubble and covered with fresh, damp soil. Twenty or thirty men and women were at work, the men planting young trees which looked as if they might have been willows or poplars and the women bedding out what were unmistakably asters and antirrhinums. The Mayor, who had been standing in the doorway, saw me approach and came around the path to meet me.

"Yes," he said, in answer to my unspoken question, "we have already—even now while the bombing is still going on—begun the process of reconstruction. Perhaps you do not know that we have a national competition for planting and beautifying our ruined cities. You see, we have achieved so much in the five years before the war started—so much that even though the past is destroyed we cannot—and we never shall —lose our faith in the future——"

"The future!"

"Of course. Everywhere—as you will see—everywhere in

Korea people believe in the future. And in this competition—in this struggle to create beauty out of ruins—Sinyju has until now held the first place." He lowered his head slightly. "And it is our intention—the intention of all of us in this city—to keep the leadership we have won."

In front of us a kneeling woman had emptied her box of seedlings. She stood up, wiping her hands on her apron and, turning round, met the mayor's glance. A smile passed between them, full of the intimacy that exists between strangers who are convinced that they have everything in common: and then the woman turned away and, fetching another box, knelt down once more to continue her planting.

7

THE ROAD TO PYONG-YANG

It was early evening when we set off on what was to be an all-night journey to the headquarters that had been prepared for us somewhere near Pyong-yang. We had been warned of the dangers of travelling by daylight, but the nights were already growing short, and there was far less risk of being observed from the air up here in the north than there would be next morning when we should be only a short flying distance from the front line. In order to reduce the possibility of being seen, we left at short intervals instead of in close convoy, most of the delegates travelling in jeeps, but a few of us in cars. Che Den Zuk tucked me into a car beside Mrs. Rodd. In the front seat, next to the driver, was a Korean soldier with a young, broad peasant's face, who turned round every now and then to smile and murmur a few incomprehensible phrases, or to offer us cigarettes from his own small package. They were Korean cigarettes, and I accepted one to see what they were like. They were coarser in flavour than the Chinese, but quite smokable. Later we learned that they were still being manufactured in one of Pyong-yang's battered factories.

As we emerged from the city and came out into the open countryside, the warm, clear evening suddenly became beautiful. Sinyju had been a flat ruin in an almost completely flat landscape, but here, only a few miles beyond the city, the road, which had at first run almost straight, curved into a still and peaceful region of low, sharp-edged hills, hills which rose from the plain with the dramatic angularity of mountains in a Japanese print. The soft, turfy grass was patched with grey outcrops of volcanic-looking rock, and the profiles of the hills, harsh against the sky, were softened in places by stretches of pine woods, the trees turning from sepia to black against the clear, paling blue above. The road itself was raised a few

feet above the level of the valley bottom, and below us, enclosed within the frame made by these hills, spread a brilliant pattern of cultivated fields, the reddish-brown soil, newly turned, mixed with varying shades of green where the tiny, rectangular crops of millet and young wheat were interspersed with rice-paddies whose watery bottoms seemed to reflect each separate, shining stalk. Here and there men and women were at work, the women dressed in long white robes such as the women had worn in Sinyju, and the men also in white, with shirts pulled in tightly around the waist and then hanging loose above what looked like baggy knee-breeches. The road curved again, and presently we passed a man driving a rough ox-cart, heavily loaded with what looked like hay. The cart was long and narrow, and the man sat leaning forward, crouching over the rumps of his two beasts, and hardly looking up to give us a glance as our driver pulled into the side of the road to allow the animals to pass.

"Do you notice," Mrs. Rodd asked, "how everything is different, and yet everything is the same?"

"Different from what?"

"From our world. From the places we've lived in all our lives."

I had noticed; but as we talked we discovered that we had been observing different things while we watched the changes in the world's vegetation. Against Mrs. Rodd's memories of the great Canadian forests the trees here, which to me seemed indistinguishable from other trees, were as dwarfed as the mountains, and the little fields, tinier even than the narrow strips of Slovakia, seemed to mock at the immensity of the prairies, making it seem impossible that any common humanity could be traced between beings who lived at such opposite extremities of scale. I, coming from a world in between, had been seized less by an awareness of the change in scale than by the strangeness of details that were very nearly, but not quite, familiar: the young oak leaves that were two or three times the size of the leaves of an English oak, but which sprang from bushes which had no main stem and which could never

become trees; hawthorn, growing tall in untrimmed hedges, the branches soft and without prickles, and the flowers, rare, large and—I discovered later—almost scentless. Ragged robins grew beside the roads, their red blossoms turning to flaring scarlet as the sun lifted them momentarily from the shade, so that they looked suddenly huge and gay, bolder than I had ever seen them. And in the distance, above the noise of the car's engine, we could hear a cuckoo, its familiar voice as harsh as if the month were already June.

We grew silent. Then, as the memories of the things we had seen during the day became too much to be borne, we turned to trivialities, running away, perhaps unconsciously, from recollections that were still too close. "That's a real smart pocket-book you've got there," Mrs. Rodd commented, fingering my handbag. "Do you think I could buy one like it in London on my way home?"

"I should think so," I answered. "I bought it in Piccadilly."

"Piccadilly! My! These London street names——" She broke off at the sound of a sudden rat-tat, very sharp and very near. I saw the two men in front of us jerk to attention, and the driver began to accelerate. "It sounds," Mrs. Rodd went on easily, "as if a car behind us had ripped a tyre."

The noise sounded to me like machine-gun fire, but I hesitated to say so. We turned round, but the rear window of the car was blocked by the canvas that had been fastened to the roof as camouflage. The plane seemed to be circling, but the firing continued. We were in open, empty countryside, and, apart from the farm-cart which we had passed a short time ago and whatever vehicles were following behind us, there seemed to be no other target for miles. It was almost an hour since we had left Sinyju. The car had been racing more and more quickly. Now we were under a belt of trees that overhung the road, and the driver pulled up with a sudden jolt. Doors were opened. We were dragged and, half-running, half-carried, flung into a ditch while the plane, still circling and very low, spattered the countryside. Then it was gone. We got to our feet, rubbing the dust off each other. Luckily

the ditch had been dry, with only a thin trickle of water flowing at the bottom. We got back into the car and the driver, the soldier and I, each lit an English cigarette before we moved on.

The hills grew steeper, the country wilder and more beautiful. On our right the sunset flared into sudden scarlet, taking the softness out of the air and pointing the edge of every ridge to a jagged splendour. And on our left, where the last rays still fell, the valleys were patterned by copses and little streams from which a faint, barely perceptible mist seemed to rise, whitening a sky which had turned from blue to green. For some miles we had been climbing slowly. Then, while it was still dusk, the car started to descend and we entered a town. Like Sinyju, it was in ruins. But here the destruction was shaped to another pattern. As we entered the main street we had, for a minute or perhaps even longer, the sensation of being in a living, comfortable place. People stood at the roadside, chatting together in little groups, and behind them the outlines of buildings, with heavy curved roofs that pointed upwards at the outer corners and then dipped along the centre beneath the weight of dark tiles, seemed as permanent and secure as the mountains. Then we saw that beneath the roofs everything had been burned out, that nothing was left but hollow, empty shells. Farther on the roofs had fallen in, and we drove past a big expanse of uncleared rubble. Beyond was an area which had obviously consisted of modern buildings, tall and square, but all of them now roofless and windowless, open to the sky. We watched in silence. There was no means of knowing how big the town had been, or of learning the history of its life and death. Judging by what was left I guessed that it might once have housed twenty or thirty thousand people, possibly more. Now there was not a habitable building to be seen anywhere.

The moon rose. The countryside grew flatter. After a few miles we came to what had, until recently, been a village. Now not a wall was left standing, yet the chimneys, black against the moonlight, were still erect, surrounded by the

debris of the dwellings that had once surrounded them. From a little distance these chimneys were like a forest of dead trees from which every branch had been lopped, terribly upright, hideously naked. Coming nearer we could see, like a swirl of dead leaves, bits of straw and broken tiles, and fragments of earthen walls that had not yet disintegrated back to dust. Here, too, there were people, though there were no roofs to shelter them. Some carried small bundles, and one man was pushing a handcart on which an old woman lay, moving her head a little, but with her eyes closed. Other people simply stood, as perhaps they had always stood in the idleness of the evening, staring at the world around; but now, behind them, there was no longer even the humblest promise of light, of warmth, of comfort, and the empty, moonlit sky was ominous with threats.

The night wore on. We passed another town, several villages, and then a town again. Now and then, but not often, we would see small groups of houses that looked habitable, and sometimes a crack of light would show beneath a door. Most of these houses were tiny, single-story shacks with roughly thatched roofs and wooden or earthen walls, which looked as if they contained one or two rooms at most, but there were others that were substantially built and fairly large, and now and then we saw buildings in European style, two or three stories high, with square-cut windows and wide porches. But habitable dwellings of any sort were the exception. Most of the villages—and we passed through so many that we eventually lost count—and each of the five towns that we passed through in the course of the night—reiterated the varying shapes of ruin, of ruin on a scale so far beyond our expectations that we were stunned, unable to visualise what all this destruction had meant in terms of human lives, or how the survivors still managed to go on living. Once, a little before midnight, I closed my eyes, but it was impossible even to try to sleep. There was nothing to do but to go on looking.

At about one o'clock we came over the crest of a hill and the car started to descend on to a wide, almost treeless plain.

Then it stopped. The moon was still high, and we could see around us what appeared to be a stretch of bare, uncultivated heath, its smooth undulations broken by nothing higher than an occasional patch of coarse, reed-like grass. A few yards ahead of us the road forked and the driver, it seemed, did not know which turning to take. We waited, expecting that one or other of the jeeps would soon catch us up; but the world around us was silent and empty, and soon there could be no doubt that we were lost. The driver, obviously worried, took the left-hand fork and then, after two or three hundred yards, pulled up, turned round and took the other road. The soldier beside him leaned over his seat to grin at us cheerfully, saying something which we of course were unable to understand, and then, seeing that we did not answer, he raised his voice and tried again, this time more slowly. He had big, square shining teeth and a round-eyed smile in a round face, and looked as if he had grown up to take life easily. The driver, on the other hand, wore an expression of controlled anxiety which, in spite of the difference in colouring and feature, made him look as if he might have been sitting behind the engine of a London bus. Now he, too, tried to explain to us what had happened, but of course the attempt was useless. There was nothing for us to do but to sit quietly and hope for the best.

"If we go on like this," Mrs. Rodd observed, putting a good face on it, "I shouldn't wonder if we don't finish up on the other side of the thirty-eighth parallel . . ."

We both laughed, trying to keep up our spirits. Somebody had put an army greatcoat into the back of the car, and now Mrs. Rodd reached up and pulled it forward, tucking it around our knees. "But seriously," she asked, "do you still feel that you want to go to South Korea?"

"Yes," I said, "I do." I had, however, already given up hope of being able to go to South Korea without returning to London first, since the delays that we had encountered meant that I could not expect to be back in London much before the first of June, and my appearance before the Public Accounts Committee was to be just a week after that. Nevertheless,

I was determined to find an opportunity of visiting South Korea later on. Mrs. Rodd still seemed puzzled that I should wish to do so, and I myself was equally puzzled that she should not. Soon we fell silent. Ahead of us on our right I could see a river shining, and presently we came to a bridge which, though damaged, was still usable. The river was wide and shallow-looking, flowing through almost level country, and with what seemed to be sandy beaches along the banks: but now the moon was setting, and it was no longer possible to see anything clearly. Besides, we had been driving for more than half the night, and our powers of observation were beginning to flag. Again we closed our eyes, and again each time we opened them the same designs repeated themselves: the monotonous pattern of ruin set in natural scenery of strange and astonishing beauty.

Once the car stopped in front of a small building in front of which a sentry was marching up and down and the driver and our guard got out to ask the way. They came back smiling, making gestures to show us that we were now on the right road, and we went on again. Several hours passed. Then I felt the car lurch off the road to take a track that seemed to lead across a meadow. By this time I was dozing. When I awoke the car had stopped, and somebody had already opened the door and was dragging me out. "What is it?" I asked. I was still more than half asleep. "An air-raid?"

"No! No—this is the headquarters—come along!"

It was still dark. Under my feet I could feel a soft path of trodden earth, and there were trees above, with wide, leafy branches. We staggered along for fifty yards or so and came out into the open. Up above the stars were fading, and the air was fresh, filled with the soft scents of a spring morning. Somebody helped me over a high stone step, down and up again. A curtain was lifted, and I was pushed into a tiny, crowded room.

"Thank goodness!" Eva Priester exclaimed. "We thought you'd got lost for good——"

"Are we the last?"

"No. Kate and Ida haven't arrived yet—but the rest of us have been here for hours."

I looked around. Apart from the delegates and the Koreans we had already met—Che Den Zuk, Dr. Han and Mr. Kim—there was one other person: a small, slender woman dressed in a white Korean costume who stood quietly by the curtain that shielded the door, looking round at us and smiling slightly, a strange, inscrutable smile, both diffident and mysterious. "Who is it?" I whispered to a delegate who was standing near.

"Don't you recognise her? It's Pak Den Ai."

I looked again, trying to match the face with the photographs I had seen. Pak Den Ai was, I knew, one of the most celebrated personalities not only of North Korea, but of the whole Far East. Her life had been devoted to the struggle for Korean independence, and she had spent many years in Japanese prison camps, enduring, like many other Koreans, the most appalling tortures. Since the end of Japanese rule in Korea, she had been the leader of the North Korean women and was, too, the deputy-chairman of the Parliament of the Korean People's Republic. Now, as she stood smiling, I stirred myself awake, trying to memorise the feminine, almost doll-like features: the brilliant, deep-set eyes, the tiny, snub nose—which had been broken, I learned later, by the Japanese—the high round forehead, with the hair parted in the middle and brushed smoothly into a knot at the back of the neck. She lifted a hand, and a silence fell over the room as we gathered our wits together and prepared to hear a speech. There was no speech. Pak Den Ai, addressing us in Russian, begged us to go to the rooms which had been prepared for us, to rest and, if possible, to sleep. Later we would discuss the plans that we wanted to make to enable us to see as much as possible of the country in the short time that we could afford to spend.

I woke to find myself in a tiny, exquisite room, just big enough to hold the bed on which I lay, a chair and a table. The bed was soft, the white sheets covered with a padded quilt of dark red silk, and the table was spread with a cotton cloth on which stood a vase of wild flowers, several packages

of cigarettes, a new tooth-brush, toothpaste and a cake of soap.

I sat up and looked around and saw that a paper wall divided me from what I guessed must be another room next door. I called tentatively: "Hello?"

Gilette answered. As she spoke I heard a faint rustle just behind me and, turning round, was in time to see the fragile paper door slide back on its wooden frame and to meet the shy, friendly smile of a young girl who was in the act of stepping over the threshold.

"Good morning," I greeted her.

"Good morning," she answered, stretching the syllables slowly. And then she laughed. "Not speak English . . . no?"

"Yes," I insisted.

"No!" she shook her head. She was very pretty, with the rosy-brown freshness of colouring which we had admired so much in many of the women of Sinyju, wide eyes and delicate yet firm features, which were composed into an expression of the utmost simplicity and candour. Yet, in spite of this air of frankness, and in spite, too, of the laughter which broke across each careful phrase, her bearing had a dignity such as I had hardly ever seen in a young girl, a dignity that transformed her prettiness into positive, unmistakable beauty. "Please," she said laughing again and showing her strong regular teeth, "please, breakfast."

From the other side of the partition Gilette said: "I'm hungry."

"Please," the pretty girl repeated, "please, breakfast." Then she stepped back over the threshold, sliding the paper door back into position.

Gilette asked: "Do you think that there's a place where we can wash?"

We pulled on our slacks and stepped outside to look. Our rooms, we saw now, filled two-thirds of the longer side of a small courtyard, and Gilette had already discovered that her other neighbour was Mrs. Rodd. The opposite side of the courtyard, built up, as our side was, behind a narrow terrace

two or three feet above the level of the ground, had a wide double doorway in the centre, flanked, as far as we could see, by a room on either side; and the two sides were joined by earthen walls, seven or eight feet high and enclosing a sunny open space that was perhaps twenty-five feet long and twelve or fourteen feet wide. Later we were to discover that, although beds and chairs had been introduced to add to our comfort, the structure in which we found ourselves was a typical Korean house, and that evening, when the weather grew cool, we watched a fire being lit in a deep hole on the left of the entrance gate-way and discovered that a hollow space ran under the walls and roofs that surrounded the courtyard so that the heat circulated under the floors of every room. Some days later, when six of us slept, in Korean style, on the floor of a room in Sinchen, we were able to realise to the full the advantages of the Korean technique of central heating; but it was not until after my return to England, when I had time to catch up on the history of Korea, that I learned that the Koreans had been the first people in the world to develop the art of warming a whole house by lighting a single fire and that the invention was considerably more than two thousand years old.

Now, as we stood on the narrow earthen terrace, the pretty girl who had come into my room stepped out of the room on the left of the gateway and, beckoning to the door on the other side, came over to show us what we were looking for. On the right of the gateway was a bathroom. In it were two old-fashioned kitchen coppers, one filled with hot water and the other with cold, an enamel wash-basin in a metal stand, and a small basin that was to be used as a dipper. The floor sloped slightly, and at the lower end was a small hole, so that by mixing the water in the basin to the right temperature—the water in the hot copper was at boiling point—and pouring it over oneself with the dipper, it was possible to take a perfectly good shower.

Clean and dressed, Gilette and I climbed over the high stones beneath the gateway and looked about us. Now, at last, we could see where we were: at the bottom of one side of a

narrow, wooded valley, with hills rising steeply on three sides, and, on the fourth, the tortuous meadow track along which we had driven from the Pyong-yang road. On our right, running in an irregular line along the valley bottom, were seven or eight houses like that in which we ourselves were staying, and a hundred yards or so on our left was a small hall, perhaps twenty feet long and ten feet wide, which was to be our dining-room and meeting place. This was, in fact, a typical Korean village, unusual only in so far as its remoteness from any road made it comparatively safe against air attack, and because of the special arrangements that had been made for our comfort. The inhabitants of the village had, we were told later, agreed to double-up with the population of another village two or three miles away so that we, in the intervals between our journeys, could enjoy the comparative peace that this place offered. The peace, however, was only comparative. As Gilette and I stepped over the threshold that morning and looked, with wondering admiration at the long, narrow valley, Gilette remarked: "How queer! It looks like autumn . . ."

I followed her glance. The fields and trees along the valley bottom were green and fresh, but the woods that ran up the enclosing hillsides were a brilliant, autumnal brown. We were still staring when a whistle blew and our hostess, giving us each a quick tug, pulled us to take shelter beneath the thatch of the overhanging roof of our house. In a minute or so two planes passed overhead, flying high and heading to the north. Another whistle blew, this time to give the all-clear, and we strolled across to our little dining-room, looking up to the woods once more, and seeing now the scorched and blackened tree trunks. As the day went on we grew accustomed to hearing a fresh air-raid warning every hour or so. Dug-outs had been constructed in the hillside, a few yards behind each of the houses, but we did not use them. The village, with its mud-coloured walls and dark roofs, and with its shelter of overhanging trees, was probably hardly visible from the air; but the women and girls who were looking after

us were careful to explain—as Bai Lang had explained to us in Mukden—that any bright object might be treated as a target and so, at each warning, people who had been sitting or strolling in the sunshine would move hurriedly into the shade, and our hostesses would run to carry out of sight bath towels and other light-coloured articles that had been left in the sun to dry. Often, too, we would hear the sound of falling bombs, and once during our stay two bombs fell within the valley, though not near enough to the houses to do any damage.

We had settled down to discuss our plans when somebody noticed that Kate and Ida were still missing. In fact, we learned when they eventually arrived some hours later, their jeep had slipped into a ditch during the long night journey. Neither they nor their driver had been hurt, but they found the jeep impossible to move and had tramped to the nearest village. Somebody had found the mayor, and he had given them a night's shelter in the only accommodation available—a barn which was already occupied by other people. There they had slept for a few hours, and then had spent the morning hearing from the villagers the story of what had happened in the district during the American occupation. It was a story similar in its essentials to many which the rest of us were to hear later as we travelled around the country, but as we listened to the detailed account of the raping and torturing of the women and of the cold-blooded destruction of crops and stocks of foodstuffs we found ourselves unwilling to believe that such things could be true . . .

Ida pulled out her notebook. The mayor of the village had, it seemed, spoken enough German to enable him to act as interpreter, and Kate and Ida had recorded the names and detailed descriptions of all the people with whom they had talked. They themselves, it was clear, had no doubt of the truth of the things they had been told. "You'll see for yourselves," Ida finished, "when we start travelling about . . . Or perhaps this place wasn't typical . . . I hope it wasn't—but anyway, we'll see . . ."

It had already been agreed that the whole delegation should spend some time in visiting Pyong-yang, and that after that we should—in order to see as much as possible in the short time available, divide into groups, and that each of these groups should visit different areas. I myself was particularly anxious to visit the prisoner-of-war camps and to have an opportunity of meeting British prisoners. As soon as the meeting of delegates was over I asked Pak Den Ai whether this could be arranged. She had no doubt that it could, but, she added, the camps were situated far in the north—in order to be as safe as possible from American bombers—and it would certainly take three or four nights of travel to get there. Even if there were no accidents—a possibility which obviously had to be reckoned with—the whole trip could not take less than a week, which was more than half the total period we were planning to spend in the country. Much as I wanted to visit the camps, that had not been my main purpose in coming to Korea, and I felt that I should not be justified in spending so long on an expedition which, however valuable, would give me so little time during the rest of my stay to see for myself the conditions in which the civil population were living. The decision was not easy to make, but having made it I had no doubt that I was right.

8

PYONG-YANG

Our headquarters was, as the planes flew, perhaps fifteen miles from Pyong-yang. At night, when the raids grew heavy, we could hear the sound of falling bombs, sometimes faintly, like the roar of distant thunder, and sometimes so close that we could see the flashes and feel the heavy roofs above us quiver at the reverberations. Yet, near as we were, the journey into the city took several hours. We bumped across the fields that ran along the valley bottom, and then swerved up on to a road so pale with dust that, even in the darkness, we could see it stretching like a twisted ribbon over the hilly landscape.

It was a busy road, worn with use and pitted with bomb-craters. Both sides were lined with men in greyish uniform, marching forward in single file, carrying rifles and with small bundles fastened to their backs. Now and then a group would be resting in the ditches, squatting on their ankles, smoking cigarettes and chatting quietly, or looking up to stare at passing vehicles. These were the Chinese Volunteers. They were small men, very light in build, and as a passing headlight flashed across them I turned to stare, astonished at the sharp look of individuality on their young, smooth faces. In spite of the neatness of the uniform they did not look like an army, stamped with a tight pattern of discipline and of habits trained against the natural grain of personality. Whether they were laughing or frowning, talking or silent, they looked like people who had somewhere a life that was completely their own, private and invulnerable. I remembered how, in Mukden, the Minister of Education had told me that there had been, from all over China, millions of young men who had wanted to go to Korea—so many, in fact, that volunteering had threatened to disrupt the whole industrial output of many

cities and to jeopardise China's own programme of reconstruction. I looked again. The faces of the young men were so alien that it was impossible to guess what sort of lives they had led before they became soldiers, whether they had been peasants, factory workers, students or clerks and administrators. Then we went on, past convoys of lorries, many of them marked with the white star of the United States army, past heavily camouflaged tanks, their gun-barrels jutting out from the tent-like swathings of canvas. The road curved uphill, down, and then up again, until, just before dawn, rows of gutted houses showed that we were entering what was left of the city. The night's raid was not yet over, and we sheltered in a dug-out, waiting for the day to begin.

It was a fine morning, already warm, and the air was clear and fresh. Yet even here, on the hilly outskirts of the city, almost everything was in ruins. We stood in the grounds of the famous temple of Buddha, Yen Myen Sa, which for more than two thousand years had been a centre of pilgrimage to people from all over Korea and which, too, in more recent times had become a playground where the people of Pyongyang came to picnic on feast days and holidays. The temple was romantically situated, on the peak of a steep conical hill which looked on one side towards the level plain of the city and, on the other, towards a wide stretch of curving river. Half-way down, the hill flattened out to make the broad natural terrace on which we stood, and then grew steep again as it fell to join the line of grey cliffs that overhung the river road. The river, silvery in the early morning light, was pencilled with the lines of broken bridges and beyond them we could see, though not very clearly, the ruins of the outer suburbs. We turned away, staring upwards through the brilliant and varied green of scrub oak, feathery larches, limes and dark conifers to see the outline of the temple roof sharp against the sky: and then we realised that it was a jagged sharpness, without rhythm and without significance. The temple, perhaps the most celebrated of all Korea's historic monuments, was a ruin, too.

"Could anyone in the world," a voice asked bitterly, "call that a military objective?"

We turned round to face the gentle, angry, scholarly face of the man who was the father of Che Den Suk. He was a little man, far on in middle age, perhaps even elderly, but so sprucely dressed and so alert that it seemed impossible that he should be the father of a woman who was herself no longer young. Yet his pride in having a daughter who was a member of the government was transparent, almost naïve. When her back was turned and she was talking to other people his glance, full of a round-eyed candour very like her own, would shift every now and then to follow her, to see what she was doing. He himself, we had learned, was the president of the University of Pyong-yang; but now the university, for reasons which we were soon to discover, was no longer able to function.

I was still gazing up at the ruined temple. "How did it happen?" I asked.

"It was bombed—in daylight—three days after the American and Syngman Rhee forces evacuated the city... And the Americans had been in Pyong-yang long enough to know which buildings we treasured most..." He shook his head. "Of course we shall try to reconstruct it when the war is over, but it will never be the same again. Never." He looked at me. "Isn't it what in England you used to call a Baedeker raid?"

Somebody called me away. It was time to go down into the city itself. Officials whom we had met at our headquarters had already described what Pyong-yang had been like before its destruction, and these descriptions had been amplified by old films and photographs. To almost everybody in the country Seoul was still the real capital; but when—to use Professor McCune's phrase—Korea was vivisected in 1945, Pyong-yang was, because of its long history, its size and its industrial importance, the inevitable choice as a temporary capital for the northern half of the country. It had a population of 400,000 and was a centre for the manufacture of textiles, fertilisers, chemicals, tobacco, beer and various food

products. Like most of the large cities of the far east, it had been a mixture of old and new: of big, up-to-date buildings, some built of brick and others of steel and concrete, and of tiny hovels—traditional Korean dwellings constructed either of wood or of baked mud, sometimes thatched, sometimes with the heavily tiled roofs that we had seen in other parts of North Korea. Between 1945 and 1950 an immense amount of new building had taken place, and when the war broke out a two-year development plan for the city was nearing its completion. This was to have been followed by a five-year plan, already drawn up, which included, among many other projects, a scheme for an underground railway on which work was scheduled to start in January, 1952. Apart from its industrial and administrative buildings, Pyong-yang had an exceptionally large number of educational institutions and buildings devoted to various cultural purposes. The university was new, and Che Den Zuk's father had described how the plan to create it had originated with an old peasant who, after the redistribution of land which took place in 1945, had suggested that now that the peasants had become the owners of the fields in which they worked they ought to begin to endow the education of their sons and daughters. The old man had organised a nation-wide collection of rice and other grains, whose sale had been used to finance the scheme. When the war broke out the university already had sixteen faculties at work and a roll of three thousand, five hundred students. Beside the university, Pyong-yang had possessed four technical colleges, six institutes of higher education, twenty evening institutes for adult education, twenty secondary schools, seventy-three primary schools, and a partially completed polytechnic. Among the other buildings of cultural importance were a museum, an opera house, eight theatres and twenty cinemas. There were also a number of Christian churches, and, of course, hospitals, clinics and other types of buildings devoted to social welfare purposes.

Apart from the museum, every one of these buildings—as well as practically everything else in the city—had been

destroyed. We drove along the river road, past a damaged, but still inhabited, row of two-story grey wooden houses and shops. The shops—there were three in all—were open-fronted, like market stalls, displaying nothing but a few combs, tooth-brushes, odd bits of haberdashery and a fairly big supply of Chinese cigarettes. Beyond the shops the wide road, cleared of debris but pitted with holes, led into the nothingness of absolute ruin. Huge fields of rubble stretched away on either side, grey as lava, littered with the ruins of stone or concrete buildings, sometimes heaped in great masses, with beams and pillars lying athwart door frames and lintel-posts, and sometimes so shattered that the rubble looked like stones poured out on to a sea shore, waiting for the waves that would lap them into smoothness. Farther on were broken walls, the outlines of buildings that we could identify from the photographs we had seen: and as we went on, spending hour after hour in a systematic survey of the devastation, it became possible to visualise what some of the buildings must have looked like: a huge red brick school, roofless and so completely gutted that every internal wall had disappeared, yet still with enough of the façade left standing to enable us to recognise that the building had conformed closely to the style of school architecture popular in England before 1945: stodgy and unimaginative, yet sufficiently light and airy for its purpose, and set in wide, rubble-strewn grounds where only the trees were still alive. In another part of the city a ruined theatre still stood against the sky, its tall entrance frontage still patterned in grey and yellow, and with fragments of what had been neon lighting hanging crazily from beneath the iron frame of the canopy over the doors. We saw big office blocks, all of them shattered beyond the possibility of repair, but still with the outlines of window-frames, fragments of cornices, and occasionally a flight of steps to show where people had once trodden to work. In other quarters there were the ruins of hospitals, some of them with jagged sections of walls standing around the craters which marked the scoring of direct hits.

Then, on the outskirts of the city, there were districts which, though badly scarred, still contained factories where work could go on, and dwellings which still gave some sort of shelter: villas whose gardens were bright with late lilac and peonies and early roses, though the houses themselves were scarred and windowless; and, in other areas, streets of tightly packed dark brown hovels, from which women came carrying their bowls of soya beans to wash to the stand-pipes which stood in the gutters. Even here on the outskirts there was hardly a street without a bare patch to mark some recent destruction. Often the smell of burning still lingered in the air, and across one wide patch of open space I saw a litter of charred paper, scattered as I had seen papers scattered in Victoria Street and St. James's Park on a May morning which was now, I was startled to remember, ten years ago . . .

Here, though, the destruction had been on a vaster and more terrible scale. To the new horror of the napalm bomb had been added, as in most North Korean towns, the terror of planes flying low to spray the streets and open spaces with machine-gun fire. Often, as we walked over the rubble, we would catch the glint of spent cartridge-cases and bend to pick them up, examining the engraved letters and numbers which were the key to their place of manufacture. Now and then we would hear the explosion of a time-bomb, and on one occasion we heard three bombs, all of which had been dropped a week earlier, explode at ten-minute intervals. They were, the city officials said, of a new type, and so far every attempt to locate and remove the detonators had been unsuccessful.

Gradually we learned how the city had been destroyed. When the American and British and South Korean armies took Pyong-yang there had been very little fighting, and until they evacuated it in December, 1950, the outward appearance of the city was not very different from what it had been before the war. A few buildings had been destroyed, but not many. The evacuation had also taken place without fighting, but the officials whom we questioned declared that the occupying forces had blown up many important buildings before they

left, including the university, many municipal buildings, all the food factories and all the government institutions. Then on January 3rd, when the North Koreans were re-entering Seoul—a city destroyed, as British war correspondents had made clear, not by the advancing armies of the north but by those who were retreating to the south—the Americans staged their first large-scale raid on Pyong-yang. The raid started at night and continued until noon of the following day, with planes dropping their loads at fifteen-minute intervals. The attack, we were told, began with incendiaries of a familiar type, and then followed petrol-jelly bombs, high explosives, more incendiaries and time-bombs. The combination of incendiaries with time-bombs made systematic rescue work almost impossible. Tens of thousands of people who had been buried in the wreckage were left to die of suffocation and at the time of our visit many of the bodies had still not been disinterred. Among the buildings destroyed on that night were most of the city's hospitals, although, as at Sinyju, all of them had been marked on their roofs with red crosses designed to be visible from a height of six or eight thousand metres. Tens of thousands of people had been burned to death, and the sufferings of the survivors had been indescribable. Immediately after the raid the Foreign Minister of the Korean People's Republic had protested formally to the United Nations at the barbarity of the methods used to destroy the city. The protest had been without avail. Bombing had continued, and even now that there was very little left to destroy the raiding still went on day after day and night after night, tearing old ruins into new patterns, or completing the wreckage of damaged factories and little back streets.

Yet life, too, went on. Nobody could estimate with any precision how many people had left the city, or how many bodies were still lying beneath the uncleared ruins, but it seemed probable that more than three-quarters of the population had died or moved away. Tens of thousands had joined the streams of refugees who had set off at different times and in different directions. We were told, as we were to

be told often again in other areas, that when the city had been evacuated by the American and South Korean armies the local population had been urged by the invaders to go south with them, and that the Americans had threatened that the atom bomb was soon to be dropped on North Korea and that those who remained would certainly perish. We ourselves talked at different times with many people who, panic-stricken at the prospect of a terror even worse than that which they had already endured, had started to go south and then, sometimes because of family ties and sometimes for other reasons, had changed their minds and returned to what was left of their homes. We learned, too, that several thousands of those who had started on the southward trek were killed even before they were outside the city—when one of the great bridges, packed with refugees, had been blown up by the retreating forces. Others had continued miserably on, haunted by the vision of death in the most terrible form of all, often separated from their families, without money or personal possessions, hungry and hopeless, driven only by the will to go on living.

Those who had remained behind gave a grotesque air of normality to the spreading wilderness of ruin. Traffic, of course, was almost at a standstill. Before their departure the occupying armies had, the city officials told us, collected and set fire to all the tram-cars. We could trace the tram-lines along some of the streets that had been cleared, and we could see that most of the roads had once been smooth and well-surfaced. Now, except for a few official-looking jeeps and lorries, there was no traffic to be seen but hand-carts, an occasional mule-cart, and a surprising number of bicycles. The jeeps in which we ourselves drove from one part of the city to another caused a flurry of excitement, and men and women would stop whatever they were doing in order to look at us and sometimes, too, to burst into loud laughter at our appearance. But when we were on foot the people we passed usually took us for granted. Sometimes people would approach to ask who we were, and when the interpreters explained, many, particularly among the women, would seize the

opportunity to describe the things they had suffered during the occupation; but then, when they had started, their manner would sometimes become nervous and reluctant, full of shame at the memory of deeds they would have preferred to forget. Many women had, during the months of occupation, been seized and taken to brothels, and others had spent, they said, weeks hiding in cellars, never daring to show themselves in the streets lest they, too, should meet the fate of their women friends. The women who talked in this way were not all young, though most of them were. One of them, who was twenty-five years old, not pretty but slender and fresh-looking, had been standing among the rubble, a few yards from the cellar which was her home, and talking to a group of older women when we approached. She told us how the house in which she had lived with her husband—the couple were childless—had been destroyed by an incendiary bomb and how, after nights of sleeping in the open, the husband had eventually found a way into this particular cellar. The older women who were with her listened attentively, then one of the women said something which made the speaker flush angrily. She pursed her lips together, shook her head, and then, after a few moments, was persuaded to tell how her sister had been taken to a brothel during the occupation and how she herself had, with the help of her husband, found a hiding place in a different part of the city. Then, finishing her story, she turned away suddenly, and rushed off to find her sister, to bring her to us to speak for herself about the things that had happened . . .

There were others, men and women whom we met in the same casual way as we wandered through the ruins, for whom life was more than a nightmare that they wanted to be allowed to forget, men and women who walked through the ruins with an easy stride, smiling a little to themselves and shouting greetings to passers-by, as full of cheerful confidence as if the world had not been blown to pieces around them. There was, for example, a man whom Ida and Kate and I came across one sunny afternoon as we picked our way

aimlessly across a huge field of rubble, not far from what had been the centre of the city. He was squatting on a broken concrete beam, sunning himself and watching what seemed to be the first tentative steps of a sturdy-looking baby. Apart from the beam on which the man himself was sitting there seemed to be not even the tiniest stretch of level space within sight, nothing but churned up fragments of brick and concrete, over which we ourselves were having some difficulty in picking our way without toppling over, and the picture of the small child, well-dressed and cared for, trying to learn to walk over the crazy patchwork of destruction had a symbolism too obvious for comment. As we approached the man turned and met our glance, smiling and beckoning us to come nearer. Then he got up, lifted the baby into his arms and came towards us. He was tall and strongly built, with a narrow head and friendly, intelligent eyes, and was dressed in dark blue cotton trousers and an open-necked shirt. At a guess he might have been forty, or perhaps a year or two younger. He said a few words of what we guessed to be greeting and then, pointing at the sky, added a sentence whose meaning we could only guess. Ida, determined that we should find out the man's history, went back to find an interpreter.

Meanwhile, the man was pointing to a small concrete hut, about the size of a domestic garage, which stood a short distance from where we were, and beckoning to us to come and look at it. By the time that Ida returned with Mr. Kim we had somehow gathered that the man had, beside the baby, a wife and three other children, and that this hut was their home. We accepted his invitation and went inside. There was a tiny kitchen, about eight feet long but hardly a yard wide, and with its floor made of the same uneven mass of brick and concrete as the rubble outside. Just inside the door stood an iron stove in which a small fire was burning. There was no oven and the stove itself, whose top came about two feet above the level of the floor, was perhaps eighteen inches square. A single wooden shelf ran along one wall, but it was quite bare, and there was no other furniture in the room.

Beyond, divided from the kitchen by a partition that reached almost to the ceiling, was a real room, the whitewashed walls running up straight from floor to ceiling, and the floor itself boarded, smooth and astonishingly clean. There was furniture, too: a decent glass-fronted cupboard, in which we could see the family bed-quilts lying neatly folded, one on top of the other, and each with a white sheet buttoned to it. On the other side of the room, against the partition that separated it from the kitchen, was another cupboard, and on top of it stood two shallow metal bowls, one filled with beans and the other empty.

"He says," Mr. Kim translated, "that he and his family have just moved into this place——"

"When?"

"Two days ago—and he has asked me to explain to you that he has built it himself——"

"Built it?"

The man explained. He and his family had been bombed out of their home in January, and had gone to stay with his wife's mother, who lived in a village some miles outside the city. They were welcome there, but it was inconvenient. The man had a job in a chemical factory which, though damaged, was able to remain in production, and he was anxious to have his wife and children with him. So he had spent days and days wandering around among the ruins, looking for some likely place that he might be able to turn into a dwelling. When he found this shanty only two of its walls were standing, and he had spent all his spare time in the last three months in building up the other walls from such material as he could find among the rubble, putting on a roof, and making a floor that would be fit to sleep on.

"Isn't it fine?" he demanded.

It was a neat job, very workmanlike. As we stared around the wife came in. She was a little woman, careworn and with a manner quite unlike that of her husband, reserved and full of doubt. As she greeted us we could sense that we were not really welcome, and we could hardly wonder. But there was

one thing I had to know before we left. "Where," I asked, "did you get the furniture?"

The wife answered. It had been lent to them by her mother: not given, but lent until such time as they were able to buy things for themselves once more. We shook hands and went out.

Nowhere else in Pyong-yang did we see anything to equal this dwelling. Many families were living in dug-outs, and others in cellars underneath bombed buildings. These hovels were not only dark and terribly crowded, but often quite obviously dangerous as well, because the slightest shift in the ruined superstructure could have blocked the entrances and imprisoned whoever was below. One dug-out which we entered was at the bottom of a nine-foot shaft. It measured little more than one yard by two, and was inhabited by a family of five, including an eight-months-old baby. Many of the other dug-outs were little, if any, better, yet the inhabitants were usually cheerful and almost invariably clean. There were some people, however, who had not been able to find any shelter underground. One of these was an old woman, the last survivor of all her family, whose home was nothing but a single length of matting fastened to the wall of a bombed building, and then stretched out to give as much space and as much shelter as might have been given by one half of a small tent. She lived, we learned, on the meagre ration of food which the city authorities provided—enough, she said, to enable her to eat something, though not very much, twice in every day. Beyond that she had nothing, no possessions of any kind. Yet she was cheerful, and as busy as her strength would allow, doing what she could to help other women to look after their children.

The children were everywhere, sometimes playing in the rubble, or scrambling in and out of the dug-outs and cellars of the city centre, or, again, standing in little groups, staring blankly, doing nothing, lifeless and inert. Most of them looked dirty and badly cared for, and many wore a settled look of fear, darting quick, nervous glances upwards at the first sound of an aeroplane droning in the distance, or running

away as they caught sight of our light colouring. But there were others, particularly among the older boys, who were gay and rowdy, bursting into loud jeering laughter as soon as we appeared, and then rushing towards us to shout question after question as to who we were and where we had come from.

On one occasion I found myself with a Korean interpreter in a jeep which broke down in one of the outer suburbs. Near by a dozen or so boys and girls were playing together on a patch of waste ground, and as our driver peered into the engine the children came closer, pointing to my red hair, whispering to each other, and then breaking into loud peals of laughter. After a few minutes one of them, a boy of eleven, approached the interpreter and asked a question. The interpreter, a young man called Shim Chung Ke, laughed and nodded.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Well—excuse me—but what those kids were asking was whether you wore a wig or if it's your own hair?"

"Yes," I said, "I've always had it." The children came nearer still. The boys were big, with broad shoulders under their dark shirts, and flat-featured lively faces that crinkled easily into smiles, and the girls, raggedly dressed in dark cotton skirts and shapeless blouses, stood watching the boys, holding back shyly, and occasionally lifting their hands to push back the thick black fringes that fell over their foreheads. Soon we were talking easily, the boys telling me how they spent their time. They lived in the little shacks that we could see a hundred yards or so ahead, and, though all the schools had been destroyed, every child was still getting some sort of education. They met their teachers in whatever rooms could still be found in the district—sometimes in a damaged public building, sometimes in a private house—and sat in their classes for four hours each day. All but the very young were given homework which, they complained, took most of the rest of the day to get finished. Their attitude to their homework was disciplined and resigned and slightly, though not conspicuously, resentful. After a time one of the bigger boys stepped

forward to speak to the interpreter. The children felt that I had had my share of questions and that it was time that they should be allowed to ask something. I agreed. The children got into a huddle, whispering together. Then, after a minute or two, the leader stepped forward and asked: "In which city of the Soviet Union does the lady comrade live?"

I answered: "I don't live in the Soviet Union. I live in England."

The news was as dashing as a sudden shower. The children turned away, no longer interested, running back once more towards their own homes. Shim Chung Ke was shaking with laughter. "Well—how d'you like that?" he demanded. "How d'you like that?"

While I was talking with the children Candelaria was visiting a tobacco factory which, though damaged, was still in operation. And on that same afternoon several delegates, including Li K'eng and Gilette Ziegler—who had herself been trained as an archaeologist—visited Pyong-yang's celebrated archaeological museum and spent several hours talking with the curator, Ru Ye Seng. The museum itself had survived the bombing, but during the occupation the Americans had robbed it of almost all its treasures: more than forty thousand articles in all, including pictures, bronzes, ceramics, jewels, gold statues of Buddha and other historic objects, almost all of them unique and beyond price. According to Ru Ye Seng most of these articles had disappeared as a result of individual acts of looting—a fact which added to his grief and bitterness at their loss, since it meant that instead of being sent to other museums where they might later be identified and even restored to their original home they would, instead, be scattered throughout hundreds and perhaps thousands of private houses in the United States, to be regarded as souvenirs or, at best, curios, owned by people who could not be expected to appreciate either their value or their historical significance.

Ru Ye Seng also described the archaeological research which had been carried out under his direction since the liberation from Japan. I myself had both read and heard

descriptions of the enormous archaeological wealth which existed in Korea, and particularly in the north, where the opening of shell-mounds and prehistoric tombs had, in the past, already thrown a great deal of light on the early, unrecorded history of the country—a history which, according to unsubstantiated legend, began with the founding of society in the year 2333 B.C. Recorded history started at about the beginning of the Christian era, but the excavation of Chinese tombs in the Pyong-yang area had provided much valuable information about Chinese and Korean habits and customs three centuries before. This knowledge had been steadily enlarged by Ru Ye Seng and his colleagues, and among the tombs opened in the past four or five years there had been a number whose walls had been decorated with elaborate and beautiful mural paintings. After describing these discoveries to Gilette and other delegates, Ru Ye Seng had gone on to tell them how the Americans had found and reopened some of these tombs, and had then left them exposed to the light and the weather so that, in the course of a few weeks, a part of the legacy not only of the Korean people but of all mankind, had disappeared for ever. Other tombs, he said, had been used as torture chambers, where women who had refused to give information about troop movements or the whereabouts of missing people had been subjected to acts which recalled, sometimes in precise detail, the sufferings people had endured in Nazi concentration camps . . .

In Pyong-yang, too, there were bunkers, burrowed far beneath the city, bomb-proof and strangely quiet. We climbed down flight after flight of concrete steps, steep, ill-lit and slippery with oozing water. At the bottom of each flight doors led away in either side. These doors, we were later to see, led into cloakrooms and small committee rooms, but now we passed them, making our way down to where members of the Korean women's organisations were waiting to greet us. We had still not reached the bottom when one of our hostesses opened a door on our left and led us into a fair-sized room,

windowless, but well-ventilated. The room itself was narrow and bare, but the long table which ran down the middle was spread with a cloth and covered with dishes of the sweet, rosy Korean apples, plates of chocolates wrapped in silver paper, and glasses, bottles of vodka and of mineral water. We drank a little, wondering, as we had wondered constantly, at the sacrifices which must have been made to provide us with such lavish hospitality. But luxury gave us no pleasure; instead, it seemed to widen the distance that divided us from the things we had seen in the world up above. We had watched, listened, questioned, seen women break down beneath the insistence of our demand to know, our determination to separate emotion from fact and to learn with the most exact precision the pattern of public disasters and of private tragedy. We had scribbled into our notebooks, trusting nothing to memory. In the cell-like quietness of the room in which we waited, the images of the things we had seen up above recurred again. I saw the wide, silvery river and, on the other side of the road that ran beside it the steep, jutting lines of the pumice-coloured cliff. High up in one of the angles of the cliff, at a point that could be reached from a narrow tongue that shelved down from the plateau above, an inscription had been carved into the stone. I had asked Shim Chung Ke to tell me what the inscription was about, and he had laughed in his mocking, off-hand way. "Oh! That's only about a picnic—it's an old carving—hundreds of years old——"

"But what does it say?"

He read it aloud, and then translated. A group of people had driven out here one summer day and enjoyed a picnic on top of the cliffs and, like lovers scratching their initials into a seat along the Thames embankment, had carved this inscription to tell people how much they had enjoyed themselves . . . I remembered, too, the sharp details of a more recent past: the ruins of tall blocks of flats, so shattered that it was impossible to construct a picture of what they had looked like, but with central-heating radiators still clinging to what was left of the walls, and with fragmentary remains of pipes

and cisterns, enough to show that the standard of building and equipment had been comparable with the flats we were building at Stevenage . . .

The door opened, and Pak Den Ai and Che Den Zuk entered together to tell us that the women who had come to meet us were now assembled. We crossed the dim corridor and saw, at the end of a passage a few yards ahead, a sudden burst of brilliant light. Another door was pushed open, clapping burst stormily around us, and we found ourselves being ushered on to the stage of what looked like a small theatre, clean and simple in form, the severe whitewashed walls throwing into extraordinary brilliance the faces of the women—perhaps three hundred in all—who filled the floor and the single high gallery. Most of the women were young, some dressed in khaki uniform, but the majority in Korean costume. They looked fresh, excited and gay, and seeing so many women massed together—there were, apart from two photographers, no men—it became possible, perhaps for the first time, to assess the physical differences that made the Koreans so different from either the Chinese or Japanese: the stronger, stockier build of the majority, varied here and there by girls who stood out as being exceptionally tall and graceful; the bolder features, sometimes curved to the soft roundness we had seen so often in China, but more often with a harshly sculptured quality that emphasised the high foreheads, sharp cheekbones and long, square-cut jaws; and everywhere was the bright colouring that had first struck us when we arrived in Sinyju, the shining black hair, the brilliance of complexions sometimes gleaming like old ivory, but more often brown and rosy-cheeked.

Pak Den Ai rose to make us a speech of welcome on behalf of the women of North Korea. Next came the delegates, six or seven in all, some speaking with quiet, restrained sympathy for the sufferings that the war had brought, others raising their voices in anger as they spoke of the political origins of the conflict. Most of those who spoke had brought gifts. Elizabeth Gallo, who was a member of the Italian parliament, presented

an album of greetings and photographs. The two German delegates had brought a big box of medical supplies for Korean women and children, and others had brought medical supplies of one kind or another. Maria Ovsyannikova, the most loudly cheered of all, finished her speech by presenting to Pak Den Ai a lacquered box containing two white silk scarves. When she had finished her speech, the door from the corridor opened again, this time to admit a procession of twenty white-clad girls, each of them carrying a bouquet of lilac, peonies and yellow daisies that were oddly and touchingly mixed with flowers of coloured paper. They climbed to the platform, pressing the bunches into our hands, smiling and embracing us, and fluttering with such excitement that one of them, a girl who looked as if she might have been about fifteen, slipped and fell on to the floor between two chairs, carrying her bouquet with her. Two or three people rushed to help her up, and the girl herself, unhurt and unembarrassed, threw back her head and joined in the shout of laughter that went up around her. Then somebody standing in the doorway beckoned towards us, and we went out.

The evening, however, was not yet over, although the time was already midnight. After a short interval we returned to the hall to find that the chairs on which we had been seated had now been moved to the floor of the hall and that a curtain had been lowered across the stage. As we took our places I heard one of the delegates ask her neighbour: "Did you notice that whenever the audience clapped Pak Den Ai joined in and clapped, too?"

I had noticed. Maria Ovsyannikova had also clapped herself, and Li K'eng ,who had also made a short speech, had done the same.

"It's the custom in the people's democracies," Eva Priester explained. "Stalin started it——"

"Clapping himself?"

"No, not himself. That's the whole point—if the speaker stands around gawking while everybody cheers it's because the cheers are for him. But Stalin said that when people clap

a speaker what they ought to applaud is not the individual himself but the ideas which he is expressing—so the cheers are not for a person but for a principle——"

"Ssh!" The curtain was rising. A piano had been moved on to the stage, and the twenty young men and women grouped about it burst into singing Shostakovitch's Song to Stalin. Their voices were powerful and well-trained, and the rather make-shift, parish hall atmosphere of their little theatre seemed to disappear, blown away by the unexpectedly professional skill of the performers. Other songs followed, some in chorus, others by two soloists, a contralto and a baritone. But those who had expected to hear Korean music were disappointed. Instead of that we found ourselves listening to Mozart. Next followed a group of dancers, four young men and two girls who, in a ballet that was as sharp as a cartoon and as tightly compressed as folklore, showed the lives of the Korean people after the liberation from Japanese rule, the peasants peacefully tilling the land that had at last become their own, proud of their crops, enjoying the small incidents of everyday life. Then a new invader arrived—a single American soldier, portrayed with a bitter and yet comic realism, gawky, bewildered, and then drunk and, in his drunkenness suddenly and senselessly angry. The fight—for which the tiny stage was really much too small—was danced between the men, the American struggling for possession of the two girls, symbolic figures representing their country's future. As the struggle grew fiercer the two girls were pushed out of sight, and then, after a staggering blow from a man dressed as a Korean soldier, the American slipped, fell, picked himself up and staggered off the stage to a burst of uproarious cheering.

Up above, the real was around us once more. Planes were tearing across the sky, and the sky itself was lit every now and then by the flash of an explosion. As far as we could judge there was no anti-aircraft fire, and the slow journey back to our headquarters was noisy and unpleasant. But our arrival

was like coming home, with our young hostesses rushing to greet us, anxious to know whether we were all safe, and leading us, again in the darkness before dawn, to the little quiet houses. There were fresh flowers on the table in my room, sprigs of hawthorn, purple vetch, yellow coltsfoot; the small odds and ends that I had left lying about—a needle and thread, a packet of lighter-flints, a lipstick—had been placed neatly together in a little basket made from a sheet of skilfully folded paper; and lying across the head of my bed, carefully washed and ironed, was my single change of underclothes. Tong Jong Hi, the pretty girl who had looked after us when we first arrived, came to make certain that I had everything I wanted. She was still dressed in the white silk blouse and black chiffon skirt embossed with black velvet roses which she had worn when I had first seen her, but it was she, I knew, who had cleaned the room, looked after my things and busied herself with washing our clothes while we were away. Each of the other houses in which the delegates were staying was, I had already learned, in charge of a Korean girl, and all of them displayed the same quiet, unobtrusive skill in looking after the comforts of their guests. As we came to know them we were told—though they were too modest to admit it themselves—that the job of looking after us had been given to each of them as a reward for special and outstanding services to the Korean women's movement, and every one, too, had endured her share of personal tragedy. Tong Jong Hi's parents had both been killed when the Americans occupied the district in which the family lived, and so had almost all her relatives. Her husband, who was a doctor, was still alive, but he was at the front with the army and it was many months since she had seen him. Only towards the end of our stay did I discover that she had had a child, a baby who had been not quite a year old when it had died in the prison in which she had been confined by the army of occupation for several months. When she spoke of the past, tears would gather slowly in her eyes and she would turn away, folding her delicate hands together as if by doing so she could more easily contain

her grief. But for the most part she seemed to live resolutely in the present, making us comfortable, anticipating our wishes, and sometimes, when our editorial committee stopped working and two or three of us would stroll off together through the field paths and up into the woods, she would come and join us, shyly asking our permission, and stopping now and then to gather a flower or to point out some special beauty in the landscape.

But those of us who formed the editorial committee had very little leisure even in the calm of our headquarters. We were determined that our report should be completed while we were still in Korea, and so the information collected by different groups of delegates had to be checked, sorted, the doubtful stories eliminated, and the rest put into order. Then, with a draft report on what we had seen completed and ready for criticism, the whole delegation would sit round in the sunny courtyard, listening, objecting, suggesting amendments, until we at last reached a final draft with which everyone could agree. Already a remarkable change had taken place in the tone of our discussions. After the armistice we had concluded in Mukden, Maria Ovsyannikova and I had slowly begun to get acquainted. Our public disagreement had given us a starting point for private discussion, and it had not taken me long to realise that, however great the difference in our personalities and in our experience of life, we had nevertheless both come to Korea with the same purpose: which was to find out the truth, and having found it to report it with unimpeachable accuracy. Respecting the truth, we began to respect each other, and at the meetings of the editorial committee we would often find ourselves arguing on the same side, refusing to admit into the report facts which, though we believed them to be true, could not be proved with absolute certainty; and sometimes after our meetings we would go on to discuss world affairs. But there was little time for these discussions, since we had still so much to see.

9

WHANG-HAI PROVINCE

There were six of us in the party which travelled south, towards the front line, to learn what was happening to the civilian population in the province of Whang-Hai. Mrs. Rodd and I shared a car, and in the jeeps behind us were Candelaria, Maria Ovsyannikova, Eva Priester and Li K'eng. The all-night journey took us into Pyong-yang, across the river, and through a countryside which, until the moon rose, we could glimpse only fitfully as the drivers switched their lights on at intervals to make certain that we were going in the right direction. Then the moon came up, illuminating fresh scenes of devastation. Occasionally we passed a village which looked as it must always have looked, the tiny houses closely huddled, the thatch heavy and irregular; but there were very few places that showed no sign of having been touched by war, and there were many which had become total ruins.

Dawn rose on a clear, spreading landscape of rolling plain, with the plain enclosed on one side by a range of low, softly folded hills, and on the other, cut off from the sky by the massed roofs of the houses of Anak, a town which before the war had had a population of about sixty thousand. The house towards which we drove, and where we were to stay as the guests of the women's organisation, was larger than any in our village headquarters, but built to a similar plan, with the rooms opening on to a terrace that ran around the court-yard. The rooms themselves were fairly large, though there were only four of them altogether—two which had been turned into dormitories for us, one which served as a dormitory for our interpreters, and a fourth which was our dining-room and meeting place. The kitchen, I presently discovered, was constructed with its floor below the level of the terrace, so that the stove on which the cooking was done also served to

heat the air-ducts that ran beneath the other rooms in the house.

Here we rested, and then settled down to interview the city officials. The province of Whang-Hai had been the first to be captured in the northward advance by American, British and South Korean forces, and it was estimated that during the occupation 123,000 people had been killed by the occupying armies, apart from those who had died, both before and after the occupation, as a result of bombing. Official statistics recorded that in Anak alone more than 19,000 people had been put to death during the occupation. But it was only as we got to know the town ourselves that this huge figure began to take on a meaning. Many of the people with whom we talked—men, women and children—were the sole survivors of what, only a few months earlier had been large families. They described to us, often in the most terrible detail, the tortures which they themselves had suffered, and the way in which the members of their families had lost their lives. Some had been taken out of their homes and shot. Others had been killed only after enduring appalling physical degradation. Others again had died in prisons where adults and children had been packed together, often left for several days without food and water, and so overcrowded that it was impossible even to lie down.

We went to look at two of these prisons. The first was built in a yard just behind the main street of the town, and before the war had been the store-house of a peasant bank. It was divided into four sections, each measuring four metres by three. There were no windows, and the only current of air came from narrow ventilating slits beneath the roof. Here, we were told, hundreds of people had been confined, and some of the survivors came to see us, anxious to tell their stories. One of these was an old man called Kim San-Yen, who lived in Anak at 172 Se San Re Street. He was small, very wizened, with long, thin moustaches dropping at either side of his narrow chin, and rheumy eyes, narrow too, and tilted upwards at the outer corners. He was dressed in a dirty,

greyish-white shirt that hung baggily over his breeches, and as he talked he leaned heavily on a stick, stepping forward now and then to look up into our faces, and then stepping back once more to raise his free hand in a sudden, emphatic gesture. He told us that a few days after the Americans occupied the town he had been arrested, though for what reason he did not know, and put into this prison among a crowd of men, women and children. After ten or twelve days —he could not say exactly how long—he was released, just as arbitrarily as he had been arrested. He went home to find that his whole family, consisting of twelve persons in all, had disappeared. At first he could not discover what had happened to them, but after a time he learned that his wife, his son, his son's wife and their two-year-old child had been taken out of the town and killed. None of the family had ever been associated with any political party or had taken any part in opposing the invaders. The son, however, had been a shock-worker in a state shop, and his name would probably have been, so the father told us, among the records captured in the municipal offices when the Americans took the town. After the liberation the father, along with many other survivors, had followed the parties of officials who were opening up the mass graves into which the bodies of the dead had been thrown. He was never able to identify the remains of his wife but, after three or four days, he recognised the bodies of his son and his son's wife. "The two of them," he said, "were bound together with ropes—and since there were no marks upon them anywhere I could only think that they had been buried alive." Two thin tears ran down his wrinkled face, but his eyes, when he looked up, were dry and cold, and his gaze, focused on me, tense with accusation. "I thought the Americans were gentlemen! I thought that the Americans were Christians—and when I heard that they had come to our country I did not think it possible that they would do such things . . ."

I asked: "Are you a Christian?"

He lowered his head, refusing to answer.

I repeated the question: "Are you a Christian?"

This time he lifted his head and looked at me again, but he still did not answer.

I insisted, and asked the question for a third time. The answer came: "I was a Christian. I have been a religious man all my life. But now . . ." he turned his head slightly, his frail body quivering ". . . now that I have seen what people calling themselves Christians can do . . . now I cannot believe in anything any more . . ."

A woman came forward, middle-aged, round-shouldered, with gnarled, work-roughened hands appearing from the sleeves of her worn blouse and with the heavy, slow movements of a peasant. Her name was Han Nak Son, and she too lived in Anak, at 194 Sun San Ri Street. She said that her husband and her husband's brother had both been arrested on November 10th, 1950 and had been brought to this prison. The arrests were made by two American soldiers accompanied by four South Koreans. The husband and brother-in-law were both peasants, and neither had ever been a member of the Korean Workers' Party. The woman declared that there had been one period of fifteen days when the prisoners were kept without food, and she and a number of other people whom we questioned stated that the prisoners had been beaten with iron bars. These beatings, every witness agreed, had been carried out by Syngman Rhee troops with an American in command.

The second prison which we visited was situated a little way from the centre of the town. The main street itself was long and narrow, with shops—all of them empty or almost empty—a few buildings in modern European style, and tight rows of Korean houses. The modern buildings were all fairly seriously damaged, apparently as the result of fighting, and among the older dwellings there were gaps where small groups had been burned to the ground; but the street still had an air of life about it, with people sitting about in the doorways of their homes or coming and going on domestic errands. Behind this main street the town sprawled away on every side, sometimes

in tight clusters, sometimes with big open spaces between the buildings. The second prison was to one side of one of these open spaces, set back at right angles to a low wall, and with a picturesque roofed-in well giving, at first glance, an air of friendly domesticity to the courtyard in which it stood. The prison here had obviously been built as a prison, and the cells opened up out of a long corridor. Here, too, a big crowd of people who had survived their imprisonment were waiting to tell us their stories. Among them was a slender, anxious-looking woman who stood a little way from the others, though not alone. Beside her was a boy, square and stocky, scrutinising me with calm, intelligent eyes. The woman, I learned, when I questioned them, was his mother, and the boy himself was nine years old. Both of them, along with the father, had been confined in this prison, where the father had been killed. The woman told us how she had had red-hot knitting needles thrust between her fingers and finger-nails, and held out her hands so that we could examine the scars.

Another woman, Shoy Um-Bok, was standing near by, leaning forward as if the baby strapped to her back was too heavy for her failing strength. She was thin and elderly, with a shrunken-looking body and narrow, sharp face, full of bitterness. As I approached I saw that the baby was shrunken, too. It was very pale, wide-eyed, but with an unfocused, almost half-dead look. "My grandchild . . ." the woman explained. She jerked her shoulders forward, easing the child upwards a little, and described how she, her husband, her son, the son's wife, and the baby who was their child, had all been arrested by the Americans and put into this prison. Her husband and son had both been killed, and her daughter-in-law had been so badly beaten that she was still bedridden and too weak to be able to feed the child. The child, deprived of its mother's milk and too young and feeble to be able to take such food as was available—there was no milk to be got—was withering towards death, and the old grandmother, almost too worn for anger, too old to feel anything but despair, could only demand that we should tell her what she and her family—

whom, she declared, had never done anything in their lives but mind their own affairs—should have done to deserve the fate that had overtaken them. "And look!" she cried suddenly. "Look at the child's legs!" She pulled the wrappings away for us to see the shrivelled limbs. "How can I save him? How can I?"

We had no answer. We turned away. Eva Priester, a few yards away, was standing looking into the well that we had admired as we entered, but now her face was pale. "Somebody told me," she said, "that people had been thrown down . . . Look . . ." We looked. The well, surrounded by a concrete wall that stood about sixty centimetres high and measured a metre across, was, we judged, about seven or eight metres deep, and in the sunny light we could see the gleam of buttons and then the shape of what looked like a child's head.

We drove out of the town to examine the mass graves which so many of the people we had met had already described to us. The dusty, narrow road twisted through street after street of tiny houses, and then, suddenly emerging into open country, began to climb through ploughland and meadow. The day was warm and cloudless, and the big fields, broken here and there by a line of hedgerow or an occasional tree, were speckled with the flowers of an English June. A light wind blew, and as we came to the top of the first line of hills that overlooked the town the grass had the close-cropped look of downland, with harebells and thyme growing among the turf. It was here, a little more than a mile beyond the town, that many of the townspeople who had been killed during the occupation were buried, some in small groups, others in large mass graves that, when they were first opened, had contained many hundreds of people. The bodies that had been identifiable at the time of the liberation had mostly been taken away for private burial; but now some of these graves had been opened up for our inspection. One grave was for children and, looking down, we could see not only the mutilated and decaying bodies but shoes, tufts of hair, books and small personal possessions, and,

too, lengths of rope. In a neighbouring grave 450 bodies had been buried, both men and women. One woman, Huan Sin Ya, told us that her mother had been buried alive in this grave and had managed to dig herself out, only to be recaptured and buried again. Altogether there were twenty such graves on this hillside, and we were told that during the months of occupation twelve hillsides had been put to similar use.

During the time we spent in Anak we saw and questioned large numbers of women and girls from the surrounding district. Wherever we went people demanded that we should listen to their stories, but the questioning of each person took a long time, not merely because we were using the interpreters carefully, but because we were determined to check every statement, and to identify the witnesses in such a way that they could be found and re-examined in any later investigation that might take place. Hence, it was impossible to listen to all of those who wanted to talk to us, and wherever a group was gathered together we picked people at random, asking advice from no one, and refusing to be influenced by the clamour of those who were loudest in their demand to be heard. The stories, varied as they were, slowly accumulated into a history of the most ruthless and wanton cruelty. Some people had been arrested and killed because of their past political associations, others because they would not betray the whereabouts of friends and relatives who were in hiding, others, too, because of their own acts of opposition to the occupation forces, but many for no clear or apparent reason. Again and again people demanded to know what they had done that such tortures should be inflicted on them. The old man outside the prison in Anak was not the only Christian we met who had lost his faith as the result of what he had suffered; but we met practising Christians, too, most of them women, who were confusedly trying to reconcile the faith with what they had seen of the conduct of people belonging to a Christian country: for, as we questioned people in detail it became clear that a very large proportion of the atrocities had been

committed by Americans. "What have we ever done to you western people," one woman demanded, "that you should come to our country to destroy us?" She raised her fist, and her face, strong and deeply lined, was contorted with anger. "What harm have we ever done to you? Tell me that! Have we ever asked anything from you? Have we ever wanted anything but to be left in peace to lead our lives in our own way? . . . We want nothing from you—nothing! But will you tell me what it is that you want from us that your people will not leave us alone?"

Cries such as this were few. When we came to compare notes with members of the delegation who had visited other parts of the country we found that we had, collectively, heard an immense and general condemnation of the governments of the western world, but very few expressions of hatred against the ordinary people of the countries whose soldiers were fighting in Korea. Instead, there was frequent bewilderment, puzzled questioning, and an astonishing, almost incredible, expression of belief in the humanity of the human race, in the fundamental decency not only of people in the countries which the Koreans knew to be their friends politically, but, too, in the people of countries whose soldiers had become their enemies.

In the dusty courtyard Maria Ovsyannikova and I, who had together been questioning a group of women who had come in to see us from neighbouring villages, sat discussing our impressions. I perhaps more than she, had been struck by the eloquence of many of these peasant women—an eloquence which, trying to establish facts, we had been obliged to restrain. They had talked not only easily but well, and their descriptions of their experiences had been mixed every now and then with details of their personal lives. One peasant woman, telling of how she and her women neighbours had this year finished their planting a week earlier than usual in spite of the absence of nearly all the men, had gone on to talk about the land distribution which had given to women as well as men their own share of the earth they tilled. This woman's

pride in ownership was fierce, and from talking about the land she had gone on to boast of how she had, during the last five years, slowly learned to read and write. Other women had joined in, some of them smiling, gaining confidence in their ultimate future from the gains that had enriched their lives in the past. Then the conversation had come back to the war, to the condition of the homeless, the scarcity of food, of medical supplies, of even the simplest necessities of life. Some of the women described how, during the harvest of the previous summer, soon after the war had started, petrol-jelly bombs had been dropped on the ripened fields, burning the crops before they could be gathered in. During the occupation, there had been a systematic destruction of livestock, cows, pigs and even chickens, so that now, in spite of the help being given by the Chinese, the people were perpetually hungry.

As Maria and I sat discussing these things, she asked suddenly: "Do you remember the evening of the concert in Pyong-yang?"

I nodded.

"And you remember the two silk scarves that I gave to Pak Den Ai?"

"Yes, I remember."

She looked at me with her direct, clear gaze. "Did you notice afterwards—when the boys and girls were singing the Song to Stalin—that I was crying?"

I had noticed, though I had pretended not to. "For me," Maria continued, leaning forward slightly, "that was one of the most painful moments of my life . . . To see how these people suffer, and that I, coming from a country where we have so much, should bring nothing but two silk scarves."

I said: "I brought nothing."

"No. If either of us had brought gifts that were of real help to the women and children here our actions would certainly have been misinterpreted—though in different ways."

"Yes." I had wanted to bring drugs and medical supplies

which could easily have been obtained in London, but to have done so would have given colour to the views of those who, on my return, might charge me with having gone to Korea to give help to one side.

"Have you ever," Maria asked, "have you ever seen any sign of Soviet military aid since we arrived in Korea? Anything at all?"

"Never."

"But you've looked?"

"Naturally. I've looked for everything." A very high proportion of the military equipment we had seen in our travels—and we had seen a great deal in the course of our night journeys—had been American: much of it, I guessed, captured on the mainland of China from Chiang Kai Shek. We had seen Chinese and Korean equipment too, but though I never lost an opportunity to poke around and see whatever was to be seen, I could honestly say that I had never anywhere seen any sign of Soviet military aid.

"Of course," Maria went on, "we have no doubt where our sympathies lie . . . But we have no doubt, either, that our first duty is to make certain that we do nothing that will endanger world peace. If I had brought gifts that were really worth bringing—food, clothing and so on—the imperialists would have labelled it as military aid . . . So we do nothing——"

"Nothing?"

"Nothing that can really help the Koreans. Before I came here—all through the months since the war started—we received at the office of our paper hundreds of letters from women all over the Soviet Union asking whether they could not adopt orphaned Korean children, just as many people did in our country during the Spanish Civil War——"

"And in my country, too," I said, "we took many Spanish children."

"Of course. And now—now because of the tension in the world situation I have had to tell these women that we cannot take Korean children——" She broke off as another group of women and girls filed through the gate and into the yard.

They had only just heard that we were in the district, and they, too, wanted to be heard.

We could not refuse, and they settled themselves in a semi-circle around us, keeping carefully into the shade because of the planes that, every few minutes, were passing overhead. There were perhaps a dozen women, and with them were two little girls, both of them neatly dressed and very pretty, their hair cut short and lying in thick fringes across their wide foreheads. Next to them, perched on the edge of a rough wooden chair, was a thin, pale woman who, as soon as she had got herself settled, unfastened the baby who was tied to her back, and pulling him round on to her knees, lifted her blouse and started to suckle him. The baby looked contented, clean and well-nourished, though the woman's clothes were shabby, the cotton thin with wear. Some of the other women were young, some old, but everyone, except for the pale, anxious mother, with the solid look of determination which characterised so many of the Korean women.

Maria suggested that the children should be allowed to speak first. Both of them were eleven years old, and were now in a school for orphans where, hearing of our visit from the teachers, they had asked permission to be allowed to come to see us. One of them, whose name was Shin Soon Dza, told us that she and her mother and sister were evacuated from their home when the Americans approached, but were captured before the evacuation-party could get away. When they refused to answer questions about the whereabouts of the father and of other people they were beaten and both the mother and sister were shot. The child herself escaped, but was recaptured, imprisoned again, and again beaten by the Americans. She told her story quietly, but several of the women, whom we afterwards discovered had been friends of the child's parents, were weeping bitterly. Then, when we had finished our questioning, one of the women spoke to the child.

"What is it?" I asked the interpreter.

He replied: "She is telling the child that she should show

you what they did to her head . . ." The child rose and came towards us, inviting us to examine the deep scar which, hidden by the thickness of her hair, ran from the crown of her head down towards the neck. She stepped back to allow her friends to describe the tortures which she had seen her parents suffer before they died, and as I was questioning her after she had finished one of the women shouted at me: "Why do you question so? Don't you believe her? Don't you know it's true that these things were done to us by the Americans—and not only by the Americans, either, but by all the soldiers who came among us . . ."

The siren wailed, and this time a watcher at the gate came to tell us that it was too dangerous to stay any longer in the open, and that we must go into the house and take cover until the raid was over.

And so it went on. From Anak we travelled, again in darkness, to Sinchen, which was only about two hours driving distance away. Here, too, we stayed as the guests of the women's organisation, sleeping in a row on the floor between fine silk quilts, and with hard, round, bolster-shaped pillows, filled apparently with some sort of seed, tucked under our heads. By this time we had grown accustomed to not sleeping very much. Nor could we eat. We ate apples, and when there was bread—though it was steamed and soggy and not very good—we ate that, too. The other dishes we picked at apologetically, explaining that we had lost our appetites. This was not true. We were perpetually hungry, and our favourite escape from the atmosphere of horror into which we were constantly plunged was to get into a corner by ourselves and talk about food, greedily and shamelessly imagining the things we would ask for when we were in Mukden, on our way home. Then as we saw how little there was even of the barest necessities for the people around us we would grow ashamed and allow the thoughts that we were really thinking to come to the top, to find expression. Most of us had, before we came to Korea, talked about the possibility of a Third World War, of Korea as a second Spain. But now that

we were seeing for ourselves, we were beginning to understand the meaning of phrases that we had once used so glibly. The destruction of civilisation . . .

Sinchen was a town of about the same size as Anak, scarred though not destroyed, and set in the middle of hilly country, so that the narrow streets sometimes switchbacked suddenly into a steep gradient. The city officials estimated that 23,000 people had been killed during the occupation—and by methods not very different from those of which we had learned details in Anak. Near the centre of the town, at the foot of one of the steeply rising hills, was a large building, in shape and size not unlike a modern town hall, with a long, rather elaborate frontage. This building, the city officials told us, had been only partly finished when the Americans captured the town, but had been taken over by the occupying forces as their administrative and police centre. Behind it, where the land shelved upwards, was what appeared to be a natural cave which, before the occupation, had been enlarged by the Koreans to make a big air-raid shelter. The officials whom we were questioning declared that before the Americans evacuated the town they transferred the people who had been imprisoned in the administrative building—479 of them in all—into this cave, where petrol was poured on them and they were burned to death. In another section more than 1,000 people were said to have been killed by fire from machine-guns. We ourselves walked down the narrow passage-way that led into the cave. Although the bodies had long since been moved we could see, as we flashed our torches on the walls, the marks of burning. And in one obscure corner to which I wandered off by myself I found some fragments that had been overlooked when the bodies had been removed after the liberation.

We saw two other caves which had been put to similar use. In each instance we were careful to question everybody we could find who had any direct knowledge of the events that had been described to us. Some of us knew that when we

returned to our own countries there would be many people who would refuse to believe any account of events which we had not ourselves witnessed, but here, as elsewhere, we were careful to satisfy ourselves of the truth of what we were told before moving on to the next investigation.

The local women's committee asked us whether we would be willing to visit a barn on the outskirts of the town which, they said, had been used during the occupation as a prison for women and children. We agreed to do so, and set off in jeeps, driving through the huddle of little streets until I noticed, turning round as my driver took a corner, that the others were no longer following. I said something to the driver, and he lifted a thumb, wagging it back in the direction from which we had come and making it plain that it was at any rate not we who were lost. Towards the edge of the town the road ran in a long, level curve edged at first by small wooden houses on either side and then emerging into open country. Big green fields spread away on either side of the road, and then we turned uphill to the left of the main road, along a cart track that ran through bare ploughland. At the end of the track stood a big, concrete barn, about thirty feet long and perhaps twelve feet wide, with one side running along the side of the hill. Six or seven women, whom I guessed to be survivors of whatever had happened in the barn, were already there, waiting to tell their story. As I climbed from the jeep they came to greet me, clasping my hands and looking into my eyes. Then one of them began to cry, gesturing towards the barn as she did so, and then bending towards the ground and lifting her hand, as mothers do when they are telling how their children grow. Then she made the same gesture again, a third time, and a fourth, and all the time the tears were streaming down her face and the other women, who were older, touched her, trying to restrain and comfort her. With an effort she pulled herself together, lifting her head and thrusting back her shoulders. She was quite young, slender and fairly tall, with a graceful figure and a round face that looked as if it had been shaped for gaiety, with upward curving

lips and soft, regular features, but her whole bearing had a look of despair more utterly hopeless than I had ever seen. Yet still she insisted on talking to me, making vivid, quick gestures as she did so, and when, five or ten minutes later, the other delegates arrived, bringing our interpreters with them, I felt that I already knew the essentials of her story.

Her name was Yan Yen-Dek and she was twenty-eight years old. Until the war started she and her husband and five children had lived in Anak, at 117 Song-Wha Street. When the Americans occupied the town her husband was killed, and she and her five children had all been imprisoned in this barn. The barn—according to information we got later from other witnesses—had had three hundred women and children crammed into it, and one night, in the confusion and turmoil, Yan Yen-Dek's youngest child, a baby of two, was trampled to death. A few nights later Yan Yen-Dek herself was taken from the barn by two American soldiers, both of whom raped her. In the darkness she managed to get away, and was taken into hiding by a family in a nearby village. There she remained until the district was evacuated, and it was only then that she discovered that her four older children had all been burned to death in the barn.

In the silence that fell after she had finished telling her story, an old woman, one of those who had been trying to steady her, suddenly spoke. "We know it's terrible for her—and we know what she's gone through—but after all she's young, and when this war is over she'll be able to start afresh, to rebuild her life . . . But as for me, I too lost everybody—my husband, my sons and daughters—everybody I had. And I'm old, and I have nothing, I have nobody, nothing to hope for ever again as long as I live."

One by one, the other women told us their stories. Every one had lost children in this prison. Nearby, were the graves into which the bodies had been thrown, and beyond was the ruin of another prison, which, we were told, had been used almost entirely for children. But this prison had recently been destroyed by a high-explosive bomb. Later we were told by

the inhabitants of a village a kilometre or so away that the whole area around the storehouse and the adjoining graves had been frequently bombed since the liberation, and they themselves believed that this was because the Americans were trying to destroy the evidence of the crimes that had been committed. Whether this was so or not we ourselves, as we walked about, had frequently to take a detour to avoid the bomb-craters with which the field was pitted.

In Sinchen, too, large numbers of women from the town and district flocked around wherever we went, anxious to talk, and many came to visit us in the house where we were staying. One evening, when all our visitors had left, Eva Priester and I were crossing the courtyard together when we became aware of an old woman, grey-haired and dressed in white, sitting alone on a bench just inside the gate. She sat very erect, but quite motionless, with her hands folded in her lap. "Do you realise," Eva asked me, "that she's been sitting there all day?"

I had noticed, not consciously, but in the way in which one sometimes notices things without really observing them. Now our curiosity was aroused and, tired as we were, we felt that we must find out who the old woman was and what she was doing there. None of our hostesses seemed to know, so we found an interpreter and went up to the old woman and introduced ourselves.

The old woman took our hands gravely. Her name was Kim Yen. She was sixty-four years of age, and lived in the village of Kim-dzi Re, which was about thirty-five kilometres from Sinchen. She told us that when she had learned that we were coming to the district she felt that she ought to come and meet us. "I know," she said, "that my daughter would have wished me to come, for my daughter was a woman like you, always concerned about making the world into a better place . . ." The daughter, Pen Dong-Nan, had been an active member of the Workers' Party, and because she had played a leading part in the affairs of the district she had been arrested soon after the Americans arrived and was put into prison. "After a few days," the mother went on, "I was

allowed to visit my daughter in prison, and when I came close to her she pulled out a silk flag that was hidden in the top of her blouse and gave it to me to hide and to take away. She told me that she was certain that the Americans would kill her, but that I must not grieve for her death and must always remember that one day our country would again be free. She said that I must keep the flag well hidden, and that when the day of freedom came again I must take it and hang it from the highest building I could find . . . That was the last time I saw her. Some days later one of the Syngman Rhee soldiers in our village boasted to me how he had, by the orders of an American officer, stuck a bayonet through her body and that of the child whom she carried . . . my grandchild . . ."

She broke off. Her voice was steady, and she turned first to Eva and then to me, staring into our eyes with a slow, wondering look. Behind the old woman's head a shaft of sunlight struck across the courtyard wall, deepening the whitewash to a pale, wild-rose pink, and against this background her brown, wrinkled face shone with a proud and humble serenity. Then she shook her head. Her eyes filled with tears, and she lifted her left arm, wiping her face against the long white sleeve of her blouse, and stiffening her body slightly as she again took command of herself. "So when," she went on at last, "I heard about the foreign women who were coming from the other side of the world to visit us in our trouble I wanted, for the sake of my daughter, to do something to welcome you . . . I still had a pig. It was the only one left, and I felt that this would be the time to kill it, so that you would have something to eat when you were among us . . . I killed it, and I brought it here, to this place——"

"How?"

"I carried it. In what other way could I have brought it from my village? But then when I got here the women told me that I had come too soon, that you would not arrive for another two days. And of course now that the weather is warm I knew that the pig would not keep, so I asked the women here what I should do, and they said that I might give

it to the children's orphanage." Again tears came into her eyes. "So I have been sitting here watching you all this time, wondering whether you would understand my mistake. I did so want to greet you joyfully, and now it seems that even in a little thing like killing a pig I can no longer do anything right . . ."

On that evening, which was our last before we returned to our headquarters, our hostesses had prepared a banquet, and we sat around the table in our little dining-room, not trying to forget the experiences of the last days—for that would have been impossible—but rather trying to remember that people who lived all the time among such frightful memories needed, when they could, to behave as if life were cheerful, easy and pleasant. So we drank toasts together and nibbled at unfamiliar delicacies: steamed rice-bread, white like linen, and cooked in two-inch cubes; dishes of rice stewed with chestnuts and dates; thick slices of pork cooked in a brown, garlic-flavoured sauce; Korean ravioli—one of the most famous of traditional national dishes—the paste made from rice-flour and the filling of chopped meat, again strongly flavoured with garlic; something that looked like a crisp and translucent spaghetti, glinting with tones of mauve and white and pale green, and tasting of nothing; wafer-thin slices of beef, salads, four or five different varieties of tinned fish and meat, apples and a sweet, exotic dried fruit that tasted not unlike dried apricots.

Our hostesses, the members of the local women's committee, sat among us, pressing us to eat. During our stay they had been so unobtrusive in their efforts to arrange whatever we wanted that it was only now, when we were about to leave, that we realised that we had scarcely begun to get to know them. There were seven or eight altogether, the oldest perhaps forty, and the youngest hardly more than a girl. They, too, we guessed, had suffered their personal tragedies, but they had not attempted to thrust their griefs upon us, and we had hesitated to ask them questions about themselves. Now,

making the most of the party, their manner was gay; but the gaiety could not last. Inevitably we came back to discussing the things we had seen, and the way in which war attacks the human personality.

Next to me sat a plump, youngish woman, with a grave, round face and a reserve of manner so profound that, although I had discovered soon after our arrival in Sinchen that she spoke a little English and had tried to talk to her, I had never managed to get beyond a few conventional phrases. Opposite were Maria, Elena and Candelaria, discussing their impressions. "Have you noticed," Maria asked, leaning across to me, "that nearly everyone we meet treats you with special friendliness?"

It was true, though there had been exceptions. Several of the women we had interviewed had made accusations against British troops, and had made them in such a way that they seemed to be personal charges, directed sharply against me. "Have the English no hearts?" one woman had cried. "Are there no children in England that you cannot understand what it is for a woman to see her children killed before her eyes? Do you not know what it is to watch the death of those you love? Are you not made of flesh and blood?"

I started to repeat the incident, but because I was made of flesh and blood I suddenly found that I could not go on. Nor could I control the tears that had sprung into my eyes. And then the woman who was sitting beside me put an arm around my shoulders, and took my right hand in hers. "How strange!" she murmured. "How strange!"

I pulled myself together, and achieved a smile. "What is strange?"

"Forgive me, but I have always been taught that the English hide their feelings, that they will never show to others what is in their minds . . . And now I see that you are not like that—that you are not ashamed to allow me to see what you feel. And it makes me happy! So happy! . . . I have always asked myself how the people of the world will ever come to understand each other if they are afraid to express

their feelings . . . But that was how they spoke of the English in Tokio."

I asked: "What were you doing in Tokio?"

"That is where I was educated, and where I learned to speak English." Now, at last, she began to talk freely. Her name was Yun Heh In, and she had been born in South Korea. Her father, she told me, had been a very rich man, and while Korea was under Japanese rule he had held a post of high rank in the Japanese puppet government of Manchuria. "Then," she went on, "when the Russians liberated Manchuria my family—and I with them—decided that we would return to South Korea where my father still owned very large properties. But on our way, while we were still in North Korea, my father was arrested by the Russians because of his collaboration with the Japanese. The other members of the family—my mother, sisters, brothers and uncles—all returned to South Korea, but I decided that I would stay to be near my father until he was released from prison. And while I was waiting I met the man who became my husband——"

"A North Korean?"

"No, he also is from the south—and he, too, had been brought up in wealth and had inherited riches; but in August, 1945, when the two occupations started—the Russians in the north and the Americans in the south—my husband decided that he could not support the things which were being done by the Americans . . . You know that the Americans even tried to use the Japanese as administrators?"

"Yes." I had read as much in Professor McCune's history of the occupation.

". . . so he came north, to join the new life that the people here were beginning to make for themselves. I myself did not meet him until 1948, when I was waiting for my father to be released. Then, when my father came out of prison he decided that he, too, wished to stay in the north, and before the war started he had been made a professor in the university of Pyong-yang——"

"And your husband?"

"He's away, fighting." And so, very slowly, she went on to tell me how she herself had been imprisoned by the Americans, and of how her baby, in prison with her, had died from starvation. It was months since she had seen her husband, and she had no means of knowing whether her relatives in South Korea were alive or dead. Yet, in spite of all that she had endured she was still full of hope. "You must understand," she finished, "that I am not a member of the Workers' Party, but when I saw the things that were achieved for the people in the years since the liberation I felt that I must do what I could to help in such ways as I could; and so I joined the women's organisation, teaching and helping in such ways as I could . . . And when the war is over and we start to rebuild our lives again——" She broke off, no longer looking at me.

"Yes?"

"Perhaps you will come back again? I should like you to meet my father and my husband, to see people living together again in families, reunited . . ."

Again she stopped. Another of our hostesses, an old woman, had risen and was moving around the table, putting in front of each of us a narrow wooden box, about the size and shape of a child's pencil box, and tied around with torn lengths of red silk. We picked up the boxes and fingered them, uncertain whether politeness demanded that they should be left as they were, or whether we were expected to open them and look inside. Then our hostess went back to her place and, still standing, began to speak. She was tall and slender, and wore her black hair fastened in a knot above the collar of her white blouse. Her face was grave, and yet full of warmth.

"In Korea," she said, "when a man and woman get married it is the custom for the man to give to the woman a specially beautiful pair of chopsticks and a spoon, and these are regarded as a symbol of the permanence of the marriage bond." She paused for a moment, and some of the warmth seemed to go from her face. Then she continued: "When the Americans came to our country thousands of Korean women buried

their personal spoons and chopsticks, trying to make certain that whatever else the war might bring to their lives their marriages should not be endangered . . . And so, dear friends, when we wished to make a present to each of you we decided among ourselves that we could find no better way of expressing our feelings than by giving to you spoons and chopsticks of Korean silver . . . And we wish to say—and especially to our English guest—" and she leaned across the table, her dark eyes smiling, "—that these gifts are a symbol of the enduring friendship between the people of our two countries." Then she sat down.

We were silent, and in the silence we could hear that the bombers had already started their night's work. It was time for us to go, to start on the long night journey back to our headquarters, and then on the longer journey that would take us again half-way round the world, back to the security of the countries from which we had come.

10

SUMMING-UP

Kate and Ida, along with Gilette and three other delegates, had visited southern Pyong-yang province, and had spent some time in the towns of Nampho and Kangse. Another group, which had included Germaine Hannevart and Elizabeth Gallo, had travelled through Kang-Won province, and the port of Wonsan; and the northern part of the country had been toured by the two German delegates, along with Trees Soenito-Heyligers and Bai Lang. As soon as the different parties returned to our headquarters we settled down to put our report together. The facts added to a total picture of ruthless brutality that was beyond imagination. We had witnessed—often under fire ourselves—the systematic destruction of town after town and village after village, many of which by no stretch of the imagination could be considered as military objectives. We had seen the destruction of the countryside, and the group in which Trees had travelled had, more than once, seen forests set on fire before their eyes. We had talked to peasants whose workmates had been machine-gunned from the air as they drove their ploughs. We had seen the refugees roaming the roads, sometimes with their possessions being pushed before them in handcarts, but, more often than not, with nothing left that they could not carry on their backs. We had seen women creep out of ditches at the break of dawn to light fires at the chimneys that were the only remnants of their homes. We had seen the meagre rations of rice and soya on which the people somehow survived, and we had heard detailed accounts of the destruction of foodstuffs and livestock by the occupying armies. And in every once-occupied area, too, we had accumulated evidence of atrocities on a scale which, until we had examined the survivors for ourselves, we could not have imagined possible. The Korean people had

been the victims of a lavishness of cruelty more terrible than the ravages of any disease.

Nampho, a port on the Yellow Sea, had been a town of 60,000 people, of little importance as a harbour because the water was too shallow for any vessels that were not of light draught, but with factories manufacturing porcelain, textiles, glass, foodstuffs and chemicals. Kate and Ida described it as an almost total ruin, pitted with craters and littered with rubble, yet still with about half of its original population sheltering among the wreckage. A number of buildings had been burned down during the American occupation, which had lasted from October 22nd to December 5th, 1950, but the major part of the damage was the result of air-raids that had taken place since. Large numbers of people had been imprisoned during the occupation, and Kate and Ida and Gilette had talked with many of the survivors. Some had been arrested on charges of having opposed the occupation authorities, others for having relatives in the army, for being members of the Peasants' Union or the Consumers' Co-operative Movement or the Korean Workers' Party, or for having relatives who belonged to these organisations. Many hundreds had been killed, and the dead had been buried in mass graves such as we had seen in Anak and Sinchen. Among the people questioned by the delegation was a Protestant clergyman named Ho Young-Yok, who stated that at the time of the occupation there had been 4,300 Christians among the population and that when the Americans were evacuating the town an American officer had advised him to get the Christian people away, since the Chinese would soon be entering the town. Ho Young-Yok said that he himself believed the stories that he was told about the cruelties practised by the Chinese against Christians, and so he had hired a boat and crammed on to it about 1,500 people, many of them from the congregation of the church of On-Yang Ri. Then, as the boat was about to leave, the Americans opened fire on it from a nearby ship. The Christians, thinking it a mistake, began to sing hymns, but the firing continued, and 275 people were killed.

Delegates who went to other districts had similar stories to tell. In the port of Wonsan, which was under shell-fire from blockading American warships when delegates visited it, the population of 123,000 had been reduced to less than half, and of the 27,345 houses and other buildings which the city had contained before the war only 9,257 were left, and many of these were damaged. In the course of one night which the delegates spent in Wonsan it was estimated that between 6,000 and 7,000 shells were fired on to the city, and, though most of them fell into areas that were already devastated, sixty-five public buildings and forty-nine houses were destroyed. Trees described to me how next morning she had gone to look at the still smouldering ruins, and had watched the bodies of the dead being taken out from the wreckage of tiny thatched houses. Then she had visited the air-raid shelters that had been constructed in the sides of the ravines that ran along the mountains. Here thousands of people were dwelling, as men had dwelt before the dawn of history, in troglodyte towns, bare, dark caverns, camouflaged across their entrances with networks of green branches. In Wonsan itself not a single school or hospital was left. Yet the city authorities were still making an effort to care for the children, collecting the orphans to send to places of relative safety, and arranging for teachers to go to one district and then another, giving instruction as best they could. And everywhere, again, people flocked to tell their experiences of life and death under foreign occupation, of imprisonment, rape, and torture. In Nampho, according to the people who had been there, there had been no South Koreans in the town during its occupation, and the only foreign troops had been American. In and around Wonsan, on the other hand, there had been troops of several nationalities, and in one district, Trees said, several people had described how often the British troops had intervened to do small acts of kindness or to restrain the excesses of others.

But inevitably, as the mass of evidence accumulated, we ceased to think in terms of the guilt of individuals, and to

examine, instead, the circumstances that had made men what they had become, and that had made Korea into a microcosm of what the world might yet be. We had observed calmly, exercising a control that must often have made us appear to the Koreans not merely cold but positively heartless. We had questioned mercilessly, and now, as we compared experiences and worked on our report, we were equally merciless in the way in which we questioned each other, eliminating from the story we had to tell to the world every statement which could not be confirmed in the most minute detail. Yet all the time, wherever we were and whatever we discussed, the memories of the things we had seen would refuse to be banished.

We could no longer keep politics out of our discussions. Inevitably we found ourselves arguing about the origins of the war. We had heard—as most people in the western world had heard—of the documents belonging to Syngman Rhee's government which had been captured by the North Koreans when they took Seoul. These documents were said to contain a mass of evidence which showed that Syngman Rhee and his advisers had for a long time been preparing to stage an invasion of North Korea, and I had read that photostatic copies had been forwarded to the United Nations, where they had been officially ignored. There were printed copies, too, and I had tried, but without any luck, to get hold of one before I left England. So now, as we tried to settle in our own minds issues which were outside the scope of our report, we asked Dr. Han whether copies were available in Korea.

They arrived next morning, and later on the same day an official came to see Mrs. Rodd and put a parcel into her hands. In it were the originals of the documents, brought from their secret hiding place—for they were among the most valuable of all the archives in the possession of the North Korean government—and put into our possession for as long as we wished to examine them. It was an astonishing collection, some of it in the Korean language, but much of it in English—including a mass of correspondence between Syngman Rhee and his American and Korean advisers, both in Seoul and in the

United States. These letters were on paper with engraved or printed headings, or bearing the stamp of the State Department in Washington or the United States Embassy in Seoul, and our two lawyers, Trees and Candelaria, examined the water-marks of the various sheets of paper with as much care as the rest of us read the documents themselves. In fact, their genuineness, which had never been questioned, was beyond doubt, and together they made a devastating story. The first letter in the collection, written by Syngman Rhee to Cho Byung-Ok, South Korean Ambassador was dated as far back as April 10th, 1949. After setting out the arguments which should be used to persuade the United States government to give armed assistance to South Korea, the writer continued:

"In a strictly confidential manner tell them what plans we have for the unification of north and south. As a matter of fact, we are ready for the unification now in every respect but one; namely, we lack arms and ammunition . . . We have to be prepared with a sufficient military force so that we can proceed into the north to join with our loyal army there, and to move the Iron Curtain from the 38th parallel to the Yalu River, and there to guard it against infiltration from without . . ."

The next document was a memorandum from Syngman Rhee addressed jointly to the South Korean Ambassador in Washington and to Syngman Rhee's personal representative. After dealing with various administrative problems—including that of paying for new embassy buildings in Washington—the memorandum returned to the question of building up the armed forces of South Korea and of obtaining military aid:

"If things come out as I hope, I am sure we will get a large proportion of the military aid appropriation of 1 billion 4 million dollars requested by President Truman for several European nations and Korea . . . I hope we can convince the President that Korea needs a lion's share, and I believe we deserve it. America's investment on Korea will

pay more dividends to the United States than any other receiving nation can yield. However, we must pave the way, and if there is any obstacle we must leave no stone unturned until such obstacles are removed . . ."

Later documents showed ambition rising. Yoon Peong-Koo, Syngman Rhee's adviser in the United States, set out, in a letter written on December 3rd, 1948, the objects to be pursued:

"To carry on the struggle to a victorious conclusion the forces of defence such as the armies of America, Japan, China and Korea must be co-ordinated and led by a supreme commander with triple objectives, namely: the Japanese push through North-eastwards and pass Vladivostock; Korean and American armies, after liberating our Northern territory, march through Liatong peninsula and up to Harbin; and a re-vialilized* Chinese Nationalist army to recover China's lost territory including Shantung Province; and after such a victorious conclusion, the Korean and American armies hold Manchuria unitl* the cost of liberation by* fully repaid by means of the development of the natural resourceses* of that part of East Asia by the combined capital and labour of Manchuria, Korea and America and that democracy and peace be furmly* established there."

The weekly reports of the South Korean Ambassador in Washington revealed that American generals and politicans were responding with increasing willingness to the demand for aid in the summer of 1949. Later documents in the collection included, apart from encouraging reports about military assistance from U.S.A., plans prepared by South Korean army headquarters for sabotage and intelligence work in North Korea for January–March, 1950. One section listed the means of communication in North Korea that were to be destroyed, specific acts of sabotage against power stations and

* Spelling as in the original.

other installations, and the assassination of four political leaders. Then, at the very end of the collection, there were two letters from John Foster Dulles, who visited Korea and was photographed on an armoured train on the 38th parallel a few days before the war broke out. One, addressed to the South Korean Foreign Secretary, was a gushing letter of thanks for a dinner party which had been given in Dulles' honour, and the other, a personal note to Syngman Rhee, concluded: "I attach great importance to the decisive role which your country can play in the great drama that is unfolding . . ."

We could argue about the meaning of phrases. And we could argue—as we did—about what had really happened on the 38th parallel on that fatal Sunday morning, June 25th, 1950, when the United Nations Commission in Korea had sent a telegram to the United Nations stating that the governments on both sides of the parallel had accused each other of armed aggression. The drama had unfolded and Korea, the far-off little country of which most of us, until recently, had known so little had become a graveyard. Some figures put the dead at one million, some at two. There was no means of knowing with any certainty. The only certainty, as we had witnessed for ourselves, was that the dead mounted every day. When we went into Pyong-yang for the last time, bombs were falling all around us, and as flashes lit up the darkness of the night we could once more trace the repatterning of old ruins, the destruction of the little hovels that still remained, and glimpse afresh the nightmare of the cellar-dwellers and the homeless.

As witnesses we had come late upon the scene, and in the ten days and nights we had spent in the country we had grown familiar with an almost unbroken continuity of ruin. The reality had been more terrible than any description. Yet seeing it, our imaginations had stretched farther, picturing a similar pattern of ruin that might some day come, as starkly as it had come here, to our own familiar worlds, to London, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen, Havana, Prague, Moscow . . .

Yet, in spite of the terror that flew over the country by day and night, we had found not only fear, but hope. We had met it in the will to survival, in the energy with which peasant women were tending their crops, in the care and education of children, in the way in which men and women spoke of the prospects of a better life. And we ourselves, whatever our differences, had come to recognise that we were agreed on the duty that our experiences had imposed upon us: to tell the truth as we had seen it, and, having told it, to find a way towards peace and towards hope, not only for the Koreans but for all the people of the world. We knew that it was not going to be easy. We were, as Kate had said on the night when we arrived at Sinyju, twenty ordinary women, without power and without much influence outside our own small circles. But now we were women who had a story to tell and we were determined that, whatever the cost to ourselves, the world should be made to listen.

Suddenly we were all in a desperate hurry to get home.

11

THE WAY BACK

It was May 26th, and there was plenty of time to get back to London to prepare myself for the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. The other delegates would spend three days in Mukden, tidying the report into its final shape before the party broke up and the members moved off in different directions. When we crossed the Yalu River for the second time the Mukden train would be waiting for us on the other side. In Mukden I would collect my luggage from the hotel and go straight to the airport. There a plane would be ready to take me to Chita, and at Chita I could pick up the regular Vladivostock-Moscow plane. I should be in Moscow twenty-four hours later, and from Moscow to London was a day's journey. I should get home with almost a week to spare.

Things did not work out as we had expected, and I was—by four hours—late for my meeting. But I was not sacked from Stevenage until four days later, after I had said the things that I had come back to London to say.

It took two nights to get from our headquarters to Sinyju. When we arrived the river was low, and it was not certain that we should be able to make the crossing. (May, usually a wet month, had been fine and sunny, and it was only in the last few days that rain had fallen.) We sat about in the Cultural Centre, and I fingered the letters from British prisoners-of-war which Pak Den Ai had asked me to deliver, longing to read them, but restrained by my own sense of kinship with the women to whom they were addressed. Then at last a message came to say that the water was rising, and that if we travelled in flat-bottomed rowing-boats the crossing could still be made before dawn. We crossed. But on the other side, in An-tung, something had gone wrong and the train was not there. So we arrived in Mukden twenty-four hours later than we had

expected. Dust storms were blowing over the city, and it was impossible for any plane to take off. I sent two telegrams to London, and made the best of a bad job by settling down to help with the final editing of our report. Maria Ovsyannikova and I still argued, but now that we had become friends our arguments started with the assumption that each of us was trying to understand the other's point of view, and we usually —though not always—managed to reach agreement. "It's queer, isn't it," I found myself remarking, "how different our discussions are now from what they were when we were last in Mukden?"

Maria stared for a moment, and then she grinned. "In Moscow," she said, "the women who met you said that you and I would get on well——"

"That's what they said to me about you."

"But you know," she went on, "I found you terrifying——"

"Me? Terrifying? Impossible!"

"Yes, really——"

I said: "But I was scared to death of you!"

Suddenly we laughed. Eva Priester, who was listening, observed: "Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to send a few more people to Korea together . . ."

We settled down to work again, waiting for the dust to subside. A telegram arrived from Moscow to ask why I had not been on the Vladivostock plane, which several of the women had gone to meet. I sent another telegram to London, and went out to do a little sightseeing. Then the sky cleared, and we were off.

Li K'eng, whom I had got to know well, said: "You must come back and see China properly."

"I will," I answered, "as soon as I've got a month or two to spare."

She shook her head. "No. I said properly. You can't see China in a month, or in two months. We want people who'll come and spend enough time to understand what we are trying to do. . ."

We had seen the new nursery schools in Mukden. Some of us

had been to the agricultural exhibition where peasants were arriving in tens of thousands to learn about new methods of cultivation, improved tools, better quality seeds. We had asked questions about the rise in factory output, the standard of living of industrial workers, the organisation of the mining industry. And we had seen for ourselves the bomb-craters in An-tung city, the recently destroyed market centre, fragments of American bombs lying among the debris.

Now, though we were in a hurry to get home, we wanted to stay, to see China, to discover what was happening to the lives of people. But the pilots were already begging us to hurry on to the plane. We reached Chita before evening. When we arrived the members of the reception committee were there to greet us, longing to hear about our experiences. We found that we could not talk. Everything was still too sharp and too near. We sent off a fresh batch of telegrams, ate, slept, and were off again soon after daylight. Siberia was brilliantly green, bursting into summer. The water of Lake Baikal was blue and still, reflecting back the cloudless sky, and when we landed at Irkutsk the white buildings glittered as if we were in a city of palaces. At every airport the gardens were already in flower, and people stood sunning themselves against the walls, as if the world were made for peace and leisure. At Omsk we spent a night in the airport building, and by next afternoon we were back in Moscow. Everybody had come to meet us, and the cries of welcome seemed to bounce upwards into the air as we stepped out of the door and on to the ladder. Everything was wonderful.

Except for one thing. Since I had left London British Overseas Airways had stopped its regular plane service between Prague and London, and the Czech Air Line had been refused any further use of the facilities of British airports. Everyone in Moscow was eager to help me to get home quickly but it was difficult to see how it was going to be managed. Once more there was nothing to do but make the best of things. I made the best of them for three days, accepting the present and enjoying it as people do who have been reprieved from

death and who see the world freshly, cherishing every detail of secure and normal living. The days were wonderful, crowded with people, with colour, with the warmth and gaiety of early June. I went sightseeing, visiting the churches and palaces and museums inside the Kremlin walls. I went shopping, and bought chocolates and caviar and vodka and children's toys. I wrote an article for Maria Ovsyannikova's magazine, and two witty young men from the Moscow radio came and asked me to record a broadcast. I hesitated. I asked: "If I do it where will it be heard?"

"In Australia and New Zealand. South Africa. Probably Canada and the United States . . ." The young man smiled and leaned forward to take a cigarette. He was good-looking, well-dressed and sophisticated, and would, if his appearance had been a trifle less virile, have looked perfectly at home in Langham Place. "There's no need to write a script if you're too tired——"

I said: "I am tired. But that's not the problem." All the way back on the return journey I had refused to talk to journalists. I had a lot to say, but I wanted to save it until I got back to London. On the other hand, when I looked forward to what was going to happen when I did get back there was only one thing that frightened me. Before I left I had considered the possibility of losing Stevenage; I had thought, though not very seriously, about the law's view of what could be said to constitute treason. It was, however, only in the last few days that the most important problem of all had really begun to worry me, and now, for the first time I was afraid: afraid that the things I had to tell might not be heard, that the truth about what was happening in Korea might be buried beneath a smothering eiderdown of polite silence. I said: "I'll sleep on it—and I'll tell you tomorrow."

The nights had suddenly become terrible. In Korea we had slept when and wherever we had a chance, and in Mukden and in Chita and Omsk we had fallen into our beds like children, and the nights had been mercifully empty of dreams, so that we had woken cheerfully, looking forward instead of

back. For me, the nightmares began in Moscow. My room was not merely luxurious, it was beautiful. The furniture was old, and it had been chosen and arranged with taste: gilt, marble and light mahogany set in a background of white walls and with a carpet and curtains of dark, soft blue. The bed was in a curtained recess, with a bathroom leading out of it. The linen sheets were cool, the bedside lamp exactly right. And every time I fell asleep I was once more in Korea. My ears were assaulted by the terrible screams of women whose dumbed despair had been twisted into fresh agonies by our intrusive questions, my nostrils filled again with the sweet and sickening odour of decaying flesh, and my eyes, sharpened afresh by contact with a living world, looked into other eyes, into the faces of children to whom every stranger was a fresh source of terror, the faces of men, narrow and stiffened by grief, and of women who went on hoping, irrationally, and against all that their experience had taught them. Behind these faces the tormented backcloth of ruin shifted, sharpening a forgotten detail into sudden focus, shattered bricks, burned straw, torn concrete, rags hung on a wall to dry, a woman washing beans at a street corner pump. And in the confusion of sleep these things transferred themselves across the world so that to wake, to see the crack of light between the curtains, was to say: No, it shan't happen here. Not anywhere else. Not anywhere in the world. Not in anybody's world. And certainly not in mine.

"Yes," I said next morning, "I'll do a broadcast, but I prefer to write a script." I wrote it, weighing every word. I recorded it. I went out to do more sightseeing. I sat in cafés, discussing life and love and the cost of living. I went to a mannequin parade, and visited people who lived in new blocks of flats. And then, at last, there was a plane for Prague, and I took it.

We flew not south, but east, refuelling at Minsk. Below us were the bright red roofs of a world that had been destroyed, and then rebuilt. We went on again, and below us was Warsaw. I had been in Warsaw in 1948, when it had been a

city of rubble: cleared rubble, but still rubble. Now, as our plane came down, I saw new buildings spreading in every direction, a city that was a real city spreading on both sides of the Vistula and rising towards the sky. Pyong-yang was already four thousand miles away.

At Prague airport all our old friends were waiting to greet us. There were red roses, embraces, insistent demands that we should stay and tell about our experiences. But there was, too, a plane that was leaving for Paris in twenty minutes. I had travellers' cheques, and if I cashed one at Le Bourget I could be in London before dark. I said more goodbyes, and left telegrams to be sent to Elizabeth and Molly. In the plane with me were Gilette and the delegates from Tunis and Algiers, Abassia and Fatma: and now, as the plane rose over a familiar world, we found ourselves homesick for the friends to whom we had said goodbye: Kate and Ida, Maria, Mrs. Rodd, Candelaria, Germaine, Lilly . . .

At Le Bourget a plane was leaving in half an hour, and I caught it. The evening was clear, the Channel as still and blue as Lake Baikal, and Kent, when we crossed it, more beautiful than any memory. I had never been so happy at anything as I was at the prospect of putting my feet on English soil. At the airport the officials were friendly. The quiet man who scanned my passport asked: "What visa is that?"

"Chinese."

"Modern Chinese?"

"Yes."

"How interesting! I don't think I've seen a Chinese visa before. Thank you."

"Thank you," I said, and moved on to the customs.

I was loaded with presents: the Korean silver chopsticks, a Korean embroidered picture, Chinese silk, books, pictures, and food and drink and oddments from Moscow. "Perhaps you'd better show me the vodka," the official suggested. I showed him, and he smiled. "It's a bit small, isn't it? Thank you."

"Thank you."

And then I went out, and there was nobody to meet me. I telephoned to Molly, and her husband answered. Molly had gone to Northolt to meet me. But I was at Northolt. No, I wasn't. For some reason I was at Heathrow. An official telephoned. Molly would leave Northolt at once, and with her were Elizabeth and all the others. Again, there was nothing to do but wait. I sat, and then, tired of sitting, walked up and down outside. Presently I found myself walking beside a policeman. "Been far?" he asked.

"To Korea."

"No!"

"Yes. North Korea."

"You?"

"Hm."

Pause.

"And what was it like?"

"Worse than you can imagine."

"Tell me, if you've got time." He had a quiet, friendly face, the sort of face that I liked to remember. He said: "It's so hard to get at the truth about anything these days. And truth is just the one thing that everybody wants."

I felt wonderful. England was even better than I remembered. "Yes," I answered. "That's why I went."